

Dating, Desire and the Song of Songs:
Constructing Some Parameters for an
Emerging Adult 'Theology of Dating'

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This thesis considers the complexity of premarital romantic and sexual relationships for Emerging Adults in the Western world, and the particular challenge faced by Christians of this age group, their lives being framed by their contemporary culture, as well as the beliefs and practises of their faith. It will discuss the inadequacy of the limited Christian teaching that is available which neither listens to the experiences and realities of believers, nor to the diversity and depth of its Scriptures.

In response, this thesis carries out an original study of discourse of desire and relationality in the Song of Songs, seeking to provide some parameters for a 'Theology of Dating' which both seriously considers the text as well as the realities of the contemporary world. It does this through a two horizons approach, examining discourse of the Song, and using this to examine sex and relationship scripts in the contemporary horizon, asking the question as to how the lovers of the Song might consider these scripts according to this reading of the Song.

In particular, the textual study aspect focuses on the use of key volitional verbs in the Song (imperatives, jussives, and cohortatives) as a verbalisation of sexual want, and how they interplay in discourse portraying the desire and the nature of the relationship between the Female Protagonist and the Male Lover.

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For my dad, Colin John Evans
(1950-2019)

List of Abbreviations

AV	Authorised Version
BDB	Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
CEB	Common English Bible
DoJ	Daughters of Jerusalem
DCH	The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew
EA	Emerging Adult
EN	English
EI	Erotic Imperative
ESV	English Standard Version
FP	Female Protagonist
FWBR	Friends with Benefits Relationship
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar
HALOT	The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HS	Hebrew Scriptures
JB	Jerusalem Bible
ML	Male Lover
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLB	New Living Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
RLLS	Real Life Love Survey
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SST	Social Scripting Theory

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Chapter 1: The need for a Theology of Dating

Dating is a fun way of meeting someone who is as terrified of dying alone as you are.¹

The *Ladybird Book of Dating*, from which the above quotation is taken, has been marketed as part of a humorous series that seeks to deal with 'some of the most pressing and complex issues of our day'.² Popular romantic comedy films like *Love Actually* and TV series such as *Friends* and *Sex in the City*, as well as countless others, grapple with the issues of love, sex and relationships. They make us laugh and they make us cry. And they do this because in one way or another we can relate to the experiences of characters, as they show us just how complicated human sexuality and the forming of relationships can be. Shakespeare too made his living in part by entertaining audiences with the great themes of love and relationships.³ Dating is a contemporary form of a bigger human process of mate-selection, and dating is an entertaining, but complex business!

Dating is certainly a complex matter and worthy of academic study. It is complex because it involves the collision of practical questions, ethical decisions and emotional experiences of human beings in the melting pot of real-life.⁴ And yet given that it is such a key aspect of human life, and such a potential vibrant area of study, it is one that has not received much academic theological attention.⁵ As an aspect of sexuality, being an essential part of human experience, dating (to be described more below) is arguably made further complicated for those of religious belief who seek to be able to make sense of their faith by respecting and following its teachings and directions, and at the same time still live it

¹ Jason Hazeley and Joel Morris, *The Ladybird Book of Dating* (Loughborough: Ladybird, 2015), p. 6; Viren Swami, *Attraction Explained: The Science of How We Form Relationships*, 2nd edn (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), pp. 273-274 discusses the psychological phenomenon of the 'Fear of Singleness'.

² Lucy Mangan, 'Lucy Mangan on Ladybird Books for Grown-Ups', *Penguin*, 2015 <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2015/lucy-mangan-on-ladybird-books-for-grown-ups.html>> [accessed 7 October 2021].

³ Comedies such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Love Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* etc., as well as tragedies, such as *Romeo and Juliet* portray the complexity of love and relationships; See summary of Shakespeare's plays in Derek A. Traversi, 'Shakespeare', in *Reference Guide to English Literature. 2: Writers H - Z*, 2nd edn (Chicago, IL: St. James Press, 1991), pp. 1204–8 (pp. 1206-1207).

⁴ Joshua Wolf Shenk, 'Foreword', in *Dating – Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas*, ed. by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark, *Philosophy for Everyone* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. viii–x.

⁵ Jason King and Donna Freitas, 'Sex, Time, and Meaning: A Theology of Dating', *Horizons*, 30.1 (2003), 25–40 (p. 25) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900000037>>.

out in a way that enables them to be able to have relationships.⁶ People who practise religious faith have the challenge of making sense of how their faith, with its beliefs, cultures and values is lived out in practice in a wider cultural horizon, with its many beliefs, cultures and values.⁷

Part of the complexity related to the subject of sexuality is that the changing cultural Western world, which is shifting and morphing from one generation to the next, deeply frames the mindset of people. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, traditional Christian teaching of how to practice faith in relationship to sexuality is often largely unhelpful or inadequate, because it often neither adequately listens to the experiences and realities of believers, nor to the diversity and depth of its Scriptures.⁸

This thesis is interested in grappling with this issue from the perspective of engaging with one particular text, the Song of Songs, a text in which sexuality is celebrated within the Hebrew Scriptures (HS).⁹ Through a detailed study of some of the discourses of desire and relationality in the text, it seeks to suggest from this reading some parameters for a

⁶ A H Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50.4 (1943), 370–96 (p. 381) in his 'hierarchy of needs', classifies 'sex' as a basic physiological need, at the bottom of the pyramid. This is different from 'love and affection, as well as their possible expression in sexuality', which are classified as 'love needs', on the third level of the pyramid (above 'safety needs').

⁷ Jaco Beyers, 'Religion and Culture: Revisiting a Close Relative', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 73.1 (2017), 1–9 (p. 2) <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i1.3864>> discusses the debates about the relationship between culture and religion, and concludes that 'religion is determined by culture, but religion also influences culture. The fate of religion and culture, is thus, interwoven';

Furthermore, the question of how do religious believers practise relationality and sexuality is not confined to Christianity. Umm Muladhat, *The Muslimah Sex Manual: A Halal Guide to Mind Blowing Sex* (Middletown, DE: [n. Pub.], 2018) was the first sex guide written by a Muslim woman for Muslim women. See discussion in Alia Waheed, 'Taboo-Busting Sex Guide Offers Advice to Muslim Women Seeking Fulfilling Love Lives', *The Guardian*, 16 July 2017

<<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jul/16/muslimah-sex-manual--halal-sex-guide-muslim-women-seeking-fulfilling-love-lives>> [accessed 2 December 2021].

⁸ For discussion on the cultural changes surrounding sexuality in Generation Z, see 3.3.2 and 14.2.4. Generation Z is defined as the generation of Western people born after 1997; Michael Dimock, 'Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins: Pew Research Centre', 2019 <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>> [accessed 1 December 2021].

For discussion about the inadequacy of Christian traditional teaching, see 3.4.6; also, Adrian Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, Modern Church Series (London: SPCK, 2012), p. 2 discusses the way that Christians and others have struggled to find 'the Christian tradition very helpful for making sense of sex'.

⁹ Cf. Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), p. 607; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs*, ed. by William P. Brown, Carol A. Newson, and David L. Petersen, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 70; Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, ed. by David W Cotter, Chris Franke, and Jerome T Walsh, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), p. xi; Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 23.

'Theology of Dating'.¹⁰ It will do this by a two-horizons approach, deeply considering the lovers of the Song in their cultural world, and then seeking to ask the question as to how they might respond if they were faced with sexual relationality in the contemporary Western world, especially the world of the United Kingdom that is heavily influenced by the popular culture of the United States through films, TV and music.

While some of the parameters presented are likely to be relevant to many from a Christian perspective who are not-yet-married, in terms of the contemporary cultural horizon, this research focuses particularly on the cultural experience of emerging adulthood, a fluidly bounded age group.¹¹ Unlike previous generations that traditionally had five markers of 'transition from adolescence to full adulthood' - 'economic independence from one's parents, residing outside of their home, conclusion of schooling (and commencement of work), marriage, and children' - the transition to adulthood is now less clear, and so emerging adulthood is a 'sprawling life stage of its own'.¹² It is a group that includes most nineteen-year-olds and includes many twenty-seven year olds, and those of the usual college/university age are very often part of that experience, having 'adult-style freedoms but lacking some or all of the typical adult responsibilities'.¹³ And this age group, although complicated for those of religious belief, often generally has significant opportunity for sexual activity and relationships in the wide cultural horizon.¹⁴ It is often seen as a 'developmental period' including 'experimentation' and 'identity exploration', which seems to be reflected in the way that Emerging Adult (EA) people carry out their romantic and sexual relationships.¹⁵

1.1 Theologies of Dating and Sexuality

1.1.1 Problems with Popular Theologies of Dating

There are significant problems with many of the existing theologies of premarital relationships. One common view about dating from a Christian perspective is to focus on

¹⁰ Relationality is a derivative of relational. See Oxford English Dictionary, "relational, Adj. and n.", in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2021) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161811?redirectedFrom=relationality>> [accessed 23 December 2021].

¹¹ Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 6.

¹² Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 6.

¹⁴ The contemporary cultural horizon will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Spencer B. Olmstead, 'A Decade Review of Sex and Partnering in Adolescence and Young Adulthood', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82.2 (2020), 769–95 (p. 770); Spencer B. Olmstead and Kristin M. Anders, 'Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood: A Primer on Theory', in *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Morgan and Manfred H. M. Van Dulmen, Emerging Adulthood Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 13–22 (p. 14).

totally prohibiting premarital sex, but as a consequence effectively prohibiting dating in the process.¹⁶ King and Freitas observe that many popular texts (such as those that are formed within Purity Culture) present a triangular theology of relationships, with God at the top vertex, self at another and the other person being dated at the third.¹⁷ They stress that the 'primary relationship' is between God and the self in the triangle and what is seen as mattering more than anything else is not damaging this primary relationship.¹⁸ In other words, from this perspective, the other person, at the other side of the triangle can be seen as a threat, having the potential of leading a person into sexual temptation and thereby distracting and jeopardising an individual's relationship with God.¹⁹ From this theological perspective, the triangle is only affirmed and becomes 'divinely ordained' at the point of marriage.²⁰ Until then the person on the other side could be seen a danger.

The critical problem is that these theologies are intrinsically negative, and therefore, as will be shown in later discussion, are largely unhelpful for EAs who have the potential to form relationships. King and Freitas give two important reasons why. Firstly, these theologies do not provide any positive theology of sexuality in the dating process.²¹ The 'other' person is seen as a risk. Premarital sex is outlawed, and this is potentially extrapolated to include all forms of physical contact, such as interpreting the actions of holding hands and kissing in the same way as sex.²² Secondly, these perspectives are so centred on marriage (and not the temporary nature of dating) that they present it as the only possible outcome of dating, so that any relationship that does not have this result can be interpreted as a 'failure' or 'sin'.²³ They present a clear-cut and stark dichotomy of the demands of either the celibate life or marriage, without any positive view of what happens in between.²⁴ There is no scope to learn through practice how to become a potentially better spouse through the experience gained through dating relationships.²⁵

But there are further and deeper consequences of this. King and Freitas suggest that:

¹⁶ King and Freitas, pp. 26-27.

¹⁷ King and Freitas, p. 27; Purity Culture will be discussed more in 3.4.5.

¹⁸ King and Freitas, p. 27.

¹⁹ King and Freitas, p. 27.

²⁰ King and Freitas, p. 27.

²¹ King and Freitas, p. 27.

²² King and Freitas, p. 27; the 'how far is too far?' question is discussed in 3.4.7.

²³ King and Freitas, p. 27.

²⁴ King and Freitas, p. 28.

²⁵ 3.5.5; Regnerus and Uecker, p. 15; David Hadley Jensen, *God, Desire, and a Theology of Human Sexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), p. 117.

by condemning dating and offering celibacy or married life as the only religiously and spiritually sound options for relationships, a serious and terrible danger is created and perpetuated for the younger generations: alienation from religion. To offer only the single life, to present dating as something to fear and protect oneself from is unrealistic in a society where individuals no longer marry at age fifteen. It places young people [and others who hold to these views] in a position to reject religion as a viable narrative altogether during some of the most difficult and important years of life. Or, at the least, it encourages people to separate religion and spirituality from their love and relationships. They place their "church on Sundays" in one compartment and their relationships somewhere else, and if somehow they do mix, guilt and fear result.²⁶

Moreover, this 'cognitive dissonance' has also been observed in practice, both in terms of younger adults who 'rationalise' their sexual behaviour in premarital relationships, as well as those who potentially reject faith because of their inability to reconcile the lack of effective Christian teaching, and their sexual desires and behaviours.²⁷ What is needed therefore are theologies that really seek to both understand the cultural world of EAs, as well as seeking to enable the Scriptures to speak into that cultural world. This thesis comes from the perspective that what is needed are positive theologies of sexuality.

1.1.2 Positive Theologies of Sexuality

This thesis is not alone in approaching the subject of premarital sexuality from a positive perspective: Freitas and King produced their own popular text addressing the issue of dating and spirituality;²⁸ Thatcher has written extensively on Christian perspectives of sexuality;²⁹ Jensen has produced a constructive theology of desire and human sexuality;³⁰ and Ind's influential popular text emphasises the importance of desire, and the meaning of sexual activity, alongside a positive Christian sexual ethic.³¹ As an important contemporary subject matter, sexuality is a subject rightly receiving a lot of attention in Christian theology.

However, what makes this thesis unique is its particular focus on the Song of Songs, alongside its application to the particular cultural horizon of EAs. One of the significant

²⁶ King and Freitas, p. 28.

²⁷ King and Freitas, p. 28 observe this as 'cognitive dissonance'; Cognitive dissonance in the area of sexuality leading to young people leaving the faith is a known phenomenon, as described in Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 53-54; also, cognitive dissonance in the form of rationalising sexual behaviour is also a known phenomenon among Christians which is discussed more in 3.4.7.

²⁸ Donna Freitas and Jason King, *Save The Date: A Spirituality of Dating, Love, Dinner and the Divine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

²⁹ Adrian Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993); Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*; Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times*, Studies in Theology and Sexuality, 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Adrian Thatcher, *Living Together and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics, 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁰ Jensen, *God, Desire, and a Theology of Human Sexuality*.

³¹ Jo Ind, *Memories of Bliss: God, Sex and Us* (London: SCM, 2003).

realisations of contemporary theology is the influence of platonic thought in the history of Christianity, and its effect on the interpretation of biblical texts.³² The Song as a biblical text has much to say to a Church that is often seemingly scared of sexuality.³³ This thesis is thus interested in what its reading of the Song has to say.

Furthermore, this thesis will examine some of the varieties of relational and sexual experiences of EAs, bearing in mind that the ways that EAs have relationships continues to develop, and that Christians EAs are part of that broader cultural world. In particular, it focuses on a variety of heterosexual experience, leaving the scope for other scholars to potentially consider the implications for homosexual experience.

1.2 Philosophical Models to Describe Dating

1.2.1 The Elevator Model

This thesis will seek to provide some parameters for a 'Theology of Dating' for EAs. But how is dating understood here? Rowan and Hallen describe dating as 'the process of exploring, investigating, and gauging the possibility of eventually reaching "commitment" with another person'.³⁴ This raises the questions as to what 'commitment' might mean, as well as how someone 'explores', 'investigates' and 'gauges'. In their definition, they argue that 'commitment' should mean 'the point at which individuals in their relationship make the decision to marry or otherwise make permanent their status as partners, where "permanence" is not an absolute'.³⁵

What is particularly useful is Rowan and Hallen's use of an elevator model to describe this progressive form of premarital relationship – they give the analogy of two people (Ann and Bob) who are the only people in an elevator, one having asked the other to join them in this activity.³⁶ In the cabin they strike up a conversation and start talking. Ann 'presses the button' to go to the next floor. They talk about family and then work, Ann feeling uncomfortable finding out she is 'sharing an elevator with an accountant', with Bob pressing the button to go to the next floor. They continue the conversation, with Bob

³² Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 3; Raymond J. Lawrence, *The Poisoning of Eros: Sexual Values in Conflict* (New York, NY: Moore Press, 1989), p. 1, Iain Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 243.

³³ Dan B Allender and Tremper Longman, *God Loves Sex: An Honest Conversation about Sexual Desire and Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), p. 14 note the infrequency that the Song is preached about in churches, as well as Longman's experience of being disinvited on one occasion from preaching because of his choice of text.

³⁴ John Rowan and Patricia Hallen, 'The Dating Elevator: Pushing the Right Buttons and Moving from Floor to Floor', in *Dating – Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas*, ed. by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 49–64 (p. 52).

³⁵ Rowan and Hallen, p. 52.

³⁶ Rowan and Hallen, p. 49.

continuing to press higher buttons, revealing more and more that makes Ann feel uncomfortable, until she presses the button for the ground floor. She apologises, saying that she enjoyed the ride, but that she 'just isn't over her fear of heights'.³⁷

The model is useful for several reasons for broadly describing monogamous dating relationships. Firstly, dating is seen as something that has the potential to be a progressive relationship.³⁸ According to Rowan and Hallen's view, unless the elevator is moving, there is the feeling of 'awkwardness' in a stalled relationship.³⁹ In dating, people move from being total strangers to interacting as a couple, and the progressive development of the relationship after that.

Secondly, in the progressive dating elevator, there are different floors. And in a dating relationship, there may be different ways of marking progression. It is going to be different depending on how people meet, what form of relationship they have when some form of romantic/sexual interest is realised by one of them (from none to existing friendship), and what is considered appropriate by them as different levels of progression. Floors might include meeting, first date, second date, holding hands, telling people that you are a couple, various levels of sexual activity, getting engaged, moving in together etc. As will be discussed later, there are variety of views and practises amongst EAs as to how sexual activities are integrated into a dating relationship.

Thirdly, the model acknowledges that things change in the dating experience – there are the physical changes that take place in the world around us, such as the 'moving, ageing and/or transitioning from one stage to another'.⁴⁰ And there are changes in terms of the subjective experience of people, influenced by 'emotional and psychological realities that we construct in our interactions with each other'.⁴¹ Dating is thus a dynamic process in which social interactions happen and are experienced through these realities. And as such, dating relationships are constantly changing.⁴²

Fourthly, the model recognises the importance of preference and relationality, aspects of premarital relationships that will be discussed much more below. Preference might be seen as the liking of one person (or one person's characteristics – including personality

³⁷ Rowan and Hallen, p. 49.

³⁸ The idea of relationship development stages of relationships will be discussed more in 3.4.12.

³⁹ Rowan and Hallen, p. 54

⁴⁰ Rowan and Hallen, p. 50.

⁴¹ Rowan and Hallen, p. 51.

⁴² Rowan and Hallen, p. 51.

and character) over another in terms of mate selection.⁴³ Ann's feeling of uncomfortableness that Bob is an accountant is her recognising a preference; Bob pressing the button to go to the next floor is his failure to recognise the right level of relationality between them at that point.

Fifthly, the process of dating is dynamic, in that both participants have the opportunity to respond to the changes in their preference and relationality, as these change. This is shown in the model by the pressing of buttons to move up or down floors, in response to the developing situation. It is a dynamic process in which participants respond to each other (and call each other to respond), and depending on how they respond, it forms the direction of travel in terms of relationality for both of them. The concept of 'pushing buttons' and seeking to move to a higher floor is described by them as 'looking for more intimacy'.⁴⁴

Sixthly, the calling of each to respond shows the importance of communication in the dating process – communication enables persons to understand if they are on a date, and if they are dating.⁴⁵ Communication constructs the experience of the reality for participants in the elevator, enabling them to realise that they are in an elevator, and it opens up the possibility of being able to go up or down the floors.⁴⁶ But this process also involves 'implicit communication' between dating participants, interplaying again with preference and relationality.⁴⁷

It follows that there is much that can be observed from the elevator model describing the phenomenon of dating. Of course, it does not 'fit all instances [of dating] commonly accepted as such'.⁴⁸ And as will be highlighted later, the variety of options within the cultural horizon of EAs includes ways of doing relationships and experiencing sexual activity, that

⁴³ This understanding of preference is based upon the process of 'mate selection' as understood within psychology. 'Mate Selection' is a well-accepted phenomenon within this discipline, that takes place in both 'short-term' and 'long-term' mating (David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*, rev. edn (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 6-9). Later, this thesis discusses how attraction preferences can include attraction to personality (3.4.10; Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 117-119). Importantly, preference can be based on hypothetical ideas of what a potential partner might be like (Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 88-91). But it should be noted that people's ideas about what preferences they may have has the potential to change (or not) through the actual experience of getting to know someone (Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 125).

⁴⁴ Rowan and Hallen, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Rowan and Hallen, pp. 53, 58.

⁴⁶ Rowan and Hallen, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Rowan and Hallen, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Rowan and Hallen, p. 51.

do not follow conventions of traditional dating and the associated elevator model – for example, attempting to start a relationship with sex is one approach that is used by EAs – however, the elevator model is one helpful way to describe dating relationships, and this will be referred to more later.⁴⁹

1.3 The Context of the Researcher

Before concluding this chapter, Thatcher, considering the work of Rowan Williams, makes some pertinent observations about the issue of understanding sex. Thatcher observes how sex ‘cannot be separated from the wider issues of gender, and so of power and dominance, powerlessness and surrender, vulnerability as well as ecstasy, and often fear, comedy and tragedy’ – Williams observes that through this complexity, ‘culture in general and religion in particular have devoted enormous energy to the doomed task of getting it right’.⁵⁰ Thatcher notes that ‘not getting sex right ... is the key to making sense of it. Through our fumbblings and our failings, we become wiser’.⁵¹

At this point it would be useful to say a little about my personal context as researcher for several reasons! Firstly, as sex is a much-debated topic, a brief description of the researcher – sex, gender, age, etc. – will enable those engaging with this work to understand where the researcher is coming from. Secondly, as will be described shortly, this research comes from a researcher who is well aware of his own past failures in the areas of premarital relationships, but these failures have raised the interest in the subject area, to pursue this research. Thirdly, as this thesis involves a substantial textual study of the Song of Songs, it is necessary to know the background of the interpreter, as the interpreter is aware of how their own prior assumptions, including their own encounters with the biblical text in question, affects their interpretation.⁵²

To briefly describe myself, I am a white, heterosexual thirty-five-year-old cis-gender Christian man, married to my wonderful wife Becky for five years. I am also a Christian minister, working in rural Anglican ministry in Wales. As a Christian, I seek to honour Jesus Christ, aware of my failings, but with hope and trust in his grace. I hold to a view of

⁴⁹ For a discussion of starting a relationship with sex, see 3.4.16.

⁵⁰ Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 2; Rowan Williams, ‘The Body’s Grace’, in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. by Eugene Rogers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 309–21 (p. 310).

⁵¹ Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 2.

⁵² Zoë Bennett, *Using the Bible in Practical Theology: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 20–21; Anthony C Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 8 observes the importance of acknowledging any pre-assimilation of a Biblical text so as not to be ‘trapped within his or her own prior horizons’.

equality of gender, and as may become obvious below, I have a high regard for feminist hermeneutics. However, I am a man and this will affect my interpretation.

I am also one of the many Christians of my generation damaged by the teachings of a British form of Purity Culture from my university Christian Union days – that entailed becoming part of a culture which had very tight rules about sexual behaviour, and an emphasis on finding a spouse that had not been part of my previous cultural experience.⁵³ If I did not find the idea of having relationships scary enough before this, the teachings of Purity Culture (and perceptions about certainty about if you are going to marry this person) made romantic relationships difficult through my twenties. My failings are that there were numerous times that I was too scared to ask girls out, that I should have kissed and not held back from kissing, that I should have been more honest about my feelings and desires.

Furthermore, as a biblical interpreter, I come to the Song having first encountered it in Evening Prayer in church as a teenager, and being both amazed, and embarrassed hearing a passage from this biblical text. I then returned to this text seriously during my theological studies, as part of a fascination with the HS, and then as the principal research text for this thesis.

1.4 The Structure of this Thesis

To conclude, this brief chapter has highlighted the justification for the need for a Theology for Dating, as well as providing a description as to what dating is, and describing the context of the research. It also states this thesis' aim, to present some parameters for a future construction of a Theology of Dating amongst EAs.

The ensuing discussion is divided into three sections. Part 1 (Chapters 2 to 4) provides the context for the study by considering the contemporary cultural horizon, the Ancient Israelite Horizon, as well as methodological questions and interpretive issues about the Song. Part 2 (Chapters 5 to 13) provides a detailed exegetical study of selected passages from the Song. And Part 3 (Chapters 14 and 15) seeks to apply the study of Section 2 within the contemporary horizon, presenting some parameters for a future construction of a Theology of Dating, as well as discussing some further research opportunities.

⁵³ Purity Culture and its influence in Britain is discussed in 3.4.5.

Part 1: Methodology and the Two Horizons

Chapter 2: Methodology and Matters of Discussion about the Song of Songs

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses both the methodology that this thesis will use, as well as key matters of discussion about the Songs of Songs. The Song is a unique and brilliant text. It is the only text of its kind within the HS. It is a text that, while having similarities in terms of characteristics with ANE love poems, there are some important differences, that make it unique.⁵⁴ The Song avoids neat categorisation in terms of genre. This chapter will briefly discuss these issues as it considers the matters of authorship, genre and interpretation of the Song. Every one of these topics is a matter for debate amongst scholars. And the way the Song is interpreted is dependent on these issues.⁵⁵

2.2 Issues of Methodology

2.2.1 Approaching the Song (in Scripture) as Having Something to Say

As its approach, this thesis seeks to broadly use the approach of Walter Brueggemann established in his book 'Redescribing Reality'.⁵⁶ As a pastor and academic, Brueggemann is concerned with letting the texts of Scripture speak to today's Church. He argues that the process of studying Scripture is the process of 'redescribing the world, that is, constructing it alternatively'.⁵⁷ The church does this process of 'redescription' because the 'current dominant description of reality ... does not square with the facts on the ground'.⁵⁸ The next chapter of this thesis seeks to describe in general one perspective of reality by looking at the contemporary horizon, being never married EA church members, including some of the significant complexities of their experience. In doing so it paints a picture of the realities of making sense of sexual desire and the challenges of premarital relationships for them.

However, the thesis is interested in following Brueggemann's lead of redescribing this reality in the light of Scripture. Brueggemann observes that scriptural texts redescribe

⁵⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 51 notes that while, for example, the Egyptian Love Poems are dialogical, the lovers do not 'address and interact with each other', like they do in the Song; Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), pp. 259-65, 280-81.

⁵⁵ Iain M. Duguid, *The Song of Songs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 19 (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2015), p. 20 observes the interdependence of these issues for interpretation.

⁵⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality: What We Do When We Read the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 2009).

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 4.

reality in two ways: they redescribe the 'ancient world in which they were first uttered and at the same time they redescribe the world in which we listen'.⁵⁹ The Song as a text certainly redescribes the reality of the ancient world, as it paints a fuller picture, and critique, of sexuality with its presence in Scripture. But interpreting the Song also offers a redescription of the contemporary world, since it presents a positive perspective on sexuality. This redescription will be discussed in the final thesis chapter.

Importantly, Brueggemann notes the importance of the 'plurality and diversity' of Scripture, and that 'the big story ... is teased out in a plethora of different small narratives, prophecies, proverbs, poems and songs in many modes'.⁶⁰ In other words, the Song is one text amongst many in Scripture, and should be seen as such. Nevertheless, the voice of the Song as part of the diversity of Scripture should be heard. Furthermore, the interpretation presented here, as just one interpretation must be considered in the light of other interpretations and texts for the benefit of the church. As Brueggemann notes, 'all interpretation is partial and provisional'.⁶¹ This thesis offers *an* interpretation, seeking to provide a redescription of reality.

But what is Brueggemann's underlying philosophy? He is interested in the '*transformative potential of the text as Scripture*' and so, while being aware of the role of higher criticism with its purposes for the academy, he is prepared to 'move beyond' to read in such a way that seeks to be 'generative' and 'revelatory'.⁶² Similarly, this thesis reads the Song from a linguistically aware form of higher criticism, in the way that it examines discourse in the Song.⁶³ However, it reads these and interprets them from the position of post-critical naiveté. It recognises the failure of confessionalism in the Church to truly let biblical texts speak for themselves.⁶⁴ In particular, it recognises the lack of attention of much church interpretation to the 'artistic attestations of the Biblical text itself'.⁶⁵

Furthermore, this thesis recognises Brueggemann's position as being 'on the side of the progressives', while noting that 'liberal Christianity ... [has] not much sustained interest in the testimony of Scripture itself, for Scripture does not lend itself to any simplistic outcome'.⁶⁶ Thus, like Brueggemann, this thesis is 'post-foundationalist' in its

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 6.

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 14.

⁶² Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 128.

⁶³ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 131.

⁶⁴ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 131.

methodology, 'without being interested in labels'.⁶⁷ Central to this thesis is the recognition that 'the liberal Christian temptation is to accommodate dominant culture until faith despairs. The conservative Christian temptation is to fashion absoluteness that stands disconnected from the dominant culture. Neither of these strategies, however, is likely to sustain the church in its mission'.⁶⁸

2.2.2 Studies of Old Testament Sexuality

As the focus of this thesis is human sexuality from the perspective of a particular HS text, it engages with some key texts about this subject. The most voluminous study in the field of Old Testament Sexuality is Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*.⁶⁹ Davidson's comprehensive study seeks to provide a 'wholistic theology of sexuality' through a conservative evangelical study of 'every passage in the H[ebrew] B[ible] dealing with human sexuality in the final (canonical) form of the OT'.⁷⁰ Importantly, in his pursuit, Davidson engages with scholars across the wide field of Old Testament studies, and as such, provides an incredibly useful source of reference for those engaging in serious study in this area. He also reads the HS in the wider context of ANE cultural world, comparing and contrasting Ancient Israel as part of that.⁷¹

Davidson starts his study (Section 1) by considering the Creation narratives (Genesis 1 and 2) and The Fall, noting the high prominence given to sexuality within these early chapters of Genesis.⁷² From these narratives he grapples with the debate about Complementarianism and Egalitarianism, discussing the several main interpretations, and landing with the position that the Creation narratives do not portray woman as being subjugated to man, but nonetheless he sees the words of God in Genesis 3:16 as being a judgement in the form of a legal trial, in which God ordains the judgement.⁷³ But key to the whole of Davidson's study is the idea of returning to the pre-Fall garden, and so he argues for the aspiration that 'marriage partners seek to return as much as possible to egalitarianism'.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality*, p. 131.

⁶⁸ Carolyn J Sharp, 'Introduction', in *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church*, by Walter Brueggemann, ed. and introduced by Carolyn J Sharp (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), pp. 1-9 (p. 8).

⁶⁹ Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007).

⁷⁰ Davidson, p. 2.

⁷¹ Davidson, p. 18.

⁷² Davidson, p. 15.

⁷³ Davidson, pp. 64, 69.

⁷⁴ Davidson, pp. 77-78

Moreover, Davidson's most comprehensive discussion about the idea of returning to the Garden of Eden is found in his discussion of the Song in Section 3 of his book.⁷⁵ In this respect, he follows scholars such as Tribble.⁷⁶ In Chapter 13, Davidson carries out intertextual discussion with the Creation narratives, arguing from his reading that the Song affirms heterosexuality, monogamy, equality, sexual wholeness, sexual exclusivity, sexual permanence, and sexual intimacy.⁷⁷ He also firmly draws a line between sexuality and divinity, affirming that 'sexuality belongs to the creation order' and thus, it is different from Mesopotamian creation myths.⁷⁸

Davidson's discussion of the Song is very comprehensive and informative, summarising the views of so many scholars, and thereby providing a useful springboard for further study. However, as Instone-Brewer observes correctly, Davidson himself only provides a limited outline of how he interprets what is going on in the Song.⁷⁹ As Davidson's work is not an extensive exegetical study, the interested commentator is left with questions. Importantly, Davidson observes a sense of progression in the Song, which will be discussed more shortly.⁸⁰ He also sees the adjuration passages addressed to the Daughters of Jerusalem as having a particular message, that is the importance of restraint.⁸¹

The middle section of Davidson's monumental work (Section 2) thematically examines different subjects in the area of sexuality, including heterosexuality/homosexuality, monogamy/polygamy, elevation/denigration of women, mixed marriages, prostitution, adultery and premarital sex, divorce, incest, rape, and procreative sexuality, amongst other topics. Davidson's approach is, for each subject area, to present an interpretation of an 'Edenic' or 'Pentateuchal ideal', and then to argue how certain sexual behaviours fall short of this. His work is well informed and a valuable piece of reference scholarship. However, there are times that from his conservative reading, Davidson reaches conclusions that are divergent from the majority of HS scholars, such as that the HS 'consistently teaches monogamy'.⁸² There are certainly times when in creating this work

⁷⁵ Davidson, pp. 552-553.

⁷⁶ Davidson, p. 522; Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978).

⁷⁷ Davidson, pp. 554-604.

⁷⁸ Davidson, p. 555.

⁷⁹ David Instone-Brewer, 'Review Article I: Richard M. Davidson's *Flame of Yahweh: A Theology OF Sexuality in the Old Testament*', *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 46.2 (2008), 245-50 (p. 249).

⁸⁰ Davidson, p. 617.

⁸¹ Davidson, p. 617; Instone-Brewer, *Review Article I*, p. 249.

⁸² Instone-Brewer, *Review Article I*, p. 250.

that Davidson plays down the variety of unconventional ways that sexuality is portrayed within in the HS, bearing in mind its diversity.⁸³ This diversity will be discussed more in Chapter 4.

As this study focuses on the Song as its main text, this thesis will now move to discussing key matters related to this fascinating text in the HS.

2.3 Authorship and Linguistic Issues

2.3.1 Superscription of the Song

What is important to note is that nothing can be said definitively about the authorship of the Song.⁸⁴ The first verse of the Song provides its title and a superscription, claiming that the text is attributed to Solomon.⁸⁵ The superscription has traditionally been seen as indicating Solomonic authorship, or that Solomon is a main character, or both.⁸⁶ However, there are two particular problems from the text itself with Solomon as either author or main character. Firstly, at no point is Solomon named as a speaker in the text.⁸⁷ The text presents the words of a Male Lover (ML), a Female Protagonist (FP), and a group of women, the Daughters of Jerusalem (DoJ). Solomon is not a speaker indicated by name. Secondly, if Solomon is a main character than there are very few references to Solomon in the text itself.⁸⁸ Thirdly, of the very few references to Solomon in the Song, one of them is possibly negative in its portrayal of him.⁸⁹ Thus, there does not seem to be enough evidence to suggest Solomonic authorship.

It is much more likely that the text has been attributed to Solomon (as a form of pseudepigraphy), to give it significance.⁹⁰ Bearing in mind that Solomon was 'legendary' from his time because of his wealth, his wisdom and his women, it is reasonable to argue

⁸³ Instone-Brewer, *Review Article I*, p. 250.

⁸⁴ Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 3; Daniel C Fredericks and Daniel J Estes, *Ecclesiastes & the Song of Songs* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), p. 274 makes a similar comment.

⁸⁵ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 3; Duguid, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Fox, p. 187.

⁸⁹ Duguid, p. 36; The main example of this is 8:11-12, in which a comparison is made between the FP as the MP's vineyard and Solomon's vineyards (possibly being his harem). Such a reading sees this behaviour of Solomon as being negative compared to the uniqueness that the ML has found in the MP (Exum, p. 260). Duguid, p. 36 makes a comparison with 8:7 that 'ahābā cannot be bought or sold, something which suggests this may be how Solomon behaves; Fox, p. 187 does not go as far as to say that this is a negative portrayal, but sees it as just being a comparison, based upon the fame of Solomon.

⁹⁰ Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 21; Carey Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 4-5.

that the text was composed by a brilliantly skilled and unnamed creative artist of another time, using his name.⁹¹

As well as the claimed connection with Solomon, the first part of the superscription also needs to be examined. Here, the Song of Songs is understood in the superlative sense meaning that it is the single best song.⁹² This has the possible implication that what follows is being presented by a final author/good final editor as a unified text, being a single song.⁹³ This is not to say that this best Song does not have different stanzas in it, but these collectively make up one song of all songs.⁹⁴

2.3.2 Linguistic arguments for the date of the Song

As with the book of Job, some scholars propose an early date for the text, while the majority argue for it being late (post-exilic).⁹⁵ The Song does not provide any means of dating it from the text itself, since it does not have any clear specific historical clues.⁹⁶ For that reason, the best available method to try to date the Song is linguistic.⁹⁷

Interpreting the evidence available, this thesis agrees with numerous scholars that a date for the Song (at least in the final form) from the Hellenistic Period is not only plausible, but also probable.⁹⁸ Firstly, this can be argued by the large number of Aramaisms in the

⁹¹ Fox, pp. 186-187; Bloch and Bloch, p. 22; Duguid, p. 20 correctly observes that the author of the Song of Songs was 'a very skilled artist indeed'.

⁹² The scholars who read as the superlative include Davidson, p. 558; Richard S Hess, *Song of Songs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 37; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 90; Bloch and Bloch, p. 137; Fredericks and Estes, p. 301; F. Scott Spencer, *Song of Songs*, ed. by Laurens Wilkins Lawrence, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), xxv, p. 1; Duane A Garrett, *Song of Songs*, ed. by Paul R House, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004); p. 124; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 120.

⁹³ Davidson, p. 558; Hess, p. 38; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 91; J. Cheryl Exum, 'Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know about The Song of Songs', in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Athalya Brenner and Carole R Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 24–35 (p. 29) says that 'the Song ... works as a unity, so well in fact that distinguishing different voices and attitudes is not easy and nothing approaching a consensus is in sight. Even commentators who see the Song as an anthology tend to read it as though its attitude toward love is uniform and the protagonists are the same two people throughout'.

⁹⁴ Spencer, p. 1; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 91; Garrett, p. 124.

⁹⁵ Marvin H Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 27; Murphy, p. 3; Duguid, p. 23. Scholars who argue for a post-exilic date include Fox, p. 190 and Bloch and Bloch, p. 23.

⁹⁶ Fox, p. 186.

⁹⁷ Fox, pp. 186-187; Bloch and Bloch, p. 23.

⁹⁸ Bloch and Bloch, pp. 25-27; Fox, p. 190; See David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 455; Gianni Barbiero, *Song of Songs: A Close Reading*, *Vetus Testamentum, Supplements* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), CXLIV, p. 506; Matthias Hopf, 'The Song of Songs as a Hebrew "Counterweight" to Hellenistic Drama', *Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich*, 2017, 1–16 <<https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-159544>> (p. 11).

Song.⁹⁹ Aramaic very slowly became the main language in Palestine from after the exile.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the large number of Aramaisms is indicative of a post-exilic date.¹⁰¹ There is evidence of Aramaisms in terms of morphology, syntax and use of idiom.¹⁰² Secondly, the text shows a similarity with Mishnaic Hebrew.¹⁰³ Thirdly, this is further supported by the use of various loan words from other languages such as the Persian word *pardēs* in 4:13, and the word *'appiryōn* in 3:9, which may be 'possibly reflecting [the] Greek *phoreion*'.¹⁰⁴ Taking together these factors, a Hellenistic date for the Song is conceivable.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, suggesting that the Song might be from the Hellenistic period potentially explains some of its similarity with Greek literature.¹⁰⁶ Bloch and Bloch observe the parallels with Theocritus' pastoral poetry, being written in Alexandria in the third century BCE, particularly the similar imagery of the lovers being portrayed as shepherds.¹⁰⁷ In both the pastoral poems and the Song, the world of the shepherds is imaginary, without the harsh experiences of the weather that affect real shepherds.¹⁰⁸ Bloch and Bloch suggest that Greek Art too might have influenced the descriptions of the Hebrew poet, through the portrayal of the nude human body in Hellenistic sculpture, sculpture of the human form being forbidden in Jewish Art by the Second Commandment.¹⁰⁹ It seems plausible that the author of the Song might have been influenced by the literature of the Hellenistic world, while being deeply embedded within Jewish culture.

2.3.3 The Genre of the Unique and Brilliant Song

The genre of the Song is something that has been much debated over its interpretive history. The key question is whether it is some sort of drama or whether it is a form of love poetry. Here it is argued that the text is love poetry.¹¹⁰ The two main reasons for arguing

⁹⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 4; Bloch and Bloch, p. 23 suggests that these examples may be evidence of 'Persian or Greek Origin'; Fox, pp. 187-188; for a detailed discussion, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Late Linguistic Features in the Song of Songs', in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs; or Perspektiven Der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. by Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 25-77, pp. 49-65.

¹⁰⁰ Bloch and Bloch, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, p. 49.

¹⁰² Bloch and Bloch, p. 23.

¹⁰³ Fox, pp. 187-188; Bloch and Bloch, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 4; Bloch and Bloch, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Bloch and Bloch, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Bloch and Bloch, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷ Bloch and Bloch, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Bloch and Bloch, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 26.

¹¹⁰ Pope, p. 192 makes the observation that the majority of scholars see the Song as love poetry. Commentators who read in this way include Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 45; Fredericks and Estes, p. 286; Tremper Longman, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 48; Hess, p. 34; Duguid, p. 25; Exum, *Song of Song*, p. 33; Bloch and Bloch, p. 3, Garrett, p. 92; G.

for this are its theme and poetic technique. However, as will be discussed more below, the Song can certainly be described as dramatic.¹¹¹

The theme of the Song, as discussed throughout the thesis, is the portrayal of a passionate relationship between a man and a woman, by means of the verbalisation of the speech and the thoughts of these two main characters.¹¹² As a central theme, it is a text that portrays the desire and experience of love by means of the senses, which is common to this genre of literature.¹¹³ In terms of poetic techniques, the Song is a text that extensively uses figurative language from beginning to end.¹¹⁴ It is a text that is terse, i.e. it uses a small number of words to convey significant meaning.¹¹⁵ It has repeated motifs and refrains.¹¹⁶ And it uses techniques that are particular to Hebrew poetry, such as parallelism, as well as other techniques.¹¹⁷ The Song is certainly poetry. And as such the thesis will treat the text as poetry, recognising the poetic techniques and creative masterpiece that the Song is.

However, this is not to say that the Song was not some sort of 'performance text' or inspired by some sort of 'performance text'.¹¹⁸ The key question here is 'what is a drama?'¹¹⁹ Reading the Song as drama has been one of the popular ways that it has been interpreted (mainly in the modern era, although the origins go back to the early Christian era).¹²⁰ There are a few characteristics that give it a dramatic feel and, some of these make it distinct from ANE poetry:¹²¹ Firstly, as will be discussed more in 2.3.3 there is some sense of 'narrativity' in the Song, perhaps better termed 'quasi'-narrativity.¹²² Secondly, unlike love poetry from the ANE, the Song includes sections of dialogue between the lovers.¹²³ Fox describes this unique feature of the Song as being a

Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 40; Davidson, p. 550.

¹¹¹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 16; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 58.

¹¹² Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 41.

¹¹³ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Hess, p. 29; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 17; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 33 observes how these refrains are seen by some scholars as evidence of editing. However, if the Song is seen as a unity, it can be seen as a poetic feature of the final form of the Song.

¹¹⁷ Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 10-14.

¹¹⁸ Hopf, p. 2. argues that the Song is a performance text.

¹¹⁹ Hopf, p.2.

¹²⁰ Fredericks and Estes, p. 281. The most recent substantial advocate of this approach is Provan. This approach to reading was made popular by Samuel Rolles Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 9th edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), p. 443.

¹²¹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 58, Bloch and Bloch, p. 16.

¹²² Davidson, pp. 561, 595 sees the Song in this way and observes it as a 'quasi-narrative'. He discusses the numerous scholars who have recognised the narrative-like characteristics.

¹²³ Davidson, p. 603; Bloch and Bloch, p. 16.

'remarkable difference'.¹²⁴ The dialogue plays a key part as a means of interaction between the lovers, and it plays an important role in this thesis. Thirdly, the Song has a chorus, the DoJ, not dissimilar in form to a 'Hellenistic choir'.¹²⁵ While the DoJ are a collective character in their own right, they do at times provide commentary as to what is being portrayed.¹²⁶ These three characteristics suggest that the Song is dramatic in form.

Furthermore, common arguments against the Song being a performance text are not enough to dismiss seeing it as such. While scholars observe a lack of stage directions, stage directions can sometimes be implied by descriptions of movement in the text, and stage directions are not necessarily required in texts that might be classed as performance texts, especially in a text as short as the Song.¹²⁷ While there is very little evidence of drama as a genre within Israel, this does not prove definitively that drama did not exist, nor does it prove that the Song has not been influenced by drama.¹²⁸ And while there have been different opinions amongst scholars about the number of characters in dramatic readings, the differences in opinion does not disprove that the text is dramatic.¹²⁹

To conclude this discussion, if the Song is Hellenistic, then it is possible that the poet was inspired in some way by the literature (potentially including drama) of the Hellenistic world.¹³⁰ As mentioned above, the characteristics of the Song as poetry are sufficiently strong to see it as such. But its similarity to performance texts makes it a unique text.¹³¹ It is a text put together by a highly creative person, that avoids neat categorisation.

2.3.4 Female Authorship?

One suggestion that is appreciated by some scholars is the potential for female authorship of the text. The main reason is that the voice of the FP is by far the dominant voice in the Song, with Brenner suggesting that 53% of the text verbalises the woman's voice, in comparison with 34% of the ML's voice.¹³² Female authorship might explain why this text

¹²⁴ Fox, pp. 315-318.

¹²⁵ Hopf, p. 8 discusses this and points out Aristotle's (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1456a) description of a Hellenistic Choir.

¹²⁶ Hopf, p. 8; Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 203 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 47 similarly observes that the presence of the DoJ in the text makes it potentially dramatic.

¹²⁷ Hopf, pp. 3, 7; C.f. Fredericks and Estes, p. 281.

¹²⁸ C.f. Fredericks and Estes, p. 281; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 58.

¹²⁹ C.f. Fredericks and Estes, p. 282; Tremper Longman, 'Song of Songs', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. by Kevin Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 758-61 (p. 760); Murphy, p. 58.

¹³⁰ Bloch and Bloch, p. 25.

¹³¹ Hopf, p. 11.

¹³² Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), pp. 46-56; Hess, p. 19.

is so different in terms of content from other texts in the HS.¹³³ And female authorship is a possibility, because the HS reports of women who were able to write, as well as those who are portrayed as composing and performing songs in the HS.¹³⁴

All of the above are good reasons to say the female authorship is a possibility. However, the gender of the author (neither male nor female) cannot be evidenced from the style of the text or its subject matter, because a man could also have written in the voice of a woman.¹³⁵ Female authorship, like so many details about the Song, is not provable.

2.3.5 Reading Strategy, Narrative and Progression

2.3.3 mentioned the issue of 'narrativity' of the Song, that will be discussed further, alongside a sense of progression in the text.¹³⁶ Some scholars dismiss any sense of narrative in the text as being a contrived reader-response to wanting there to be a storyline.¹³⁷ However, it is a usual phenomenon for contemporary scholars to observe some sense of 'progression or loose narrative development' in the text, and this observation warrants further discussion.¹³⁸ Davidson, while rejecting 'full-blown' dramatic readings of the Song, argues confidently for a 'quasi-narrative', and this is a fair description of how the Song is understood here.¹³⁹

To discuss this further, it is necessary to consider the 'reading strategy' that is used within this thesis. The reading strategy that is used is a progressive one, reading from the beginning of the Song to the end. It is the way of natural reading. The reader does not know the end at the beginning. As Spencer observes, there is nothing ideological about reading in this normal fashion; it is the way of 'let[ting] the drama unfold with fresh immediacy, as if experiencing it for the first time'.¹⁴⁰ For scholars who have spent a great deal of time looking at a text, this can be difficult to do, and it is not wholly possible, because one cannot remove oneself from a previous encounter with the text. But a 'progressive reading strategy' means taking the Song one step at a time, and in the process to see where the journey leads. It is also the case that reading in this progressive way means not ignoring the text that has previously been read (and the speech and action

¹³³ Bloch and Bloch, p. 21.

¹³⁴ Hess, p. 19, Duguid, p. 24.

¹³⁵ Bloch and Bloch, p. 21; Hess, pp. 19-20; Athalya Brenner, *The Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 65; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 65; Spencer, p. xlvii.

¹³⁶ Davidson, p. 595.

¹³⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 42; Pope, p. 54.

¹³⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 42.

¹³⁹ Davidson, pp. 561, 595.

¹⁴⁰ Spencer, p. liv.

that is portrayed there).¹⁴¹ As will be communicated below and in the commentary section, reading in this way has meant, like in Spencer's experience, that the Song is seen as

a series of broadly connected images, scenes and slides, as in a PowerPoint presentation, rather than a more impressionistic, kaleidoscopic flash barrage.¹⁴²

Reading in this way confirms a sense of 'choreography', a sense of 'the movement ... moving somewhere, rather than just hoping all over the dance floor'.¹⁴³ Reading in a progressive direction affirms what many scholars recognise as a sense of 'narrativity' or progression.¹⁴⁴ However, there is more to this 'quasi-narrative' than specifying which reading strategy is being used. Scholars have recognised strong textual reasons for it. Firstly, Munro observes the way that poetic images develop throughout the Song, building upon their previous uses.¹⁴⁵ Secondly, numerous scholars recognise two climatic points in the texts (namely 4:16-5:1 as the 'middle climax' and 8:5-7 as the 'final peak'), and these create a structural sense of a direction of travel.¹⁴⁶ Thirdly, the extent to which the portrayal of passion and lovemaking in the second half of the Song is considerably more developed than in the first half of the Song.¹⁴⁷ And lastly, as will be argued in successive discussion, the way that something that is called the *Erotic Imperative* (EI) is used in the Song asserts this progressive development.¹⁴⁸

2.3.6 Synchronic Reading

The Song is treated throughout this thesis using a synchronic methodology.¹⁴⁹ This linguistic approach, recognised by Saussure, treats the language of the text as being frozen at a particular point in time.¹⁵⁰ In other words, the thesis is only really interested in

¹⁴¹ Spencer, p. liv.

¹⁴² Spencer, p. liv.

¹⁴³ Spencer, p. lv.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev edn (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), p. 187; Davidson, p. 595.

¹⁴⁵ Munro, pp. 144-146; Davidson, p. 595.

¹⁴⁶ Ernst R. Wendland, 'Seeking a Path Through a Forest of Symbols: A Figurative and Structural Survey of the Song of Songs', *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics*, 7.2 (1995), 13-59 (pp. 36, 41) is a key scholar in recognising this; Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), p. 51 similarly sees these two sections as being 'the two central foci: the centre and the conclusion'; Davidson, p. 623 stresses the scholarly support for such a reading.

¹⁴⁷ Davidson, p. 599.

¹⁴⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ For a brief discussion, see John Walton, John Walton, 'Etymology', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. by Kevin Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 200-202 (p. 200-201).

¹⁵⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Roy Harris, Bloomsbury Revelations (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 104 contrasts the methods of synchronic and diachronic linguistics; Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hased in the Hebrew Bible*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 157 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 14 explains how this may be applied to biblical studies.

the 'final form' of the text, in this case the MT as in the BHS.¹⁵¹ It is not concerned about whether different sections have been composed by different authors etc. The 'final form' of the text is what is available and it is upon this that the discussion will be based. However, all of this being said, the text 'works as a unity' to the extent that it is likely it had a good author or good final editor.¹⁵²

2.3.7 The Structure of the Song

The unity and structure of the Song are two strongly interrelated concepts.¹⁵³ The discussion of 2.3.1 and 2.3.3 noted the Song is read here as a unified text of love poetry, a performance text, with sections, instead of an anthology of poems.¹⁵⁴ Such a unified reading observes the Song's 'conscious artistic design'.¹⁵⁵ It also observes the 'consistency of character'.¹⁵⁶

It follows that treating the Song as a unity (and not as an anthology) is supported by literary studies that determine that the book is a 'structured whole'.¹⁵⁷ Duguid notes that some scholars accept a sense of unity identify a common macrostructure of this form: 1:2-2:7; 2:8-3:5; 3:6-5:1; 5:2-6:3; 6:4-8:4; 8:5-14.¹⁵⁸ There are good reasons to recognise this macrostructure, mainly through observing the 'internal borders' within the text.¹⁵⁹ Firstly, 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 are all verses that conclude a section with a repeated refrain called the 'adjuration passages', with what follows being significantly different.¹⁶⁰ Secondly, 5:1 ends its section at a climatic point, which contrasts significantly from the setting and situation described in 5:2, as well as there being a change in main speaker (from ML to FP).¹⁶¹ Thirdly 6:3 ends a section with the second use of the 'refrain of mutual possession', which is significantly different from the setting of 6:4, as well as a change in main speaker (from FP to ML).¹⁶² Together, these textual features provide a well substantiated macrostructure for the Song.

¹⁵¹ Clark, p. 14.

¹⁵² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 35; Fox, p. 220.

¹⁵³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 291.

¹⁵⁴ At the most extreme end, Franz Landsberger, 'Poetic Units within the Song of Songs', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 73.4 (1954), 203–16, (pp. 215-216) sees the Song as being a collection of very short poems.

¹⁵⁵ Exum, p. 34.

¹⁵⁶ Garrett, p. 30; Bergant, p. xv.

¹⁵⁷ See discussion in Hess, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Duguid, p. 53. This macrostructure for the Song is observed by Exum, p. 38, Bergant, p. xv, Hess, pp. 35-36 and Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁵⁹ Wendland, p. 39 uses this quoted term; Fredericks and Estes, p. 291.

¹⁶⁰ Hess, p. 81; Bergant, p. 26; Carr, pp. 101, 115, 183; Duguid, p. 53.

¹⁶¹ Duguid, p. 123; Hess, p. 165.

¹⁶² Duguid, p. 123; Exum, p. 212 observe the significance of the change in speaker.

Some scholars argue that the whole Song has a chiastic structure.¹⁶³ While this might produce some fascinating results, Estes makes the pertinent comment that there is a great deal of difference between how different scholars discern as to how the chiasm is formed.¹⁶⁴ To put it another way, if there was a chiastic structure to the Song, then surely there would be more consistency amongst scholars as to the structure of this chiasm.¹⁶⁵

2.4 Key Interpretive Matters

2.4.1 Literal or Allegorical Interpretation, and the Inclusion in the Canon

The discussion will now move to some key interpretive matters. One of the main issues in the history of the interpretation of the Song is whether it should be read in an allegorical or literal sense – should the relationship between the lovers in the Song be seen straightforwardly as a text that portrays two lovers or as symbolising something other than this ‘surface’ reading? Because there is no hermeneutical key, it is not possible to dismiss either interpretation.¹⁶⁶ And it is not possible to prove what the author was intending by writing the Song, and what they thought of the text. However, this thesis reads it as a literal interpretation, and as the ‘natural’ reading this is an acceptable way of reading the text.

However, in the pre-critical Christian history of interpretation of the Song, the allegorical reading was the expected norm. In fact, the Council of Constantinople (550CE) banned the literal interpretation of the Song, making the allegorical reading the only acceptable reading.¹⁶⁷ The Neoplatonic emphasis of early Christian interpreters like Origen, with their focus on the soul and on the elimination of the body meant that, as far as they were concerned, the allegorical interpretation was the only possible interpretation.¹⁶⁸ But the

¹⁶³ C.f. Garrett, pp. 30-35; Davidson, p. 559.

¹⁶⁴ Fredericks and Estes, p. 292.

¹⁶⁵ Fredericks and Estes, p. 291.

¹⁶⁶ While it is not possible to dismiss either interpretation, a few scholars make some pertinent observations of as to why the literal reading is most reasonable. See Longman, ‘Song of Songs’, in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 760; John Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone, p. 244.

¹⁶⁷ Provan, p. 238.

¹⁶⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 29-30 makes this observation, as does William E. Phipps, ‘The Plight of the Song of Songs’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42.1 (1974), 82–100 (p. 88), who says that ‘Origen introduced Plato’s interpretation of love into Christianity by means of his Song of Songs allegory’, noting how Plato held the view of ‘opposing earthly and heavenly loves’. Kevin L. Flannery, ‘Plato and Platonism’, in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 542–44 (p. 544) notes that ‘it is difficult to deny that an excessively dualistic conception of humanity can lead to the overheated sort of ascetism in which the body is regarded as evil’.

Andreas Graeser, ‘Platonism’, in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

critical study of the Bible, as well as discovery of comparable ANE texts resulted in the literal reading becoming largely the accepted norm within the scholarly world.¹⁶⁹

A related matter is why is such a text is included in the Canon of Scripture. Was it included because of its significance as a love poem being read in a literal way?¹⁷⁰ Or was it included because of its allegorical reading? Or was it included for some other reason, such as the attribution of the text to Solomon?¹⁷¹ The fact of the matter is that there is no evidence that it makes it clear why it was included.¹⁷² The Mishnah suggests that the book was deemed controversial, along with Ecclesiastes, at the time of Jewish discussion about the Canon.¹⁷³ Rabi Aqiba famously added to this discussion, saying that

no man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs that it does not render the hands unclean, for all the ages are not worth the day on which the Songs of Songs was given to Israel; for all of the writings are Holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.¹⁷⁴

Another quote from Aqiba emphasises that his reading of the Song was allegorical, since he says that that the Song should not be 'sung in taverns', indicating his probable criticism of its literal interpretation.¹⁷⁵ It suggests that he knew that the literal interpretation was a common one, or at least recognised that it could be read in this way.¹⁷⁶

2005), iv, 233–39 (p. 237) notes that Origen was part of the early development of 'Christian Platonism'. Furthermore, Phipps, p. 87 discusses the ten-volume commentary that Origen wrote on the Song, including a warning that he gives to readers in the prologue to his homilies, that 'everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature should refrain completely from reading this little book and the things that will be said about it' (Quotation from Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentaries and Homilies*, trans. by R. P. Lawson (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1956), p. 23). Origen's influenced by platonic thought is also supported by him saying in his commentary that 'there is a love of the flesh which comes from Satan, and there is also another love, belonging to the Spirit, which has its origins in God; and nobody can be possessed by the two loves. ... If you have despised all bodily things ... then you can acquire spiritual love' (Quotation from Origen, p. 270; Homily 1; Discussed in Phipps, p. 88). Phipps, p. 87 also notes that when Origen was young he castrated himself in response to Jesus' instruction to cut off members that cause one to sin (Matthew 5:30).

¹⁶⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 75; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 42; and Longman, *NICOT*, p. 37. Longman, p. 23 notes that the allegorical interpretation is regaining some popularity within certain circles.

¹⁷⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 58.

¹⁷¹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 5; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 58 notes that other texts that have a Solomonic attribution are not in the Canon of the HS.

¹⁷² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 58; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 5 observes the lack of certainty on this matter.

¹⁷³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Alicia Ostriker, 'A Holy of Holies', in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Athalya Brenner and Carole R Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 36–54, p. 38; Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, p. 545 similarly observes that Aqiba probably saw the Song in an allegorical way.

¹⁷⁶ Katharine J. Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom' and Its Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 14 makes the point that allegorisation might have been the result of canonisation, but not the reason for it.

Perhaps the better approach than speculating why it is included in Scripture is to ask what would it mean if it was not there?¹⁷⁷ As the key biblical text that presents human sexuality in a positive light, to not have this included in the Canon would be travesty, and it would mean that what was left would be primarily negative portrayals of sexuality in the HS.¹⁷⁸ But its inclusion in the HS means something remarkably important; it effectively “‘canonize[s]’ human love’.¹⁷⁹

2.4.2 Who are the Characters in the Song?

The Song is a text with two main characters, referred to throughout this thesis as the ML and the FP. They are recognisable in the text, as speakers that describe and address one another.¹⁸⁰ The FP is the main speaker in the Song, and, as Exum observes, ‘there is no other female character in the Bible that we get to know so well through her intimate and innermost thoughts and feelings’.¹⁸¹ Much more will be discussed about the FP through the commentary sections below.

The reader of the Song learns about the ML through the description of the FP, as well as his words and actions.¹⁸² In her opening description of him, she refers to him as king (1:4) which has resulted in many making the interpretive decision to see him as King Solomon.¹⁸³ However, a few verses later (1:7), she also addresses him as a shepherd. This has led some interpreters to read a third character, another lover, into the text, since it was not seen possible that a king could also be a shepherd.¹⁸⁴ There are problems with a three character reading of the Song, the main one being that it is unclear which male character is being referred to or speaking at any one point, and the whole reading becomes arbitrary.¹⁸⁵ Instead, as the Song is poetry, in this thesis, the descriptions of the king and shepherd are seen as being figurative imagery.¹⁸⁶ They are neither Solomon, nor a king or shepherd in a literal sense, but imagery used to refer to the one ML.

¹⁷⁷ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Chave, ‘Towards a Not Too Rosy Picture of the Song of Songs’, *Feminist Theology*, 6.18 (1998), 41–53 (p. 42).

¹⁸⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 25.

¹⁸² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 15.

¹⁸³ For contemporary commentators who name the ML as Solomon, see Davidson, p. 568, Fredericks and Estes, p. 300 and A. Boyd Luter, *Song of Songs*, ed. by H. Wayne House and William Barrick, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 1:2.

¹⁸⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁵ Longman, ‘Song of Songs’, in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 760; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁶ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 16; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 95; Spencer, p. 6.

There are a few other things that can be observed about the lovers in the Song. Firstly, as will be discussed more below, there are good arguments to say that the lovers remain unmarried throughout the course of the Song.¹⁸⁷ This makes them very appropriate for the discussion in this thesis with its focus on premarital relationships. Secondly, the text gives the impression that the main characters are young.¹⁸⁸ This is made explicit by the main characters in their description of one another in 2:3-4¹⁸⁹. And Spencer also suggests that the vibrancy of the passion expressed by the main characters demonstrates this.¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, this unspecific naming of the two main characters means that they in effect represent all lovers.¹⁹¹ They are 'archetypal lovers', and while the Song is created within a particular culture, their experience is in many ways ageless.¹⁹² It is this important characteristic that makes the Song a relevant text across the ages. But it also means that the implications of their relationship can speak into the contemporary horizon.

Before moving on from discussing the characters, there is one final group to be discussed. The Song also has a chorus, the DoJ, who interact at various points with the FP. They act as internal audience for the Song.¹⁹³ And they (as a collective) are the only other speaker in the Song.¹⁹⁴ They perform various roles, including: learners from the FP,¹⁹⁵ 'cheerleaders' to the lovers in their lovemaking,¹⁹⁶ active supporters, by being called to find the ML when he goes missing,¹⁹⁷ and friends who question whether he is the right man for her.¹⁹⁸ They play an important supportive role in the Song.

¹⁸⁷ Numerous contemporary commentators argue for this. They include Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 226; Bloch and Bloch, p. 175; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 68; Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, p. 14; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 93; Spencer, p. 66.

¹⁸⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs* p. 9; Spencer, p. xlv refers to the lovers as being young.

¹⁸⁹ In 2:2 the FP is described as being among *bānôt*, which is a word used for a 'young girl'; Chrys C. Caragounis, 'bat', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 779–81 (p. 779). In 2:3 the ML is described as being among *bānîm*, which is used for 'sons', but is understood to mean younger men; See Pope, p. 372.

¹⁹⁰ Spencer, p. xlv.

¹⁹¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 8; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

¹⁹² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 8.

¹⁹³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 57.

¹⁹⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 182.

¹⁹⁵ Munro, p. 147; Allender and Longman, p. 22; Fredericks and Estes, p. 273; Kenton L. Sparks, 'The Song of Songs: Wisdom for Young Jewish Women', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 70.2 (2008), 277–99.

¹⁹⁶ 5:1; Allender and Longman, p. 19.

¹⁹⁷ 5:8; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 84.

¹⁹⁸ This is implied by the question asked in 5:9. See discussion in 10.4.2. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 68; Othmar Keel, *The Song of songs*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 198; Spencer, p. 138.

2.4.3 Why the Lovers in the Song are not Married, and Procreation is not an Explicit Theme

This thesis affirms an established view that the lovers in the Song are not portrayed as being married in the text.¹⁹⁹ This is because the text does not really give much attention to either marriage or procreation. It is something that is not much on their horizon. Sexual desire is certainly on their horizon. But the evidence in the text for framing this within the context of marriage and procreation does not seem to be sufficient.²⁰⁰ However, the focus in the HS more generally on marriage means that seeing marriage as an ultimate outcome for the lovers, them being 'on the way to marriage', is a reasonable argument to make.²⁰¹

The two allusions to procreation in the Song are found in 3:4 and 8:5, both of which are unusual, and seem to be about the place of conception of by her mother and by his mother respectively. The commentary will highlight how these allusions in their contexts emphasise that these places were places where intercourse took place, the emphasis being on sexual desire, without an emphasis on the procreative outcome aspect.²⁰² Davidson is right to observe that 'in the Song the procreative function of sexuality is conspicuous by its absence'.²⁰³ At no time do the lovers 'even muse about the children they will have together'.²⁰⁴ In the Song 'Eros does not need justification in order to be. Eros is "a given" of creation'.²⁰⁵

Similarly, the only reference to a wedding in the text is 3:6-11, being a description by the FP to the DoJ of the appearance of Solomon on his wedding day. Scholars who interpret Solomon as one of the lovers in the Song take this to be a reference to them getting married.²⁰⁶ But the critical problems with this reading are that this passage neither gives any reference to a form of relationship between Solomon and the FP as speaker, nor does

¹⁹⁹ Commentators who hold this position include André LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), pp. 7-8; Keel, p. 32; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 226; Bloch and Bloch, p. 175; Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 25, 68; Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, p. 14; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 93; Spencer, p. 66; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 162.

²⁰⁰ Davidson, p. 618 argues that culturally, sexual behaviour could only happen within marriage, but this is not supported by substantial marital or procreative imagery in the Song; Bloch and Bloch, p. 12 notes that the laws surrounding sexuality (to be discussed more in Chapter 4) do not actually indicate *how* people behaved; they also note that 'sex between unmarried people, though hardly approved is, is not considered a flagrant transgression like incest and adultery'.

²⁰¹ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, pp. 226-227.

²⁰² 8.4.1; 12.3.1.

²⁰³ Davidson, p. 604.

²⁰⁴ This quote is from Fox, p. 309; Davidson, p. 605.

²⁰⁵ This quote is from LaCocque, p. 49; Davidson, p. 605; Pope, p. 182 also observes that This lack of emphasis on the fecundity of the FP – something that is found in Ruth 4:11 – also supports the argument that the Song is not about marriage.

²⁰⁶ Davidson, p. 596; Luter, 3:6; Fredericks and Estes, p. 341; Duguid, p. 104.

it portray any explicit verbalisation of desire or emotion on her part, as she often does throughout the Song. She is not portrayed as a bride awaiting the arrival of her husband, but as an observer of a great royal event.²⁰⁷ One might imply that the FP is excited at the appearance of Solomon by her calling of the DoJ to see this great event, but there is no indication about any desiring or emotional attachment to Solomon.²⁰⁸ He is not the lover in this scene, and she is not his. It seems more likely, as Goldingay and Exum suggest, that this passage could be seen as a possible 'anticipation of their own wedding day'.²⁰⁹ It is as if the FP is hinting about something that she hopes might happen one day.

Furthermore, there are other reasons why the lovers are portrayed as being not married in the Song. Firstly, they are not portrayed as being able to be 'together all of the time'.²¹⁰ This is further suggested by the comings and goings of the ML, and that they do not live in the same house.²¹¹ Secondly, at a late stage in the Song, the FP expresses her wishes to kiss the ML in public, but the implication is that this would be culturally unacceptable, suggesting that they are unmarried.²¹²

Moreover, some scholars argue that the use of the ML calling the FP *kallâ* (bride) in a few cases suggests that the lovers are married.²¹³ But this should simply be seen as being figurative, poetic language, being the language of endearment.²¹⁴ A good reason for this is that *kallâ* is used four of the six times alongside the noun 'ăḥōtî with a first-person pronominal suffix (my sister).²¹⁵ However, the reference to sister does not need to be taken as meaning that he is having an incestuous relationship.²¹⁶ Thus, similarly, the

²⁰⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 140 note that she is portrayed as observing a great event.

²⁰⁸ This calling of the DoJ by the FP to see the arrival of Solomon is portrayed in 3:11 by two imperatives (listed in Appendix 2).

²⁰⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 141; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 234.

²¹⁰ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, pp. 225, 230, 234, 237, 249, 250.

²¹¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 26 observes the repetition of the comings and goings. Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 230; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 59 both imply different houses.

²¹² 11.3.6.

²¹³ 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 5:1

²¹⁴ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156; Robin Wakely, 'kallâ', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), II, 644–52 (p. 645); J. Conrad, 'kallâ', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. by David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), VII, 166–67.; Brenner, *Song of Songs*, p. 27; Bloch and Bloch, p. 175; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 169; Spencer, p. 101.

²¹⁵ 4:9, 10, 12, 5:1.

²¹⁶ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 151; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156; Pope, p. 480. Fox, xii-xiii and Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 52 notes how 'sister' is used as a term of endearment in Egyptian love poetry.

references to bride do not need to be taken in a literal sense.²¹⁷ This makes most sense of a text in which there is very little ‘nuptial imagery’ at all.²¹⁸

2.5.1 Linguistic Issues

2.5.1 Different Words for Love in the Song

One important interpretative issue for reading the Song is how to interpret the different words for ‘love’ that are used in Hebrew. Depending on how these words are understood can produce very different interpretations, shown by the allegorical and literal readings.²¹⁹ The problem is made more complex because of the relatively small corpus of texts that are available in Hebrew in comparison with other languages, e.g., Latin and Greek. In other ancient languages there are many more examples of the erotic use of language than there are in biblical Hebrew.²²⁰ However, the author of the Song knew what they wanted to express. It is argued here that the Song is a deeply erotic text, expressing sexual desire and erotic love.²²¹ How this is expressed in passages more generally will be discussed in Chapter 5. But part of this discussion focuses on the different words for ‘love’ that will be discussed here. The key word groups for love that are used in the Song are the *’hb* word group, the *dôdî* word group and the *r’yh* word group.²²²

2.5.2 The *’hb* Word Group

The *’hb* word group when used for human-to-human interactions is one that covers a whole plethora of different meanings, from friendship to loyalty, as well as erotic meanings, such as ‘passionate, sexual love’, as well as being a word for ‘marital relations’.²²³ Words that make up part of this group in the Song include the feminine singular noun *’ahăbâ*, the third person plural verb *’ăhēbû* and the third person feminine singular verb *’ăhăbâ*.²²⁴

²¹⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 52; Spencer, p. 102.

²¹⁸ Spencer, p. 102.

²¹⁹ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 244.

²²⁰ For example, the *lupanar* (brothel) in Pompeii has graffiti which provides examples of the use of language for sexual experience. See Amanda M Devitt, ‘Sites of The Sex Trade: Spatial Analysis and Prostitution at Pompeii’ (unpublished MA Thesis, McMaster University, 2014), pp. 48-59.

²²¹ Victor Karandashev, *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Experience and Expression of Love* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019), pp. 253-255 discusses the cross-cultural psychological understanding of these phenomena.

²²² Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, pp. 65-71.

²²³ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 67.

²²⁴ Feminine singular noun (2:4, 2:5, 2:7 with a definite article, 3:5 with a definite article, 3:10, 5:8, 7:6[EN], 8:4 with definite article, 8:6, 8:7 (twice both) with a definite article)); third person plural verb (1:3,1:4); third person feminine singular verb (1:7, 3:1, 3:2, 3:3, 3:4).

18 of the 251 uses of words from this word group are found in the Song; Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, ‘*hb*’, in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 45–53 (p. 46).

In the context of the erotic text of the Song, the reading here is to see the word group in an erotic sense referring to desire and erotic love.²²⁵ There are two critical reasons for this. Firstly, as will be discussed in the succeeding commentary, passages in which words from this word group are found are erotic contexts, indicating that an erotic meaning is most appropriate. Secondly, the potential to read the 'hb word group in an erotic way is supported by its use in other texts of the HS. Quell and Wallis argue that the 'original use of the concept of 'ahab belong to the realms of sexual love, of physical desire, of lust and even of sensual pleasure', and Wallis argues that the Song 'praises the rapturous experience of sexual love as a motivating power that is plainly supernatural'.²²⁶ One text which emphasises the sexual meaning of the 'hb word group is Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22), in which Amnon 'hb Tamar.²²⁷ The same could potentially be said of Solomon's 'hb for his many wives.²²⁸ But the sexual understanding (in terms of desire) of the word group 'hb could certainly be applied to various texts in the Pentateuch.²²⁹ It is a word that has significant sexual meanings, and these support reading the 'hb word group in the Song as having a sexual meaning.

Moreover, one scholar has suggested that in some of these wider contexts of the HS, instead of reading the 'hb word group as referring to erotic-emotive semantic meanings of heterosexual love, that they should instead be understood more broadly to mean 'experiencing and desiring love in all-encompassing or more general sense'.²³⁰ With the many potential understandings of the 'hb word group this is certainly potentially arguable. But in passages that portray heterosexual love relationships in the HS, the potential

²²⁵ Gerhard Wallis, 'āhabh', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), I, 99–118 (p. 108); Gottfried Quell, 'Agapao, Agape, Agapetos', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), I, 21–55 (p. 24) gives the example of Song 8:6 as being 'the most forceful expression of the passion of love'.

Some scholars who include readings of words within the 'hb word group in this way, though who are not explicit about generalising, include Bloch and Bloch, p. 138; Hess, p. 52; while not explicit about the Hebrew, this erotic understanding is implied by Walsh, p. 20.

For discussion about the use of 'ahābā in the adjuration passages, being those with definite articles (2:7, 3:5 and 8:4), see 13.2.2.

The feminine singular verbs are used as an epithet for the ML by the FP. She is potentially expressing her desire for him by this term. See Hess, p. 59, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 106. In particular, see Longman, *NICOT*, p. 129, who says that by using this epithet, 'he is named by her desire'.

²²⁶ Wallis, pp. 107, 108.

²²⁷ H. G. L. Peels, 'qānā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 937–40 (p. 293).

²²⁸ Jenni and Westermann, p. 47.

²²⁹ E.g., Genesis 24:67, 29:16-18, 34:3; P. J. J. S. Els, 'āhab', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 277–99 (p. 291).

²³⁰ Els, 'āhab, p. 291.

sexual element (include desire and attraction) should not be ignored or discounted in terms of determining meaning, even if words from the 'hb word group are interpreted to have a more general meaning for love. The sex element of sexuality cannot be ignored.

But what form of erotic meaning is expressed by the use of the 'hb word group in the Song? In her commentary, Walsh presents a reading that sees the Song as a text that focuses on the 'expression of desire between the lovers'.²³¹ This makes excellent sense of a highly erotic text and this thesis similarly sees this as being the primary understanding of the 'hb word group in the Song.²³² Unlike Walsh, as will become clear in this thesis' commentary discussion, it does not assume that the portrayal of desire is never consummated in the Song.²³³ But it makes excellent sense to see the 'hb word group in the Song as being associated with sexual desire.

2.5.3 The *dôdî* Word Group

It was stated above how words of the 'hb word group are used to express sexual desire within the context of the Song. This erotic understanding is also very much supported by examining the *dôdî* word group. There are forty words of this word group from the Song. Thirty-four of these are nouns of masculine singular form, and so they refer as an epithet to the ML.²³⁴ The other six, as masculine plural nouns, demonstrate the erotic nature of the Song as a whole.²³⁵ The most usual way to interpret these masculine plural nouns in the Song is that they refer to physical acts of 'lovmaking'.²³⁶ Unfortunately, many English Bible translations avoid making the erotic understanding of *dôdîm* explicit, by instead translating it as love in an abstract sense, which is misleading.²³⁷ But this is neither the usual way that the plural form of *dôdîm* is understood in the HS, nor does it fairly represent the erotic nature of the text, recognised by the many commentators who translate it as lovmaking.

²³¹ Walsh, p. 162; See also Hess, p. 32.

²³² Hess, p. 32 and Spencer, pp. 193-194 note the particular value of Walsh's desire reading of the Song.

²³³ Walsh, p. 162.

²³⁴ 1:13; 1:14; 1:16; 2:3; 2:8; 2:9; 2:10; 2:16; 2:17; 4:16; 5:2; 5:4; 5:5; 5:6 (twice); 5:8; 5:9 [four times]; 5:10; 5:16; 6:1 [twice]; 6:2; 6:3 [twice]; 7:9[EN]; 7:10[EN]; 7:11[EN]; 7:13; 8:5; 8:14.

²³⁵ 1:2; 1:4; 4:10 [twice]; 5:1; 7:12[EN].

²³⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125 makes the distinction that the plural form (*dôdîm*) throughout the Song refers to 'expressions of love'. Scholars who affirm this include Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 141; Hess, p. 115; Fox, p. 97; Bloch and Bloch, p. 137; Duguid, p. 79; Keel, p. 44; Luter, 1:2; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 8; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 93; Spencer, p. 7. The lovmaking reading is implied by Michael D Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 10; Walsh, p. 72.

Contra Pope, p. 508, who understands the plural noun as referring to an abstract, instead of concrete, meaning.

²³⁷ E.g., NRSV; ESV, AV, NEB, JB. Bloch and Bloch, p. 137 observes the 'evasive' nature of translations of this word in most Bible translations.

This understanding of the masculine plural form of *dôdîm* is also supported by other passages from the HS.²³⁸ Proverbs 7:18 is a reference to love as something that is experienced until morning, indicating that it is an activity;²³⁹ Ezekiel 16:8 refers to ‘the age for love’, suggesting that the subject is of an age ‘of sexual maturity’;²⁴⁰ and Ezekiel 23:17 refers to a ‘bed of lovemaking’.²⁴¹

Naturally, a term like lovemaking in a poetic text has some level of ambiguity associated with it, potentially including a whole number of sexual activities. It is not a strict technical definition like ‘vaginal sexual intercourse’, but instead could include activities such as ‘kisses, caresses, as well as intercourse’.²⁴² Thus, in many contexts, the reader is left to their own interpretation of what contextual sexual activity is being referred to in the various passages in the Song, it often being far from clear. The interpretive ambiguity of this word, a word that is celebrated (1:4), in a text that celebrates sexual love, allows a generosity and openness as to what is being expressed in different sections.

2.5.4 The *r’yh* Word Group

The final word group for ‘love’ that is used in the Song is the *r’yh* word group, almost always as a feminine singular noun with a possessive pronominal suffix, which is used by the ML to refer to the FP.²⁴³ It is a word that is only found in this feminine singular form in the Song in the HS.²⁴⁴ At one significant point in the text, the FP speaks of the ML as a *rē’î*, which deserves specific attention below.²⁴⁵

Moreover, the masculine singular form of the noun is found in contexts which suggest companionship, as well as sometimes having a sexual connotation.²⁴⁶ Hosea 3:1 is one example of this sexual connotation.²⁴⁷ With these multiple senses of friendship being

²³⁸ DCH, Vol. 2, p. 423 lists the plural noun (when referring to ‘love’) is found in Ezekiel 16:8, 23:17 and Proverbs 7:18.

²³⁹ Hess, pp. 115-116,

²⁴⁰ Garrett, p. 128.

²⁴¹ Davidson, p. 314.

²⁴² Bloch and Bloch, p. 137. Fredericks and Estes, p. 305 notes that Keel, p. 44 tries to be too specific about the meaning of this plural noun, saying that it refers to ‘foreplay and sexual intercourse’. While these are certainly included as potential meanings of the noun, the noun is ambiguous enough to allow the expression of a whole scope of sexual activity. Bloch and Bloch, p. 137 are closer to the mark by describing the plural noun as a ‘comprehensive term for lovemaking’.

²⁴³ The feminine singular noun is used in 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4. BDB, p. 946. Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 69; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 131;

²⁴⁴ Murphy, *The Songs of Songs*, p. 131; DCH, Vol. 7, p. 526.

²⁴⁵ 5:16; 10.4.3 for detailed discussion; DCH, Vol. 7, p. 511.

²⁴⁶ DCH, Vol. 7, p. 509.

²⁴⁷ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 131; DCH, Vol. 7, p. 510.

expressed here, Keel is right to suggest that for the feminine singular noun unique to the Song, 'even though the term 'girlfriend' sounds all too modern, the etymology, linguistic use, and history of translation would justify its use'.²⁴⁸

2.6 Other Comments on the Song

There are a few short comments that will be briefly made about the Song which will help clarify to what follows in the commentary section below. Firstly, the MT version does not cause many problems and does not need many emendations.²⁴⁹ Thus, the very few emendations that are made are discussed as textual notes. Secondly, BHS is the version of the MT that is used here.²⁵⁰ Thirdly, both translation and textual notes are found in the footnotes. Fourthly, this thesis uses SBL style for transliteration (academic style).²⁵¹ To conclude, this chapter has discussed some of the key interpretative issues regarding the Song, noting its uniqueness and its significance as part of the Canon of Scripture. Aspects of how sexuality is portrayed more generally in the HS will be returned to in Chapter 4.

²⁴⁸ Keel, p. 58; George M. Landes, *Building Your Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary: Learning Words by Frequency and Cognate*, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta: GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xli, p.136 similarly supports 'girl-friend' as a way of understanding this noun.

²⁴⁹ Hess, p. 21.

²⁵⁰ *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit Morphology; Bible. O.T. Hebrew. Werkgroep Informatica, Vrije Universiteit.* (Logos Bible Software, 2006).

²⁵¹ *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, ed. by Patrick H. Alexander and others (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), pp. 26-27.

Chapter 3: The Contemporary Cultural Horizon

3.1 Introduction

This chapter paints a picture of the Contemporary Cultural Horizon, being the cultural world in which people (including Christians) are influenced in their decision making about premarital relationships. It will begin by defining the particular context that is being used to bound the contemporary horizon, since otherwise the cultural context will be too broad. Then it will provide some historical and social structural context of the background of the cultural horizon. Then, the chapter will discuss a variety of relationships and sexual scripts about forms of premarital relationship that exist within that contemporary horizon. And lastly, some of the experiences of these scripts will be considered alongside the questions raised for a Theology of Dating.

3.2 Defining the Context of the Contemporary Horizon

Since people's cultural perspective is affected by factors such as age, gender, where they live, their religion, social class, family life, their politics etc., it is only possible to paint a contemporary cultural horizon with a particular focus. To paint the horizon too broadly would be to fail to inhabit it sufficiently. Thus, this thesis will especially focus on the cultural horizon of heterosexual EAs before their first marriage in the United Kingdom. Amongst this set there will be a plurality of cultural experiences, based upon the factors above, unique life experiences and individual psychology, but there should be some commonalities, through collective cultural interaction.²⁵²

Furthermore, as this thesis is specifically interested in presenting a *Theology* of Dating, the specific focus of the cultural horizon is those among that set who would consider themselves Christians. Thus, this 'collective identity' of being a believer is attached to 'a sense of obligation' to the beliefs and practises of Christianity, noting the variety in the expression of these amongst different Christians and churches.²⁵³ Since the Church (and Christians) do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of, and interact with the wider dominant culture, Christians are both influenced by the wider culture, as well as the subcultures within Christianity.²⁵⁴ The history of Christianity, since it involves human beings, is from

²⁵² Isaac Reed and Jeffery Alexander, 'Culture', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. by Bryan S. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 111–17 (p. 111-12). Callum Brown and Gordon Lynch, 'Cultural Perspectives', in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. by Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 329–51 (pp. 329-330) asserts that culture is a 'structure' in that its meanings 'have wider social existence' than 'our individual imaginations'. They are attached to 'particular institutions, places and societies'.

²⁵³ James Beckford, 'Religion', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. by Bryan S. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 505–12. (p. 505).

²⁵⁴ Beckford, pp. 506, 509.

one perspective the history of the different ways that Christian people (individually and collectively) have interacted with wider culture.²⁵⁵ Thus, as this thesis presents some parameters for a Theology of Dating, the contemporary cultural horizon, being presented here will include some discussion of both Christian subcultures, wider dominant culture, and the interaction between the two.

Moreover, some of the most comprehensive research (both qualitative and quantitative), that has been done about premarital relationships of EAs, including the impact of religious belief on these relationships, has been done in America.²⁵⁶ Importantly, while there are significant ongoing British studies, there is less of a specific focus in British research on the interaction of Christian faith and sexual attitudes.²⁵⁷ Bearing in mind the influence of American popular culture (through film and television media), as well as the influence of American Christianity in some of its variety of forms on British Christianity (as an aspect of Western Christianity), the significant studies of EAs in America will interplay in the ensuing discussion.²⁵⁸

Furthermore, focusing on the contemporary culture of EAs means recognising that it is often an age group where there is 'experimentation' and 'identity exploration', which often includes the areas of romantic and sexual relationships.²⁵⁹ Morgan and van Dulmen observe that

Emerging adulthood uniquely affords individuals a variety of choices with regard to sexuality. It is common for emerging adults to change residences, jobs, and relationships, and these general life adjustments can be accompanied by shifts in their experiences and attitudes towards sexuality, such as when moving away from parents offers more freedom for sexual exploration or forming a new relationship offers opportunities for new sexual behaviours.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 2.

²⁵⁶ Regnerus and Uecker; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*.

²⁵⁷ E.g., The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL). The most recent study NATSAL-4, with a specific focus on younger people, is currently under way (National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 'Natsal-4', 2021 <<https://www.natsal.ac.uk/natsal-survey/natsal-4>> [accessed 16 January 2022]).

²⁵⁸ Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflect Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); Eden Christian Bookshop, 'UK or US Evangelism - Does It Really Matter?' <<https://www.eden.co.uk/blog/uk-or-us-evangelism-does-it-really-matter-p1852>> [accessed 16 January 2022] observes the large number of Evangelical Christian publishing houses that are US based, and how consequently a large amount of Christian books within the UK originate in the US in its cultural setting.

²⁵⁹ Olmstead and Anders, *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood: A Primer on Theory*, p. 14.

²⁶⁰ 'Introduction', in *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Morgan and Manfred H. M. Van Dulmen, Emerging Adulthood Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1–10 (p.1).

This 'developmental phase' with its potential opportunities for 'experimentation' provides one key aspect of the background of life for many EA.

3.3 The Historical and Social Context of the Contemporary Horizon

Before describing in detail the specific contemporary horizon of EAs before their first marriage, it is necessary to very briefly provide some wider historical and social context. However, for the sake of brevity this will be a brief summary of very significant cultural influences.

3.3.1 The Historical Context of Sex, Dating and Marriage

At the heart of the contemporary Western horizon is the value of the freedom to marry, both in terms of the freedom to become married, but also the freedom as to who to marry, and such freedom of choice has its roots within Western Christian teaching, both Catholic and Protestant.²⁶¹ When this freedom is seen alongside the dominant Western cultural idea of marrying for love, it provides the context for mate selection by processes of courtship.²⁶² Dating as one such process developed through the twentieth century.²⁶³ Furthermore, this freedom to marry and the developments in dating should be seen in the

²⁶¹ Susan Dowell, 'Marriage as a Sacrament', in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, ed. by Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 125–26 (p. 126).

Saskia Lettmaier, 'Marriage Law and the Reformation', *Law and History Review*, 35.2 (2017), 461–510 (p. 484, 497) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248017000104>> discusses Protestant Reformation teaching about marriage. She notes that parental consent was required in German Protestant teaching, but in England the Pre-Reformation understanding that 'present and perfect consent ... alone maketh matrimony'.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. by F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. rev (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23 notes the existence of the rules of affinity in terms of teaching about Christian marriage.

²⁶² Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 145–146 discusses the history of the development of the idea of marrying for love, placing it within the context of The Enlightenment; George P. Monger, 'Courtship', in *Marriage Customs of the World: From Henna to Honeymoons* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 87–89 (p. 87) notes how anthropologists observe how the practice of courtship takes place in societies where there exists freedom of choice in marriage partner and there being ways for unmarried people to meet people of the opposite sex. Thus, courtship practises are primarily a Western phenomenon.

²⁶³ Carrie A. Bredow, Rodney M. Cate, and Ted L. Huston, 'Have We Met Before?: A Conceptual Model of First Romantic Encounters', in *Handbook of Relationship Initiation*, ed. by Susan Sprecher, Amy Wenzel, and John Harvey (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2008), pp. 3–28 (pp. 5–7) summarises three different stages in the historical developments of Western courtship practices. The first stage they term 'Close-Field Partnering' (late nineteenth century to 1920s) in which partnering was a process overseen by parents and choices of partner regularly came from those known to the family. The second stage they term as 'The Dating System' (from early twentieth century until into the 1960s) in which courtship moved from the 'private spaces' of home to public spaces, over which parents had less control. It was also the stage during which 'dating added new stages to courtship and multiplied the number of partners from serious to casual an individual was likely to experience before marriage. The last stage has been termed 'Modern Partnering' (from 1970s onwards), which includes the contemporary models of relationship described in the next subsection.

context of two large movements – the Sexual Revolution and Feminism. The Sexual Revolution is hugely significant in many ways, but particularly by providing the regular availability of birth control, the perceived freedom within society at large to have premarital sex, as well as the verbalisation of the issue of authenticity and honesty in terms of sexual desire and behaviour.²⁶⁴ The Feminist Movements and Equal Rights have also been hugely significant, having implications for how women might think about every area of their lives, including sex and relationships, and how this relates to matters like work and fertility.²⁶⁵

3.3.2 The Information Technology Revolution

In addition to the Sexual Revolution and the significant changes brought about in society because of Feminism, one other hugely significant change affecting the way that contemporary relationships are conducted is the Information Technology Revolution, particularly as a way of meeting and interacting with people.

Social media, dating sites and apps are all firmly part of the contemporary horizon. They affect the contemporary horizon in several different ways. Firstly, 'Cyber Romance' as a form of 'Long Distance Relationship' is a common practice.²⁶⁶ Bearing in mind that geography is recognised as conventionally having a hugely significant impact on the formation (and development, and sustaining) of relationships, the ability to meet and develop relationships online changes the relationship scene.²⁶⁷ One American survey carried out in 2017 revealed that nearly 40% of the couples involved met online.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. ix specifically lists these things as some of the consequences of the Sexual Revolution.

Brown and Lynch, p. 333 lists the various laws that changed during the Sixties in the UK; Nichi Hodgson, *The Curious History of Dating* (London: Robinson, 2017), p. 148 describes the Sixties as 'the most revolutionary decade yet' in her history of dating. According to Brown and Lynch, p. 336, the cultural changes of the Sexual Revolution resulted in 'a loss of normative Christian culture' in Britain.

An increase in authenticity is discussed in Allyn, p. x; Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), pp. 36-37. This has been recognised by Brown and Lynch, p. 335 in terms of the drop of the number of cases of blackmail (which centred around sexual misdemeanours) during the Sixties. This focus on authenticity has meant that scholars have since demonstrated that premarital sexual activity was more common before the Sexual Revolution than has previously been led to believe. e.g., Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963*, Cambridge Social and Cultural Histories, 16 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁶⁵ Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.

²⁶⁶ Erica Owens, 'The Sociology of Love, Courtship, and Dating', in *21st Century Sociology*, by Clifton Bryant and Dennis Peck (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007), pp. 266–71 (p. 270).

²⁶⁷ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 28-75.

²⁶⁸ Michael J. Rosenfeld, Reuben J. Thomas, and Sonia Hausen, 'Disintermediating Your Friends:

Bearing in mind the high numbers of people in other Western countries are dating online, the influence of online dating on the contemporary cultural horizon in Britain is significant.²⁶⁹

Moreover, research indicates that the rise in the Internet dating scene also potentially affects the way that people think about dating. For many people looking for relationships, it creates the potential for more choice. But the potential to be 'cognitively overwhelmed' by choice is a recognised phenomenon.²⁷⁰ Choice through online dating also has the potential to make people assess potential partners in a different way, from seeing each on their own terms, to making comparisons between them.²⁷¹ Furthermore, scholars believe that the amount of choice can create a situation where people feel unable to commit to one person, because of the other potential options available.²⁷² For some people it creates a perception that there is a countless number of other fish in the sea. It has even resulted in new vocabulary developing to describe how online daters behave as a result of having so much choice.²⁷³ These changes demonstrate just some of the ways that online dating is changing the contemporary cultural horizon.²⁷⁴

Secondly, the Internet, as a significant media source is believed to be a driving force for cultural change. The 'speed' and 'scope' of the Internet enables the transference of media content (and the interaction with that content through social media) in a way that is so different from that in a 'predigital world'.²⁷⁵ The creation of an online world where things can 'go viral', the existence of 'memes' as 'self-replicating culture' gives the potential for

How Online Dating in the United States Displaces Other Ways of Meeting', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116.36 (2019), 17753–58
<<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908630116>>; See discussion in Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 40.

²⁶⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 41.

²⁷⁰ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 47.

²⁷¹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 46–48 discusses the issue of 'more choice means fewer sales', particularly since the amount of choice that online daters have means that they operate according to the psychological phenomena of 'joint evaluation mode' instead of 'separate evaluation mode'.

²⁷² Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 51–52.

²⁷³ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 50 lists the following vocabulary: 'cushioning (keeping other potential partners waiting in the wings in case your current relationship doesn't work out), ghosting (when someone you've been dating or messaging suddenly disappears without telling you why), haunting ... (when your date has ghosted you, but then out of the blue likes something you've posted online), and roaching (when the person you've been seeing hides the fact they've been dating other people).

²⁷⁴ Another key philosophical question is how one authentically relates through the online medium (see Dan Sibley, 'How to Be Yourself in an Online World', in *Dating - Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas*, ed. by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 180–94); another is the difference that being able to stay in touch all of the time makes to a long-distance relationship (see Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 73).

²⁷⁵ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Postmillennial Pop (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), p. 12.

ideas to spread quickly and for cultural change to happen as a result.²⁷⁶ Research into Generation Z in Britain, in particular, indicates that it has changing 'social norms', and it is suggested that this is happening quickly because of this generation's connectedness to technology.²⁷⁷ This includes continuing progressive ideas about sexuality, such as the increase in the number of this generation who think of themselves as non-binary, and this changing cultural world forms part of the wider contemporary cultural context.²⁷⁸

3.3.3 Singleness and Marriage in Contemporary Britain and the Contemporary British Church

Turning now to the demographical context, in terms of legal marital status in the UK, in 2019 around half of the population were either married or in a civil partnership.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, about '60% of the population lived in a couple', including too those cohabiting.²⁸⁰ This is compared to 35% of the population being legally single, in the sense of never married.²⁸¹

What is important to note though is that 90.5% of the population aged 16-29 have never been married.²⁸² And furthermore, 71.6% of were not living in a couple (i.e., either cohabiting or married).²⁸³ So a significant number of people in this age bracket were either single (unmarried) and not in a relationship, or single and in a relationship that had not got as far as moving in together. The results from one 2017 survey suggests that 42% of people were single (not in a relationship) aged 18-29, and that 18% were 'in a relationship [but], living apart'.²⁸⁴ So within this age bracket, there are a large number of single people, but more people are in some form of relationship (whether living apart,

²⁷⁶ Jenkins, Ford and Green, pp. 16-19; Hodgson, pp. 229-230.

²⁷⁷ IPSOS MORI, 'Gen Z: Beyond Binary: Progressive/Traditional', *IPSOS MORI Thinks*, 2018 <<https://thinks.ipsos-mori.com/progressive-traditional/>> [accessed 13 January 2022]; Olmstead and Anders, *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood: A Primer on Theory*, p. 14 observe that the access of emerging adults to media, including social media, giving them 'increased information about sexuality' when compared to previous generations; See notes of 1.1 for definition of Generation Z.

²⁷⁸ IPSOS MORI, *Gen Z: Beyond Binary: Progressive/Traditional*.

²⁷⁹ 50.4%; Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*, 17 July 2020 <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesby maritalstatusandlivingarrangements/2019>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

²⁸⁰ Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*.

²⁸¹ Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*.

²⁸² Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*.

²⁸³ Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*.

²⁸⁴ Statista, 'What Is Your Current Relationship Status?', 2017 <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/714172/uk-current-relationship-status-residential-population-by-age-group/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

living together or married) than not. This demographical description portrays what relationship status look like for adults under thirty, and thus, some of what the horizon looks like for this age group.

Moreover, when singleness and marriage in the contemporary British church is considered, according to one piece of research carried out by YouGov in 2015, 60% of people who attend church regularly are married, when less than 50% of wider society are married.²⁸⁵ Pullinger has suggested that there is ‘over-representation’ of married people in the church, when compared to the number of single people, and when compared to the number of married people in the wider population.²⁸⁶ As a consequence, a marriage-heavy church demographic, alongside a marriage-heavy church culture, can make single people in congregations feel very undervalued.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, it potentially encourages single people to want to be married without offering a perceived way of getting there, or acknowledging their independent value no matter what their marital status.

In addition, the church demographic research highlights that there are a significant greater number of single women compared to single men who are members of British churches.²⁸⁸ In particular, as middle class women are the largest group of attendees of churches in Britain, this means that there are a significant number of unmarried middle class women in British churches.²⁸⁹ Inevitably, as will be discussed, this imbalance in terms of gender affects the contemporary horizon, as in many churches there are not enough men for every woman (should they wish to) to marry one who shares their Christian faith.²⁹⁰

3.4 Scripts in the Contemporary Horizon

3.4.1 Social Scripting Theory and the Contemporary Horizon

Key to painting a picture of the contemporary horizon is to describe the scripts that influence people’s thinking. Social Scripting Theory (SST) is a standard tool used within

²⁸⁵ YouGov and Single Christians, *The Numbers of Single Adults Practising Christian Worship*, 2015, pp. 1–25 (p. 16)
<[https://www.singlefriendlychurch.com/downloads/yougovsccvmlowresrpt25jan2015-\(2\).pdf](https://www.singlefriendlychurch.com/downloads/yougovsccvmlowresrpt25jan2015-(2).pdf)> [accessed 31 August 2021]; the report is discussed in Vicky Walker, *Relatable: Exploring God, Love & Connection in the Age of Choice* ([n.p]: Malcolm Down, 2019), ch. 1. Kindle ebook. Walker notes that when considered by denomination there is variation between 1/4 and 1/3 single people.

²⁸⁶ Single Christians, ‘The Numbers in the Church’, 2015
<<https://www.singlefriendlychurch.com/research/yougov>> [accessed 12 January 2022].

²⁸⁷ Kate Wharton, *Single-Minded: Being Single, Whole and Living Life to Full* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2013), p. 29.

²⁸⁸ YouGov and Single Christians, p. 13; Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 1.

²⁸⁹ Middle class women are classified as ABC1 women in YouGov and Single Christians, p. 13.

²⁹⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 8.

the social sciences to be able to interpret people's behaviour in relation to the wider society and culture, and so will be used here for that purpose.²⁹¹ It is regularly used as a means of pragmatically painting the contemporary horizon, including by scholars engaged in theology.²⁹²

SST sees people as actors on the stage of life, who follow 'internalized' scripts of behaviour.²⁹³ According to this theory, people construct meaning through 'behaviour, responses and emotions'.²⁹⁴ And the sexual values that people live by are attached to those scripts, and these values are things that are learnt and taught.²⁹⁵ According to SST, people learn 'relationship practises and preferences' through 'interactions with others, from what we see and hear in various media, and what we learn in societal contexts'.²⁹⁶ Cultural Scripts are immensely powerful in forming ideas as to how people might behave in terms in terms of dating and sexuality, as from them individual form ideas as to what is 'mainstream, "normal" and valued'.²⁹⁷ Of course, people, as free agents, do not have to follow scripts. They can have the autonomy to choose alternatives. But in doing so they are choosing an alternative script, and they sometimes feel the need to justify this.²⁹⁸

Furthermore, scripts can be immensely powerful. Swami has observed how cultural scripts about first-dates are so powerful that many heterosexual egalitarian daters still do things like let the man pay the bill etc., even though this does not fit with their usual value set.²⁹⁹ Similarly, the power of sexual scripts (those that describe commonplace sexual behaviour) are demonstrated by teenagers in the phenomena of peer pressure.³⁰⁰

However, for those young adults who are to one extent or another religious, there is the potential that religion will have an impact as providing an alternative script. As will be discussed, the most common Christian script that young people might be exposed to is

²⁹¹ Olmstead and Anders, *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood: A Primer on Theory*, p. 15 note that this approach is part of the sociological methodology of 'Symbolic Interactionism'.

²⁹² E.g., Grant, pp. 192-194; Stanton L. Jones and Heather R. Hostler, *Sexual Script Theory: An integrative exploration of the possibilities and limits of sexual self-definition*, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 120-130.

²⁹³ Michael W. Wiederman, 'The Gendered Nature of Sexual Scripts', *The Family Journal*, 13.4 (2005), 496–502 (p. 496) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480705278729>>.

²⁹⁴ Wiederman, p. 496.

²⁹⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 236; Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 61 includes a diagram (Figure 3.1) providing a 'Conceptual Model of Religious Influence', presenting a model of how sexual values are learnt.

²⁹⁶ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 266; William Simon and John H. Gagnon, 'Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15 (1986), 99–120; Wiederman, p. 496.

²⁹⁷ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 266.

²⁹⁸ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 267.

²⁹⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 267.

³⁰⁰ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 42.

abstinence, with different amounts of emphasis. For the majority religious adolescents in one study, the rule of no sex before marriage was ‘the total sum of Christian teaching on sex’.³⁰¹ And as will be discussed, this is a script associated with significant problems. It is a script that evidence suggests is often ignored by adolescents and EAs. The point is that religious communities sometimes provide limited scripts of ways of behaving as a Christian. But importantly, ‘religious involvement alone does not equal religious influence of sexual attitudes and behaviour’.³⁰² So the influence that these scripts have on the dating life of religious young adults (and adults in general) is variable.³⁰³ But for the Christian EA both the cultural and sexual scripts of wider culture, and the cultural and sexual scripts of the Church/Christian teaching have the potential to interplay their life.

Moreover, the discussion that follows in this chapter will begin by centring around scripts related to marriage (including scripts that contribute to people’s thinking about if or when they might consider better to be married, whether sex is limited to marriage etc.). This will then be followed by scripts related to forms of relationships prior to marriage (serial monogamy etc.). And finally, this will be followed by scripts related to premarital sex beyond relationships (such as casual sex, hookup culture etc.). Sometimes there will be some crossover between these three categories of script. But this structure is being used to provide some ordering to the scripts that paint a picture of the contemporary horizon.

3.4.2 The ‘Capstone’ Marriage Script

One of the most dominant scripts in Western cultures is the marriage script, the idea that heterosexual couples will marry. This is a script that people have that an expectation will be a permanent form of relationship.³⁰⁴ Other forms of relationship script (e.g., cohabitation) exist in the wider contemporary horizon and will be discussed later. But marriage is still a dominant script.

However, it is certainly true that statistically marriage is in decline in the West, including Britain.³⁰⁵ This decline in number of people being married is due to both less people

³⁰¹ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 214.

³⁰² Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 41.

³⁰³ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, pp. 184-185 provides a model of six different ways that religion may influence the decision sexual behaviour and beliefs of young people.

³⁰⁴ Mark Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p.78.

³⁰⁵ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, pp. 11-14 discussed the statistics of the general decline in the West; Brown and Lynch, p. 333 discuss the UK phenomenon; Office for National Statistics, *Marriages in England and Wales: 2018*, 10 August 2021, <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/bulletins/marriagesinenglandandwalesprovisional/2018>> [accessed 5 September 2021]. confirms this phenomenon.

getting married, as well others who are exiting marriage by the means of divorce.³⁰⁶ It is also the case that on average, the age of first marriage is rising throughout the Western world.³⁰⁷ In 2018, in England and Wales, the average age of marriage for men in opposite sex couples was 38.1 years and the mean average age of women was 35.8 years.³⁰⁸ This compares with the mean average age of 27.2 years for men and 24.7 years for women in 1970.³⁰⁹ In the contemporary horizon, marriage takes place at an increasingly older age.

Naturally, as traditional Christian teaching emphasises the value of marriage, it is a powerful script as part of the contemporary cultural horizon for Christians, being that around two-thirds of regular British churchgoers are married.³¹⁰ However, according to some research it is also, aspirationally, the wish of many EAs of all or no faith in America. Regnerus and Uecker found that 93-96% of their interviewees wanted to get married someday.³¹¹ It is an institution that, for all its flaws, is held in 'high esteem' by these EAs.³¹²

So why is it the case that most EAs do not want to marry young anymore?³¹³ One key observation amongst sociologists is that the script has changed from marriage being a 'foundation stone' to a 'capstone' within the contemporary horizon of most Westerners.³¹⁴ It is no longer seen as a 'formative institution', but is instead seen as 'the institution they enter when they are fully formed'.³¹⁵ When marriage was seen as a 'foundation stone' love was conventionally hugely important, but the relationship was also seen to be a practical basis on which to 'build upon' life together as a unit.³¹⁶ However, marriage as a 'capstone' means that it is something that one 'builds towards'.³¹⁷ It is symbolic as being an achievement that one has 'made it'.³¹⁸ It is perceived as something that can be changed when worn down.³¹⁹ It is something that is perceived as an 'accessory', and so not necessary.³²⁰ Marriage is now largely seen in the West as being something that has

³⁰⁶ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 13.

³⁰⁷ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 12; Regnerus and Uecker, p. 169.

³⁰⁸ Office for National Statistics, *Marriages in England and Wales, 2018*.

³⁰⁹ Office for National Statistics, *Marriages in England and Wales, 2018*.

³¹⁰ YouGov and Single Christians, p. 16.

³¹¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 169.

³¹² Regnerus and Uecker, p. 170.

³¹³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 169.

³¹⁴ This description is proposed by Andrew Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage in America Today* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2010). It is discussed in Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

³¹⁵ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 38; Bredow, Cate, and Huston, p. 8.

³¹⁶ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

³¹⁷ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

³¹⁸ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 38.

³¹⁹ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

³²⁰ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

the key purpose of providing ‘psychological satisfaction’.³²¹ The dominant script about marriage has changed. And while it almost does not need saying, in the wider contemporary cultural horizon, marriage and sex have been uncoupled.³²²

3.4.3 Christians Potentially Trapped Between Two Scripts

While the ‘capstone’ script of marriage is the dominant Western script, research still indicates that a minority of EAs in America and Britain get married young (potentially following the foundation script), and religion is often the key influencing factor.³²³ Several studies in America indicate a similar pattern, that evangelical protestants and Mormons will be the most likely to marry young, while those who are Catholics and Jews are comparative with those of no religious affiliation, with mainline protestant being in the middle.³²⁴ Similarly, the religious EAs surveyed were also the most likely to *want* to be married young.³²⁵ The stress on the institution of marriage can have a strong influence on encouraging believers to marry younger.

However, Regnerus also suggests that the ‘capstone’ marriage script is also becoming more influential within the contemporary Christian horizon throughout the Western world.³²⁶ As the dominant script, the ‘capstone’ script has a great deal of influence. The economic challenges for many adults in their twenties – such as not being able to afford to live independently of parents, the aspiration to get established in the workplace, alongside the perceived financial cost of a wedding for those who are in relationships – potentially reinforce the ‘capstone’ script.³²⁷ And the ‘capstone’ script where it is held amongst Christians is also potentially reinforced by the narrative in the culture at large that young marriages end in divorce.³²⁸

All of this being said, the ‘foundation’ marriage script still seems to hold sway for some Christians within particular subcultures, as will be discussed more below.³²⁹ For some

³²¹ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 37.

³²² Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 103.

³²³ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 175-176.

³²⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 176.

³²⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 176.

³²⁶ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 38.

³²⁷ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, pp. 39, 121.

³²⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 179-180 describe the perception amongst many EAs that getting married young is a ‘moral mistake’, because of the risk of divorce. Interestingly, this concern applies to both men and women, and men in their upper twenties held to this belief. However, there is a lower chance of divorce for some groups of people in America, including religious people. This is shown in US Department of Health & Human Services; Centers for Disease Control (CDC); National Center for Health Statistics, ‘Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States’ (American Psychological Association, 2002) <<https://doi.org/10.1037/e372462004-001>>.

³²⁹ 3.4.5.

there is a sense that 'doing it right' will imply getting married young.³³⁰ And for those who do not achieve this goal, there can be a sense of having missed their opportunity, even for some who are only a little older.³³¹ The two scripts have influence within the Christian cultural horizon, and this plausibly makes things more complicated.

3.4.4 The Expectation About Getting Married Script

Marriage is presented [within much Christian Culture] as an important goal for Christians - often the sole purpose for women, and a natural step for a man upon reaching maturity.³³²

Having observed that getting married young is a script for some Christians, and that people who do not do this sometimes already feel that they have missed their opportunity, it is important to note that for many, *wanting* to get married is only half of the story. For some there is an 'assumption' or even expectation that they will get married.³³³ And the marriage-heavy Church demographic and culture, creates and reinforces this expectation.³³⁴ In the Real Life Love Survey (RLLS), one Christian woman describes her experience that

I was given the impression that I would get married at some point in my future, and it would be the most important thing about my life.³³⁵

Naturally, with such a strong emphasis on marriage, there can be a real struggle for those who do not get married by the time that they expected.³³⁶ Some people end up questioning 'where God is', and why they were left unchosen.³³⁷

3.4.5 The Sexual Abstinence Script within Purity Culture

The next 'marriage' script that will be discussed is that of sexual abstinence prior to marriage. Although this script is really about behaviour prior to marriage, its marriage emphasis is so strong, that it is being discussed here.

As mentioned above, the traditional teaching of churches is that marriage is the only form of relationship in which sexual activity should take place. Thus, it is not surprising then that the largest group of virgins who are EAs according to Regnerus and Uecker are those who are religious.³³⁸ The belief of preserving virginity is a powerful script among some

³³⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³³¹ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³³² Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 3.

³³³ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 11, describes one woman's experience of 'growing up with an assumption they will get married'.

³³⁴ 3.3.3.

³³⁵ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 3.

³³⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10.

³³⁷ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 11.

³³⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 20.

religious EAs. Arnett sees the religiosity of people in their twenties as regularly being the main reason for virginity.³³⁹

The strength of this script in the West is in its most extreme form demonstrated by American Evangelical Purity Culture, in which some EAs make a vow of abstinence from sexual activity.³⁴⁰ This is being discussed here at some length because of its significant influence within this brand of Christian culture. Like all norms, this practice of avowed virginity within its subculture is a plausibility structure.³⁴¹ It depends upon the belief that premarital virginity is a way of avoiding sin. This belief sees marriage acting as a 'purifying container', purifying the 'messiness of human sexuality'.³⁴² As previously mentioned, one of its main representatives was the popular author, Joshua Harris, who has since renounced his teaching about relationships, and subsequently lost his faith.³⁴³ Harris taught about 'biblical courtship' as a replacement to dating.³⁴⁴ Its purpose was to emphasise the 'purifying container' of marriage as being the only place for sexual intercourse, but Harris' model went much further. Instead, it went as far as saying that Christians who are engaged or near engagement should not even kiss.³⁴⁵

Furthermore, American Purity Culture developed within a strongly evangelical complementarian theology, where men are to be the active ones, while women passive.³⁴⁶ The culture promotes a 'fairy-tale' ideal of courtship, where a young woman would be swept off her feet by Prince Charming.³⁴⁷ Freitas describes the classical narrative for an evangelical EA woman:

God has a husband picked out for her. One day, God will reveal to this man what wife he is to marry, at which point the man will start a chaste courtship. In the meantime, she is to

³³⁹ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004). This is discussed in Regnerus and Uecker, p. 20.

³⁴⁰ Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses*, Updated (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 84.

³⁴¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 20.

³⁴² Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 79 discusses the work of anthropologist of religion, Mary Douglas about sacredness and profanity; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas Collected Works, 2 (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 36-37.

³⁴³ Harriet Sherwood, 'Author of Christian Relationship Guide Says He Has Lost His Faith', *The Guardian*, 29 July 2019, section World news
<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/29/author-christian-relationship-guide-joshua-harris-says-marriage-over>> [accessed 12 January 2022].

³⁴⁴ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 4.

³⁴⁵ Joshua Harris, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1997), p. 96.

³⁴⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 4; For a description of complementarian Purity Culture, see Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 79.

³⁴⁷ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 79-80 notes that even Disney imagery is used in some of the popular books that promote Purity Culture, mentioning Lisa Bevere, *Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004) as one example.

wait patiently, submissive to God's will. Her only real job is to guard herself from missteps that could derail this romantic ideal - like dating the wrong guy.³⁴⁸

It is a narrative that has a particular sway in American evangelical Colleges, being a prime place for evangelical EAs to find a spouse.³⁴⁹ Moreover, associated with Purity Culture is the perceived necessity of staying pure, not just because the perception of dishonouring God by sinful behaviour, but also for other possible reasons.³⁵⁰ Firstly, potentially to avoid the perceived negative feelings associated with sexual activity before marriage within that particular evangelical culture.³⁵¹ Secondly, because of the perceived need of an EAs to preserve their 'standing amongst ... peers', as well as preserving their attractiveness to a future potential spouse.³⁵² Thirdly, the perception of the consequences that it would have for future married life if purity had not been preserved, and at its most extreme perceptions that 'marriage will only work if you have been abstinent'.³⁵³

Nevertheless, however strong the script of virginity before marriage is within Purity Culture, participants often fail to meet its mark. Casual sex, even though it breaks the rules, takes place on evangelical college campuses, where Purity Culture is a norm.³⁵⁴ Research has shown too that 'in many cases abstinence pledges do little more than postpone the sexual intercourse for a few months, or turn those who try to keep them in the direction of other sexual activity'.³⁵⁵ The fact is that it does not stop EAs engaging in sexual activity. Bearman and Bruckner have demonstrated that while purity abstinence pledgers may wait longer for sex, their STD rates are comparable with other EAs, since their use of condoms was also lower.³⁵⁶ It is common too for abstinence pledgers to even deny they had made a pledge a year later, with the most denials coming from people who had since participated in sexual activity.³⁵⁷

³⁴⁸ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 81-82.

³⁴⁹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 75-77.

³⁵⁰ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 80.

³⁵¹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 75 lists the way that some evangelical students talk about their experiences

³⁵² Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 80.

³⁵³ This quotations is from a participant in RLLS as discussed in Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 4; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 79-80 talks about a student (Emily) who feels that she would have disappointed her husband if she was not a virgin, and that she would have been disappointed if he was not; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 84 discusses the Purity Culture idea that dating causes a 'damaged heart', so that 'when you finally meet your future spouse you have little (or nothing) left to give'.

³⁵⁴ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 76.

³⁵⁵ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 77.

³⁵⁶ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 298, n.1; Peter S. Bearman and Hannah Brückner, 'Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse', *American Journal of Sociology*, 106.4 (2001), 859-912 (p. 862) <<https://doi.org/10.1086/320295>>.

³⁵⁷ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 298, n.1; Janet E. Rosenbaum, 'Reborn a Virgin: Adolescents' Retracting of Virginity Pledges and Sexual Histories', *American Journal of Public Health*, 96.6 (2006), 1098-1103 <<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.063305>>.

It is true that for a small number of evangelical EAs, particularly those who got married young, Purity Culture is seen to be a positive thing, as for some of them the perceived fairy-tale has come true.³⁵⁸ However, they are the exception, not the rule.³⁵⁹ Many are not able to find romantic love through this culture, and are devastated by this.³⁶⁰ And many are damaged by this culture because 'most youth are more sexual than the quest for purity allows them to feel and acknowledge, much less act out'.³⁶¹ Moreover, numerous women in the US have verbalised their experience of the damage caused by Purity Culture.³⁶² In particular, Emily Joy and Hannah Paasch (founders of #ChurchToo movement) have put much of the blame on Purity Culture as creating the Cultural conditions for sexual violence to happen.³⁶³

All of this emphasis on American Purity Culture might seem far removed from the situation in the UK, but developing researching is showing the affect that Purity Culture has on the Cultural Horizon for Christians here. It is believed that Purity Culture has had a significant influence in contemporary British Christianity, beyond evangelicalism. PhD Candidate Hannah Baylor has observed how she

Discovered friends who had signed purity pledges and wore purity rings and people who had done the True Love Waits and Pure Course. So many people had devoured I Kissed Dating Goodbye: a Coptic friend said her church really pushed that book on its young people. Purity Culture in the UK is not just for evangelicals.³⁶⁴

The extent of its effect, including its ongoing legacy, is currently being researched by Leeds University.³⁶⁵ Of those adults who took part in the UK based RLLS, 22% have said that 'Purity Culture ... damaged me and my faith'.³⁶⁶ One respondent observed how she

³⁵⁸ Freitas, pp. 75-77. Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2 quotes one respondent to the RLLS, who says that if she had not received this teaching about abstinence she thinks 'she would have been fully promiscuous and probably never committed to anyone'.

³⁵⁹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 75.

³⁶⁰ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 78.

³⁶¹ The quotation is from Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 80. Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 78 notes how her research has shown that most of the evangelical women she had interviewed had from their perception, 'already given away too much' by the strict battle ideas of the Purity Culture which they inhabited.

³⁶² Linda Kay Klein, *Pure: Inside the Evangelical Movement That Shamed a Generation of Young Women and How I Broke Free* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2018); Angie Hong, 'The Flaw at the Center of Purity Culture', *The Atlantic*, 2021
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/purity-culture-evangelical-church-harms-women/618438/>> [accessed 12 January 2022].

³⁶³ Emily Joy Allison, *#ChurchToo: How Purity Culture Upholds Abuse and How to Find Healing* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2021); See discussion in Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 4.

³⁶⁴ Hannah Baylor, 'Kissing Purity Culture Goodbye', *The Shiloh Project*, 2021
<<https://www.shilohproject.blog/kissing-purity-culture-goodbye/>> [accessed 12 January 2022].

³⁶⁵ University of Leeds, School of Philosophy, Religion, History and Science, 'Chrissie Thwaites'
<<https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/philosophy/pgr/3095/chrissie-thwaites>> [accessed 12 January 2022].

³⁶⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10.

was ‘completely unequipped [because of Christian Culture] to deal with a relationship in a physical sense’ when she started one.³⁶⁷ And many adults (male and female) who took part in the survey have described how their ‘relationships, theology and world views’ have developed very different from the stereotypes propagated by Purity Culture.³⁶⁸ The contemporary horizon needs to acknowledge the influence of Purity Culture on it.

3.4.6 The (No) Sex Before Marriage Script

Purity Culture is a particular brand of abstinence teaching. But it is one approach to emphasising the traditional Christian teaching that ‘marriage is the sole relationship within which sexual intercourse is legitimate or acceptable to God’.³⁶⁹ It is a teaching that is clearly recognised in the British RLLS, since about 50% of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘Christian culture emphasises abstinence over teaching about healthy relationships’.³⁷⁰ But abstinence is certainly not a cultural value at large within contemporary Western culture.³⁷¹ With available contraception, the risk of pregnancy is largely not seen as being a risk that is rational.³⁷²

The discussion about abstinence leads to two questions, that will be discussed in a general sense. Firstly, do unmarried Christians in the contemporary horizon actually believe in Christian teaching about sexual abstinence? And secondly, do they actually practice this?

Naturally, there will be a whole spectrum of views in answer to the first question. There are many who believe traditional Christian teaching about abstinence before marriage. Freitas observed how amongst Purity Culture in American Evangelical colleges, ‘many students’ said that ‘sex is “the worst of all sins”’.³⁷³ On the other hand, many Catholic students in her research ‘literally laughed out loud at ‘Catholic teachings on sex’.³⁷⁴ Similarly, it was rare amongst both mainline protestant and Catholic teenagers in

³⁶⁷ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁶⁸ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 4.

³⁶⁹ Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher, *People of Passion: What the Churches Teach about Sex* (London: Mowbray, 1997), p. 58.

³⁷⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁷¹ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 108 says the decision for abstinence in the West is for moral or religious reasons, or psychological ones; amongst EAs, Regnerus and Uecker, p. 19 have observed that the factors that are most likely to make an EA a virgin are that they are ‘the very religious, the risk averse, those with high expectations, and those with limited attractiveness’.

³⁷² Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 108.

³⁷³ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 180.

³⁷⁴ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 13; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 15 further observes from her research how students at Catholic colleges in American cannot be distinguished in terms of sexual behaviour and attitudes from those at non-religious colleges.

Regnerus' research for them to say that waiting until marriage was required before sex.³⁷⁵ In the British context of the RLLS of Christian adults, 36% of participants thought that 'sex before marriage was always wrong'.³⁷⁶ But only 2% of participants thought that 'Sexual activity is a primary indicator of a Christian's personal purity'.³⁷⁷ The differences here shows the variety of different views about the subject, dependent on age, context, and plausibility structures that reinforces beliefs.³⁷⁸ The views about the teaching are diverse, and seem to be stronger in contexts where these strong plausibility structures exist.³⁷⁹

Furthermore, in terms of whether this teaching is practised, there are a variety of different responses among Christians, dependent upon context. In America, the National Association of Evangelicals has been actively considering the morality of the use of contraception for unmarried Christians, because of the significant number of unplanned pregnancies associated with the large amount of premarital sex amongst young evangelicals.³⁸⁰ Regnerus' research observes that amongst American Evangelical teenagers there is very little different in terms of those not having sex compared with American teenagers at large.³⁸¹ Similarly, for EAs, religiosity was not a significant factor in terms of the number of lifetime sexual partners that some had.³⁸² At evangelical colleges, in Freitas' research, 35% of participants said that they were sexually active.³⁸³ Similarly, British Christians in the RLLS gave their examples of experience of premarital sex.³⁸⁴ Thus, the 'no sex before marriage' script, while being a teaching that has a significant cultural influence in some settings, it certainly is not wholly practised.

3.4.7 The How Far is Too Far Question

For some Christians who are in relationships, who aim to follow the no sex before marriage script, one of the important questions is 'how far is too far?' in terms of sexual behaviour.³⁸⁵ Freitas lists a variety of responses to what acceptable sexual behaviour

³⁷⁵ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, pp. 116-117.

³⁷⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁷⁷ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁷⁸ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 175 observes the importance of the shared culture of Evangelical colleges in contributing towards their beliefs.

³⁷⁹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 175.

³⁸⁰ Adelle M. Banks, 'Evangelicals Say It's Time for Frank Talk about Sex', *Religion News Service*, 19 April 2012, <<https://religionnews.com/2012/04/19/evangelicals-say-its-time-for-frank-talk-about-sex/>> [accessed 12 January 2022], as discussed in Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 211.

³⁸¹ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 153.

³⁸² Regnerus and Uecker, p. 26.

³⁸³ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 168.

³⁸⁴ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁸⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 32; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 206 includes a quote about one student who makes this observation about evangelical students.

amongst evangelical students meant, and had responses ranging from ‘waiting till the wedding ceremony for their first kiss’ to ‘engaging in “everything but” intercourse, including oral and anal sex’.³⁸⁶ Regnerus and Uecker observe how ‘technical virginity’ (referring to virginal sex) becomes a line for many evangelical religious EAs, that they believe that they should not cross before marriage.³⁸⁷ As mentioned above, some Christians do cross that line, and do not see it as being important. But for others, the question is how close to the line can they get in terms of sexual behaviour in premarital relationships.³⁸⁸ One evangelical student who has had the same boyfriend for two years, and whom she hopes she will one day marry, speaks of her experience of regular oral sex with him, noting her sense of ambiguity and confusion, that ‘for us it’s okay, but for them [other people] it’s stupid’.³⁸⁹ Similarly, another evangelical female student speaks of her experience of having almost daily oral sex with her evangelical boyfriend, because ‘as humans we like it’, even though they did not talk about it for months because of their perceived ambiguity that it was ‘wrong because of church and because of what the Bible said about sex’.³⁹⁰ Ultimately, even after talking about it, and finding accountability partners, they returned to this daily behaviour, not discussing it between themselves nor telling their accountability partners.³⁹¹ Similarly, another female evangelical student spoke about having oral sex with multiple boyfriends, with hoping to keep ‘technical virginity’.³⁹²

These two examples of preserving ‘technical virginity’, as well as the wider question as to ‘how far is too far?’ raises the issue as to how commitment, desire and sexual behaviour, and the scripts associated with them, interact in premarital Christian relationships. They also very much confirm the reality of the challenge for Christians sitting between the traditional scripts of Christian morality and the scripts of the wider culture. Regnerus and Uecker rightly observe how these female students

feel the powerful pull of competing moral claims upon them: the script about what boyfriends and girlfriends in love want or are supposed to do for and to each other, and the script about what unmarried Christian behaviour should look like. They want to satisfy both but find themselves rationalizing’.³⁹³

This attempting to rationalise Christian faith and preserve technical virginity is illustrated well in the satirical song ‘The Loophole’ by Garfunkel and Oates, in which a young

³⁸⁶ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 84.

³⁸⁷ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 31-32.

³⁸⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 228.

³⁸⁹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 35;

³⁹⁰ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 32.

³⁹¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 32.

³⁹² Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 84.

³⁹³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 35.

Christian woman encourages her boyfriend to have anal sex as a loophole solution.³⁹⁴ It shows the dilemma associated with the how far is too far question.

3.4.8 The Waiting for Marriage Script

The final marriage script to be discussed is the 'waiting for marriage' script, which is strongly associated with the 'expectation about getting married' script. It is a script of 'waiting for Mr (or Miss) Right to come along'.³⁹⁵ Yet again it has been classified as a 'marriage' script, because it is seen as being preparation for marriage, even if marriage never happens. It has particular influence within the complementarian emphasis of Purity Culture, but its influence is not limited to that particular brand of Christianity.

Its complementarian emphasis means that it focuses on men doing the initiating and women waiting for the men to do the initiating. Such a complementarian script is deeply disempowering for women. It is disempowering enough in situations where there may be potential partners available (such as college/university situations). However, it can be even more disempowering in situations where there are no options to meet potential spouses without actively seeking them. Numerous interviewees speak about hardness of the experience of waiting in the RLLS.³⁹⁶

For Christians the script is often associated with ideas like 'God will guide you to your future husband/wife' or 'God will provide the perfect partner if you just keep waiting'.³⁹⁷ It is the ultimate script of passivity, in which God will 'magically' provide a girlfriend/boyfriend, who will be 'the one'.³⁹⁸ But in the meantime the Christian (often a woman) has to 'be content'.³⁹⁹ One contributor describes her experience in the British RLLS:

As a child I went to a charismatic church where we were taught through meetings, youth groups and books, we had to wait for the right 'one' - this isn't biblical and it promotes anxiety, fear and oppression - funny that ... things Christianity are meant to set you free from.⁴⁰⁰

The contributor above makes an important observation about the need to wait as having the potential to create anxiety. Questions like 'What if God does not provide a husband/wife for me?' cause great concerns in this waiting script. Furthermore, it is a

³⁹⁴ Garfunkel and Oates, *The Loophole* (No One Buys Records, 2015), SECRECTIONS.

³⁹⁵ One popular Christian devotional is written with this in mind is Jackie Kendall and Debby Jones, *Lady in Waiting: Becoming God's Best While Waiting for Mr Right* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2012).

³⁹⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁹⁷ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. preface.

³⁹⁸ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

³⁹⁹ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

script that potentially becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' for those who are of a shyer personality. Swami recognises the particular challenges that 'shy' people face in terms of social interactions, and the implications that this has for relationships.⁴⁰¹ For some Christians, the shyness aspect of their personality will interact with this waiting for 'the one' script, and so they will never do anything to make that possible. It is a script that can be incredibly hard at the time and has the potential to create a great deal of disappointment.⁴⁰²

3.4.9 Ideas about 'Being in Love' and its Relationship to Sexual Desire in the Contemporary Horizon

Before moving to look at some of the key relationship scripts and sex scripts in contemporary culture, it is necessary to take an interlude to discuss sexual desire within the contemporary horizon. Sexual desire is here understood to be a

psychological state subjectively experienced by the individual as an awareness that he or she wishes to attain a (presumably pleasurable) sexual goal that is currently unattainable.⁴⁰³

Noting that love is considered to be *the* reason for marrying in the contemporary horizon, one important matter is what does it mean within this horizon to 'be in love'.⁴⁰⁴ Regan's research with a group of EA demonstrates that for that group 'the majority ... spontaneously think of sexual desire when asked to define the state of "being in love"'.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, these EA 'conclude that dating partners who do not desire each other sexually are not in love'.⁴⁰⁶

These beliefs have an important place within the contemporary horizon. The perception that sexual desire and being in love are either one of the same, or strongly related, is commonly held.⁴⁰⁷ This makes sense where romantic love is found in relationships that

⁴⁰¹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 264.

⁴⁰² Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 5 describes higher levels of self-declared hopelessness amongst RLLS interviewees who followed the waiting script.

⁴⁰³ Pamela C. Regan and Ellen Berscheid, *Lust: What We Know about Human Sexual Desire*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999), p. 15.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. 3.3.1.

⁴⁰⁵ Pamela C. Regan, 'The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships', *Social Behavior and Personality*, 28.1 (2000), 51–60 (p. 52) observes that sexual desire was considered more important than sexual activities of various kinds in relationships; Pamela C. Regan, Elizabeth R. Kocan, and Teresa Whitlock, 'Ain't Love Grand! A Prototype Analysis of the Concept of Romantic Love', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15.3 (1998), 411–20 discusses a survey of 120 people where they could freely state a characteristic of the state of 'being in love', and the second highest characteristic given was 'sexual desire' (65.8%).

⁴⁰⁶ Quotation from Regan, 'The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships', p. 51; Pamela C. Regan, 'Of Lust and Love: Beliefs about the Role of Sexual Desire in Romantic Relationships', *Personal Relationships*, 5.2 (1998), 139–57 (p. 139) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00164.x>>.

⁴⁰⁷ Arthur Aron and others, 'Falling in Love', in *Handbook of Relationship Initiation*, ed. by Susan

'typically have an explicit actual or potential sexual component, such as dating and marital relationships'.⁴⁰⁸ However, these commonly held beliefs about the role of sexual desire in romantic love are also significantly substantiated by social psychological research.⁴⁰⁹

They are not merely a perception within the contemporary horizon.

While psychologists debate about the nature of passionate love and sexual desire, there is a 'clear' acknowledgement of the link between them.⁴¹⁰ One study describes passionate love as 'a state of intense longing for union with the beloved'.⁴¹¹ Berscheid goes as far as to say that passionate love is "about 90% sexual desire not yet sated".⁴¹² One tool (The Passionate Love Scale) that is used by psychologists to observe passionate love includes studying aspects that are related to sexual desire.⁴¹³ They include statements such as "I sense my body responding when ____ touches me"; "In the presence of ____, I yearn to touch and be touched"; and "Sometimes my body trembles with excitement at the sight of ____".⁴¹⁴ The link between passionate love and sexual desire is thus well established. And sexual desire is thus linked with romantic love too, since 'the overwhelmingly powerful passion is considered a distinctive feature of romantic love'.⁴¹⁵

Nevertheless, some distinction between passionate love and sexual desire can be made by psychologists. Fisher has observed how 'romantic attraction' and 'the sex drive' are linked with different brain systems, with sexual desire not being focused on a particular person, while romantic attraction is more specifically focused on an individual.⁴¹⁶ Similarly, fMRI scans of people's brains experiencing romantic love demonstrates that there is only a minimal amount of overlap with the scans of those experiencing sexual arousal.⁴¹⁷ But

Sprecher, Amy Wenzel, and John Harvey (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2008), pp. 315–36 (p. 317) confirms studies of the common perception of the 'passion factor' of passionate love being 'sexual in nature, including sexual passion and sex appeal'; Beverley Fehr and James A. Russell, 'The Concept of Love Viewed from a Prototype Perspective.', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60.3 (1991), 425–38; Karandashev, p. 139.1 notes the relationship between 'romantic love' and 'passionate love' with 'strong erotic and sexual components'.

⁴⁰⁸ Aron and others, p. 317.

⁴⁰⁹ Ellen Berscheid, 'Some Comments on Love's Anatomy: Or, Whatever Happened to Old-Fashioned Lust?', in *The Psychology of Love*, ed. by J. Sternberg and M. L. Barnes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 359–71.

⁴¹⁰ Aron and others, p. 319 summarises the discussion; Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire in Dating Relationships*, p. 52 says that 'contemporary social psychological discourse on love suggests that the experience of passionate love is strongly linked with sexual desire'.

⁴¹¹ Karandashev, p. 217.

⁴¹² Berscheid, p. 373.

⁴¹³ Elaine Hatfield and Susan Sprecher, 'The Passionate Love Scale', in *Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures*, ed. by Clive M. Davis and others (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 466–68; discussed in Aron and others, p. 319.

⁴¹⁴ Aron and others, p. 319.

⁴¹⁵ Karandashev, p. 217.

⁴¹⁶ Aron and others, p. 319 note Fisher's research, as well as other scholars that have conducted supporting research.

⁴¹⁷ Aron and others, p. 319.

the link between sexuality and romantic love is something absolutely acknowledged, and so the sexual desire aspect of romantic love, as commonly perceived within the contemporary horizon, cannot be played down.⁴¹⁸ This is strongly demonstrated by Regan's research, which highlights a strong positive correlation between sexual desire and passionate love as an emotional experience amongst participants.⁴¹⁹ On an experiential subjective level, the two are clearly strongly linked.⁴²⁰

Furthermore, Regan's research highlights some important points about sexual desire and its role within dating relationships. Firstly, for both men and women participants 'the more sexual desire felt for the[ir] partner, the more satisfaction participants experienced' in them.⁴²¹ In the dating relationships studied, sexual desire had a positive role in creating that positive experience. Secondly, sexual desire was 'strongly related to the thoughts of not ending a relationship.'⁴²² So the more that a participant sexually desired their partner, the less times on average they thought about ending their relationship and starting a different relationship. This applied to both men and women.⁴²³ Desire, thus is seen as having a key role in 'relationship maintenance'.⁴²⁴ Thirdly, the reverse of both of the above was also found to be true for participants, that those who did not experience desire (and the related feeling of being 'in love') felt 'relatively uninvolved with their relationship and uncommitted to their partner'.⁴²⁵ Fourthly, the level of sexual desire a person had for their partner mattered more than the actual amount of sexual activity that they participated in with them.⁴²⁶ The key observation is that 'the fact that one has sex with one's partner may not mean as much in terms of relationship maintenance as the fact that that one *wants* to have sex with one's partner'.⁴²⁷ All of these things highlight the importance of sexual desire in dating relationships. According to Regan, 'desire ... serves as an important, perhaps the most important, sexual index of relationship quality'.⁴²⁸

⁴¹⁸ Aron and others, p. 319.

⁴¹⁹ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, pp. 52, 57.

⁴²⁰ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 55 has stated that 'strong support was found for the hypothesis that sexual desire is the aspect of human sexuality most associated with passionate love'.

⁴²¹ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 55.

⁴²² Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 56.

⁴²³ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 56.

⁴²⁴ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 53.

⁴²⁵ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 58. Related to this is the experience of the person who is not sexual desired and the effect of this upon them. Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 55 observes that men in the research were 'more frustrated' if their partner had low levels of sexual desire towards them.

⁴²⁶ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 58.

⁴²⁷ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 53.

⁴²⁸ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 58.

Not surprisingly, the literature about Christians' ideas about sexual desire and its role in premarital relationships is limited. Freitas observes that within American Evangelical colleges, students 'talking about their own sexual desires and sexual experiences is something very few of these students do [amongst their peers]⁴²⁹'. However, one respondent of the RLLS observes the particular problem of their experience of abstinence culture was what single (unmarried) people were to do with sexual desire, since this was simply 'swept under the carpet, as if single people don't experience desire'.⁴³⁰ Longman similarly acknowledges this particular problem within Christian teaching (or lack of) is the way that much of the church handles sexual desire, it is as if nobody experiences it before marriage.⁴³¹ But in reality, sexual desire is something that 'begins in the womb'.⁴³² And even if it is not consciously observed (or admitted) by Christians, psychologists indicate it plays an important role in relationship maintenance.

3.4.10 Attraction in Relationships, and its Relationship to Other Characteristics

The discussion so far has focused on issues surrounding the long-term relationship of marriage, and ideas (both within and beyond Christian culture) as to the role of sexual behaviour and sexual desire. Besides this long-term model of sexual relationship, in the wider contemporary horizon there are, of course, many forms of short-term sexual relationship, some of which will be discussed below.⁴³³ What is important to note is that psychologists have observed the differences between what people look for in a mate in short-term and long-relationships.⁴³⁴

However, very importantly, in both instances, perception of the physical attractiveness of the other person is considered of being of particular importance.⁴³⁵ Regan and Berscheid observe how the connection between appearance and 'sexual attractiveness' is well

⁴²⁹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, pp. 109, 123.

⁴³⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

⁴³¹ Allender and Longman, p. 3.

⁴³² Allender and Longman, p. 3.

⁴³³ David Schmitt, 'An Evolutionary Perspective on Mate Choice and Relationship Initiation', in *Handbook of Relationship Initiation*, ed. by Susan Sprecher, Amy Wenzel, and John Harvey (Boca Raton, FL: Psychology Press, 2008), pp. 55–74 (p. 56) points out that Evolutionary Psychologists suggest that humans are 'probably designed and adapted for more than one type of mating', i.e., short-term, and long-term.

⁴³⁴ Bredow, Cate and Houston, p. 16; Buss, p. 13.

⁴³⁵ Bredow, Cate and Houston, p. 16; Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 76-114; Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 91 observes from one study how women who wanted short-term sexual relationships prioritised the physical attractiveness of a potential partner over a man's ambition in terms of their perceived social status and/or wealth;

Pamela C. Regan and others, 'Partner Preferences: What Characteristics Do Men and Women Desire in Their Short-Term Sexual and Long-Term Romantic Partners?', *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 12.3 (2000), 1–21 (p. 5) <https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v12n03_01> notes that physical appearance is deemed as being of the highest importance for short-term relationships.

established.⁴³⁶ Significantly, Swami argues, physical attractiveness is not just of importance to men, but also to women.⁴³⁷ Summarising recent research, he says that ‘gender differences in the importance of physical attractiveness for romantic relationships have been greatly exaggerated’.⁴³⁸ One study of 30,000 people demonstrated that attractiveness mattered for both men and women in both initial encounters and for how relationships developed.⁴³⁹ Physical attractiveness is deemed of being of general important to both sexes. And it is deemed as being important for both short-term and long-term sexual relationships. Of course, men are not all the same, and women are not all the same, and so care must be taken in making generalisations.⁴⁴⁰ But research seems to indicate that physical attractiveness ‘probably matters to most people’, even though the way that this plays out is complicated.⁴⁴¹

Moreover, physical attractiveness, of course, is not the only characteristic that is deemed important in a partner for those seeking long-term relationships.⁴⁴² Research studies indicate that ‘inner-qualities’ matter more in what people want from a potential partner in a romantic relationship.⁴⁴³ Between these studies, characteristics such as ‘trustworthiness’, ‘warmth’, ‘a sense of humour’, and ‘intelligence’ were of more importance than ‘physical attractiveness’ and ‘sexiness’.⁴⁴⁴ It follows that the virtues of good character, alongside other characteristics of personality are considered important in a potential partner makes sense for a long-term relationship, since these ‘prosocial’ characteristics mean that a potential partner is perceived to be able to provide ongoing support emotionally for them and any children that they may have.⁴⁴⁵ Similarly, the Bible and the Christian tradition recognises the importance of virtuous character, making it something potentially attractive within the contemporary Christian cultural horizon.⁴⁴⁶

⁴³⁶ Regan and Berscheid, p. 93.

⁴³⁷ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 77.

⁴³⁸ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 89.

⁴³⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁰ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁴¹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 95. Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 108 notes that research indicates that people with visual impairments put less of a priority on physical attractiveness.

⁴⁴² Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 119 observes how physical attractiveness, success in a career and the amount of potential wealth a person could make was less important amongst older people than younger people.

⁴⁴³ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 117-119 discusses several studies which support this. Buss, p. 44 notes that characteristics such as love, sincerity and kindness have been observed as being the characteristics that women want in men in many different cultures.

⁴⁴⁴ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 118.

⁴⁴⁵ Regan and others, *Partner Preferences*, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Stephen E. Fowl, ‘Virtue’, in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. by Kevin Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 837–39.

However, this is also not to say that physical attractiveness is only of limited importance within the contemporary Christian horizon. As sexual desire is known to have an important particular role in maintaining a relationship, then physical attraction towards a potential partner is still of great importance for that to happen.⁴⁴⁷ Regan has demonstrated how the more a dating partner desires their dating partner in a relationship, the less they consider a relationship with someone else.⁴⁴⁸ There is no particular reason to think that this is any less the case amongst Christians than amongst the wider contemporary cultural horizon.

Nevertheless, importantly this does not mean that physical attractiveness is a bound concept. Swami points out numerous studies that strongly support the idea that personality can change a potential partner's perspective about physical attractiveness.⁴⁴⁹ In one study, for example, participants were asked to rate the photographs of people on a computer screen in terms of how attractive they found them.⁴⁵⁰ After a distraction exercise, so that they would forget the ratings that they had given, the exercise was repeated, but this time including information about personality traits of the individuals in the photographs. Not only were those who had more desirable personality traits better rated, but hugely significantly, their physical attractiveness ratings were also higher. Other studies have also backed up how the perception of someone's character affects their attractiveness rating.⁴⁵¹ Similarly, several studies support the idea that liking someone (presumably based upon their characteristics) makes them seem more physically attractive.⁴⁵² The studies demonstrate that as people spend time together (a university class, a rowing team and an archaeological dig team) and they realise their liking (or not) for each other, that their physical attractiveness levels change accordingly. The results indicate that characteristics that would be in line with Christian virtues can make a person appear more physically attractive to others. Hence, physical attraction is important to the development of relationships, but physical attractiveness can change based upon perceptions of character.

⁴⁴⁷ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire in Dating Relationships*, p. 53.

⁴⁴⁸ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire in Dating Relationships*, p. 51.

⁴⁴⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 128.

⁴⁵⁰ Gary W. Lewandowski, Arthur Aron, and Julie Gee, 'Personality Goes a Long Way: The Malleability of Opposite-Sex Physical Attractiveness', *Personal Relationships*, 14.4 (2007), 571–85 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00172.x>> in Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 129.

⁴⁵¹ Viren Swami, 'Physical Attractiveness and Personality', in *Encyclopaedia of Body Image and Human Appearance* (London: Elsevier, 2012), pp. 622–28.

⁴⁵² Swami, *Attraction Explained*, pp. 130-133 discusses these studies.

3.4.11 Premarital Serial Monogamy as a Script

The 'capstone' marriage script, with marriage being the icing on the cake in the wider contemporary cultural horizon also works alongside a cultural pattern of serial monogamy, that is multiple sexual relationships, happening one at a time. Regnerus describes serial monogamy as 'the primary sexual script among EAs today'.⁴⁵³ In practice, this tends to mean having multiple sexual relationships at a young adult age, followed by 'settling down'.⁴⁵⁴ 'Settling down' in the wider contemporary horizon, as will be discussed below, often involves cohabitation.⁴⁵⁵ Arnett summarises the philosophy behind serial monogamy script in this way:

Finding a love partner in your teens and continuing in relationship with that person through your early twenties, culminating in marriage, is now viewed as unhealthy, a mistake, a path likely to lead to disaster. Those who do not experiment with different partners are warned that they will eventually wonder what they are missing, to the detriment of their marriage.⁴⁵⁶

The script of serial monogamy amongst EAs is one which emphasises the wisdom of experience, that is that it would be unwise not to have more than one relationship.⁴⁵⁷ Obviously, if the focus is not on 'settling down' the script can be dissociated with the search for a potential marriage partner, and become one of changing partner simply because one wants a change.⁴⁵⁸ It is also a script that can encourage people in relationships to think that there could be 'someone better out there'.⁴⁵⁹ It is a powerful script that is embedded in the contemporary cultural horizon. It is also a script that importantly acknowledges the human experience of 'falling in love many times'.⁴⁶⁰ And it is a script that also acknowledges that the role of sexual desire that, was at one time for many a motivation for marriage (at a young age), is now for the majority a reason for premarital relationships, whether or not marriage is the ultimate intended outcome.⁴⁶¹

Moreover, what is also important to note is that premarital serial monogamous relationships amongst EAs, and not casual sex, is the place where most premarital sex happens amongst EAs.⁴⁶² For 2/3 of all EA women in Regnerus and Uecker's research,

⁴⁵³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 24, 171; Bredow, Cate, and Huston, p. 8.

⁴⁵⁵ 3.4.13; Bredow, Cate and Huston, p. 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Quotation from Arnett, p. 73; this is discussed in Regnerus and Uecker, p. 171.

⁴⁵⁷ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 171.

⁴⁵⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 171.

⁴⁵⁹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 171.

⁴⁶⁰ Bredow, Cate, and Huston, p. 8.

⁴⁶¹ Bredow, Cate and Huston, p. 8.

⁴⁶² Regnerus and Uecker, p. 70.

'sex and dating' are inseparable.⁴⁶³ And 96% of women aged 18-23 year are 'sexually involved' with the person that they in a relationship with.⁴⁶⁴

However, the length of these serial monogamous relationships amongst this age category is on average of a short length, most lasting a maximum duration of six months.⁴⁶⁵ Some of these relationships come to an end because of 'natural relationship conclusions', such as moving for work or college etc.⁴⁶⁶ Others end because 'mutual self-giving' does not develop between the partners.⁴⁶⁷ For many EAs there is an 'inevitability of the end', that it will come.⁴⁶⁸ This philosophy is perhaps summed up well as 'every relationship fails until one doesn't'⁴⁶⁹.

Interestingly and very importantly, serial monogamy is also a script that is well established within the contemporary Christian cultural horizon. It was mentioned above that religiosity was not found to be an influencing factor for the number of partners that EAs had.⁴⁷⁰ And research also indicates that EA evangelical women had more serial partners than mainstream Protestants in America.⁴⁷¹ Whatever level of sexual activity takes place in these relationships, premarital serial monogamy is very much part of the Christian cultural horizon. Even if it would be considered inappropriate within some Christian subcultures, that a person might not marry the first person that they have a romantic relationship with, the phenomenon happens. One EA evangelical women (Jessica) within a Purity Culture context, who had not previously had a relationship, admits that she does not think that she will 'only date one person', because 'it's not likely they'll have an arrow over their head saying "they're the one"'.⁴⁷² However platonic premarital Christian relationships might (or might not) be, the idea of having multiple ones is part of the cultural horizon.

3.4.12 The Role of Sexual Activity in Premarital Relationships

This subsection will discuss the role of sexual *activity* more generally in contemporary premarital relationships.⁴⁷³ Sexual activity is a broad term and could include, but is not

⁴⁶³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 15.

⁴⁶⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 15.

⁴⁶⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 70.

⁴⁶⁶ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 71.

⁴⁶⁷ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 70.

⁴⁶⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 73.

⁴⁶⁹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 73.

⁴⁷⁰ 3.4.6; Regnerus and Uecker, p. 26.

⁴⁷¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 26.

⁴⁷² Freitas, *Sex and The Soul*, p. 82.

⁴⁷³ Susan Sprecher and Kathleen McKinney, *Sexuality*, Sage Series on Close Relationships (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1993), p. 100 have produced a diagram (figure 5.1) suggesting the different roles of sexual activity within a relationship. The list includes: 'an act of self-disclosure', 'an act of intimacy', 'an act of affection or love', 'an act of interdependence', 'an act

limited to activities such as ‘kissing, caressing, heavy petting, making out, oral sex, mutual masturbation and sexual intercourse’.⁴⁷⁴ 3.4.9 discussed the recognition of the importance of sexual *desire* within the contemporary cultural context. Interestingly and importantly, Regan has suggested that sexual desire (the want to have sexual intercourse with one’s partner) may be more significant than actual sexual behaviour in terms of ‘relationship quality or maintenance’.⁴⁷⁵ This may be an important consideration for more conservatively-minded Christians making sense of sexual desire, since a lack of activity does not mean that there is no desire for it.⁴⁷⁶ However, Regan has also observed how sexual activity does contribute to levels of ‘self-reported satisfaction’ with a partner within a romantic relationship.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, men, in her study were less angry with their partner in the cases where there was more sexual activity, as well as having a lower number of thoughts about ceasing the relationship.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, sexual activity certainly can have an important role.

Sprecher and McKinney too observe how sexual behaviour is one form of behaviour amongst others that has a role in ‘relationship stability and maintenance’ within premarital relationships.⁴⁷⁹ In other words, sexual behaviour, alongside nonsexual behaviour is perceived to have a part to play in premarital relationships in the contemporary horizon. Furthermore, there has also been a recognition that sexual activity corresponds to perceptions of relationship developmental stage, and related ideas about levels of commitment.⁴⁸⁰ This idea is broadly portrayed in the popular cultural idea of waiting for the third date for sex.⁴⁸¹ At the time of their interesting study, Christopher and Cate examined dating relationships and observed love was associated more with sexual activity

of maintenance’, and an ‘act of exchange’.

⁴⁷⁴ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 54.

⁴⁷⁵ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 53.

⁴⁷⁶ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 56.

⁴⁷⁷ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 56.

⁴⁷⁸ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 56.

⁴⁷⁹ Sprecher and McKinney, p. 105 include a diagram (figure 5.2) which provides a model for understanding the role of sexual behaviour within dating relationships in terms of ‘relationship stability and maintenance’.

⁴⁸⁰ Sprecher and McKinney, p. 110, Owens, p. 269 both discuss relationship developmental stages. Spencer B. Olmstead and Kristin M. Anders, ‘Sexual Activity in the Contexts of Romantic Relationships’, in *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 99–116 (p. 103) observes recent research amongst younger EAs, in which ‘emotional connectedness with a partner’ was seen as being something that they wanted to aspire to achieve before ‘engaging in sexual behaviour’; see also Kristin M. Anders and Spencer B. Olmstead, ‘A Qualitative Examination of the Sexual Possible Selves and Strategies of First-Semester College Students: How Sexual Possible Selves Are Developed During the Transition to College’, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48.6 (2019), 1859–76 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1332-2>>.

⁴⁸¹ Ellen Scott, ‘The Three-Date Rule Is Dead as Most People Are Up for Having Sex Sooner’, *Metro*, 30 May 2020 <<https://metro.co.uk/2020/05/30/three-date-rule-dead-people-are-sex-first-date-12779277/>> [accessed 8 September 2021].

in the later stages of dating relationship development, especially at the point when the participants were thinking about ‘becoming a couple’.⁴⁸² Not surprisingly, scholars have observed differing attitudes between men and women about the level of wanted sexual activity at different stages of dating relationships, the men often wanting higher levels of sexual intimacy earlier on.⁴⁸³ Research suggests that women have wanted higher levels of ‘emotional intimacy’ to determine the appropriate levels of sexual activity.⁴⁸⁴ There may be associated with this the wish not to be perceived to be ‘easy’ to get or ‘loose’.⁴⁸⁵

As will be discussed below, ideas among some EAs have developed to the extent that trying to start a relationship with sexual intercourse is now a practice.⁴⁸⁶ But however soon sexual behaviour plays a part in premarital relationships, and whatever that sexual behaviour looks like, sexual behaviour is perceived to have a part to play. The fact that ‘how far is too far?’ is a question within Christian culture reflects that sexual activity (whether this is simply kissing or more than that) has a recognised place within premarital relationships.

3.4.13 Cohabitation Scripts

The next relationship script moves into the category of long-term relationships, being the practice of cohabitation. In the wider contemporary horizon, cohabitation is regarded as normal, and a person may cohabit with one more than person prior to marriage.⁴⁸⁷ It is the case that within Western societies, including Britain, ‘cohabitation has overtaken marriage as the first partnership type, with parenthood increasingly occurring outside of and marriage’, and this is reflected in official British statistics.⁴⁸⁸ It seems to be the case that ‘moving in together’ is now culturally seen as ‘a rite of passage for couples’.⁴⁸⁹ It is an

⁴⁸² F. Scott Christopher and Rodney M. Cate, ‘Premarital Sexual Involvement: A Developmental Investigation of Relational Correlates’, *Adolescence*, 23 (1988), 793–803 (p. 794) lists four stages of relationship that were considered in this study: ‘(1) first date, (2) when they were casually dating, (3) when they were considering becoming a couple, and (4) ... when they were a monogamously dating couple’; See discussion in Sprecher and McKinney, p. 110.

⁴⁸³ Christopher and Cate, p. 800; Olmstead and Anders, p. 103 states that in a recent study a higher proportion of emerging adult women, than men, stressed the importance that ‘sex and commitment go hand-in-hand’ in romantic relationships, with ‘commitment often occurring first’.

⁴⁸⁴ Christopher and Cate, p. 800; similarly, Olmstead and Anders, *Sexual Activity in the Contexts of Romantic Relationships*, p. 103 note in recent research that more women than men stressed that sex and commitment go ‘hand in hand’.

⁴⁸⁵ Christopher and Cate, p. 800. Anders and Olmstead, p. 1868 is a recent study which confirms the concerns of some women on a college campus, who did not want to get a ‘negative sexual reputation’.

⁴⁸⁶ 3.4.16.

⁴⁸⁷ Bredow, Cate, and Huston, p. 8.

⁴⁸⁸ Ann Berrington, ‘Expectations for Family Transitions in Young Adulthood among the UK Second Generation’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46.5 (2020), 913–35 (p. 913) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1539276>>; Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Quotation from report by Barna Group, *Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation*, 24 June 2016 <<https://www.barna.com/research/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation/>>

established part of the wider cultural horizon to which Christians are exposed.

Importantly, in British society in general, there is a significant transition between those aged 16-29 (in 2019) and those aged 30-34, as the younger group has 68.7% cohabiting (and 30.8% married) of those that are either cohabiting or married, compared with 35.3% cohabiting (and 63.2% married) of the older age group.⁴⁹⁰ Presumably, this significant shift is due to the large number of people who cohabit who later decide to get married. Thus, cohabitation, for many of the general population provides a perceived route to marriage, should that be what they decide to do. For many who wish to get married, it is potentially seen as a 'testing ground' for marriage.⁴⁹¹ For some, the perceived cost of holding a wedding provides the pragmatic reason for cohabitation.⁴⁹²

Moreover, there has been much debate about whether cohabitation prior to marriage leads to a higher likelihood of divorce.⁴⁹³ The theory is that 'relationship quality' often decreases through a marriage, and so cohabiting beforehand leads to this happening earlier, which has the potential to jeopardise the marital relationship.⁴⁹⁴ However, cohabitation is not the end of the road for Christian relationships, and interestingly women in America who are religious and cohabit are more likely to marry afterwards than women who are not religious.⁴⁹⁵

Interestingly, for such a strong script in contemporary society, people cohabiting only makes up a small percentage of those recorded in British churches.⁴⁹⁶ However, it is the case that some Christians do cohabit, even if this something that they 'slide', instead of 'decide' to do.⁴⁹⁷ One survey in America has discovered that 29% of 'all weekly church attenders say they have cohabited at some point'.⁴⁹⁸ Regnerus also observes from his research that Catholics in Western countries are more likely to cohabit than evangelicals, which he explains by the stronger rejection of divorce in Catholicism, whereas it is more

[accessed 13 January 2022], describing this phenomenon in America; discussed in Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 1.

⁴⁹⁰ Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements, England and Wales: 2019*.

⁴⁹¹ Grant, p. 45.

⁴⁹² Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 121.

⁴⁹³ Grant, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁹⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 181.

⁴⁹⁵ US Department of Health & Human Services; *Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce*, p. 29.

⁴⁹⁶ YouGov and Single Christians, p. 11 indicates that 20.7% of Practising Christians cohabit. However, the percentage of those who attend more than once a year in the UK are too small to be statistically reliable. This research took place in 2015.

⁴⁹⁷ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 144.

⁴⁹⁸ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, p. 144.

acceptable amongst evangelicals.⁴⁹⁹ It is a script that has influence within the contemporary horizon.

3.4.14 The Hookup Script

The next script to be discussed that forms part of the wider cultural horizon introduces another form of sexual relationship, and that is the short-term sexual relationship. Hookups are commonly associated with college culture, though recent research is beginning to examine hookup culture beyond college settings.⁵⁰⁰ In college situations it is often a common practice.⁵⁰¹

While definitions of hookup are debated, here it is understood to be ‘a paired activity that could lead to sex but is not itself sex’ and often takes place in the context of participants being tipsy or drunk.⁵⁰² It is the phenomena of a person kissing (making out) with someone that they do not know well, with the possibility of further sexual activity.⁵⁰³

Another usual understanding about hookups of scholars is that it is a sexual activity that takes place between people not in a romantic relationship.⁵⁰⁴ It can take place once with the same person or on different occasions.⁵⁰⁵ But the emphasis is on it being a sexual activity, that is not part of a romantic relationship. Scholars debate as to whether hookups play a positive role in terms of women’s liberation or whether they effectively create ‘obligatory, unwanted or coercive sex’.⁵⁰⁶ Research indicates that women mention more enjoyment of sex and experience of orgasm within the context of relationships (i.e. not hookups).⁵⁰⁷ At the time of their research, Regnerus and Uecker observed that ‘the vast majority of young adults never have sex the first time that they meet someone’ and that it

⁴⁹⁹ Regnerus, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, pp. 142-143.

⁵⁰⁰ Olmstead, p. 781.

⁵⁰¹ Olmstead, p. 781.

⁵⁰² The definition given is from Regnerus and Uecker, p. 102; Olmstead, p. 780 lists the contemporary debates about defining hookups; Melissa A. Lewis and others, ‘What Is Hooking Up? Examining Definitions of Hooking Up in Relation to Behavior and Normative Perceptions’, *Journal of Sex Research*, 50.8 (2013), 757–66 (p. 764) emphasises the statistical significance given to the use of alcohol by emerging adults’ own definition of a hookup; for a detailed narrative description of hooking up, see Lisa Wade, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus* (New York, N.Y: Norton, 2017), ch. 1.

⁵⁰³ This definition is given by Regnerus and Uecker, p. 103. Lewis and others, p. 764 observe in their study how perceptions about what sexual activities form part of a hookup are varied in the eyes of EAs in the study.

⁵⁰⁴ Olmstead, p. 780.

⁵⁰⁵ Olmstead, p. 780.

⁵⁰⁶ Olmstead, p. 782; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 13 argues that hookups are a negative sexual script; see Donna Freitas, *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture Is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013); see also Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), p. 45.

⁵⁰⁷ Olmstead, p. 782, Srinivasan, p. 156 n. 44.

was only through drinking that many, particularly women, would take part in casual sex in this way.⁵⁰⁸

Within Freitas' research amongst American evangelical students, 23% said that they felt 'OK' or 'fine' about hooking up, including those who mentioned the "thrill" of transgression'.⁵⁰⁹ What is particularly important to note here is that the hookup has been seen as having 'all but replaced dating as the normal means by which romantic and sexual relationships get started'.⁵¹⁰ While this is not the case, since dating is not extinct, the hookup is a sex script that has a significant influence on the wider contemporary cultural horizon.⁵¹¹

3.4.15 Friends with Benefits

Another sex script in the wider contemporary cultural horizon has been called the Friends-with-benefits Relationship (FWBR).⁵¹² According to one research paper, 50-60% of college and university students from one university in America have had at least one FWBR.⁵¹³ This is a script which is also focused on sex, in which EAs participate in friendship relationships alongside sexual intimacy, but 'without the responsibility and time constraints present in more traditional romantic relationships'.⁵¹⁴ Also, they are unlikely to be exclusive relationships.⁵¹⁵ What makes it friends with benefits is that it does not situate

⁵⁰⁸ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 91.

⁵⁰⁹ Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 120; Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, p. 121 also has produced a pie chart of the experiences of evangelical students the morning after a hookup.

⁵¹⁰ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 103.

⁵¹¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 104.

⁵¹² Owens, p. 270.

⁵¹³ Melissa A. Bisson and Timothy R. Levine, 'Negotiating a Friends with Benefits Relationship', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 38.1 (2009), 66–73 (p. 66) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-007-9211-2>>.

⁵¹⁴ Owens, p. 270; Angela D. Weaver, Kelly L. MacKeigan, and Hugh A. MacDonald, 'Experiences and Perceptions of Young Adults in Friends with Benefits Relationships: A Qualitative Study', *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 20.1 (2011), 41–53 (p. 41) provides a similar definition, including emphasising the friendship aspect.

In one study, Paul A. Mongeau and others, 'Identifying and Explicating Variation among Friends with Benefits Relationships', *Journal of Sex Research*, 50.1 (2013), 37–47 (p. 38) makes some important observations about the complexity of FWBRs. They note that while most FWBRs involve friendships in which participants 'know each other well and care for each other before', some FWBRs are amongst 'friends' who do not know each other so well. They also suggest that there are actually seven types of FWBRs (pp. 39–40): 'true FWBRs, just sex, network opportunism, three types of transition in (successful, failed, and unintentional), and transition out'. True (p. 39) FWBRs are 'close friends who have sex on multiple occasions. 'Just sex' (p. 39) are partnerships in which 'partners interact almost exclusively to arrange and carry out sexual interaction'. 'Network opportunism' (p. 39) is when 'these partners engage in sexual activity if neither has found a different sexual partner for the night'. 'Transitioning in ... precede romantic relationship development' (p. 40) and this transition can happen because of 'intentional attempts at romantic relationship initiation', which might or might not be successful, as well as unintentional transitioning. 'Transitioning out' (p. 40) was when participants in an ended romantic relationship continue to engage in sexual activities together.

⁵¹⁵ Weaver, MacKeigan and MacDonald, p. 49.

sexual activity within the context of romantic relationships.⁵¹⁶ What makes it different from hookups is the potentially repeated nature of 'the benefits', as well as it being in the context of 'friendship'.⁵¹⁷

Moreover, there have been some interesting findings from research looking at this phenomenon. Firstly, an attachment theory study of EAs who participate in FWBRs has shown higher levels of 'attachment anxiety'.⁵¹⁸ Secondly, there has been some research which suggests that from the point of view of participants, FWBRs can have benefits to those who participate in them, being, for some, the best of both situations, without the 'negative aspects' of relationships ('e.g. drama, commitment, complications, worry, hurt, strings, and messiness').⁵¹⁹ Thirdly, FWBRs can, for some, have negative aspects too, including wanting commitment, but not being able to achieve it, the ending of friendships and the imbalance between feelings of the participants towards each other.⁵²⁰ Fourthly, there is a sexual 'double-standard' perception about this kind of script, in which women are 'viewed more negatively than men for their participation in FWBRs'.⁵²¹

Olmstead has noted that both of the sex scripts described above are apparently engaged with by young adults often in between romantic relationships.⁵²² Thus, the existence of these scripts does not mean that relationship scripts have been replaced by sex scripts.

3.4.16 Starting a relationship with Sex Script

The final sex script to be mentioned is one that attempts to cross the boundaries between sex scripts and relationship scripts. This is a common script, with one survey in America revealing that over a third of Millennials who took part had experienced 'sex before a first date'.⁵²³ One suggestion is that the aim is of gaining some sort of security in a relationship.⁵²⁴ However, it does not seem to achieve that aim. While many give this script a try, one piece of research revealed that only 8% of EA participants who were in a relationship had their relationship start in that way.⁵²⁵ Compared to the third who have tried this script, there is a significant difference between those who try it, and the number of relationships that develop from it. It is as if the two types of scripts, 'sex scripts' and 'relationship scripts' cannot easily be combined.

⁵¹⁶ Owens, p. 270.

⁵¹⁷ Weaver, MacKeigan, and MacDonald, p. 45.

⁵¹⁸ Olmstead, p. 770.

⁵¹⁹ Weaver, MacKeigan, and MacDonald, p. 46.

⁵²⁰ Weaver, MacKeigan, and MacDonald, p. 48.

⁵²¹ Weaver, MacKeigan, and MacDonald, p. 50.

⁵²² Olmstead, p. 785.

⁵²³ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10.

⁵²⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 61-62.

⁵²⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 61.

There is perhaps an important thing to observe here about commitment, sex scripts and relationship scripts. While it is the case that some participants want more than is offered by the level of commitment involved with sex scripts, the 'rules' of sex scripts are that commitment in a romantic sense is not what they are about.⁵²⁶ 3.4.12 discussed how sexual activity is perceived to have a place within the stages of relationship development. Thus, by trying to start a relationship with sex, a person is potentially not honouring the stages of relationship development and the associated growing sense of intimacy. Their behaviour will be read in terms of a sex script instead. It may be that a person who seeks to start a relationship with sex would be perceived as not being marriageable material, since their behaviour demonstrates their lack of understanding of the correlation between sexual activity and commitment.⁵²⁷

3.5 Questions Raised by the Contemporary Cultural Horizon

The chapter so far has painted a picture of the complexity of premarital dating relationships in the contemporary cultural horizon by providing a detailed discussion of some of the dominant marriage, relationship and sex scripts that hold sway.⁵²⁸ It has highlighted too the potential added complexity for Christians.

The final part of this chapter will draw together this discussion, briefly observing some of the key questions that are raised by the contemporary cultural horizon for a Theology of Dating. This, and this chapter's preceding discussion, will then contribute to Chapter 14's discussion of some parameters for an EA Theology of Dating.

3.5.1 How does God guide?

I thought I'd get married earlier. I thought it'd be simpler, I thought God would be more directive.⁵²⁹

The quote above verbalises one woman's experience about God's guidance in terms of relationships. One of the most significant questions for Christians in terms of premarital relationships is how does God guide. Christians in their diversity (whether they realise it or not) will use the Sources of Theology (Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience) in ways according to their the theological experience, emphasising some sources over

⁵²⁶ Weaver, Kelly and MacDonald, p. 49.

⁵²⁷ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 61.

⁵²⁸ There are other scripts in existence, such as 'Consensual Non-Monogamy' (polyamory), as discussed in Olmstead, pp. 783-786; another dating phenomenon are 'Ambiguous Friendships': Andrew Terjesen, 'I've Never Been on a Date (Yet Somehow I Got Married)', in *Dating - Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas* (Malde, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 139-150.

⁵²⁹ Walker, ch. 2 quotes the experience of a participant of the RLLS.

others in their theological thought.⁵³⁰ Reason has a part, and is demonstrated in practice by the evangelical student mentioned above who recognised they will realistic date more than one person to enable them to decide who they wish to marry.⁵³¹ Scripture and Tradition has a part too, though often the extent of the guidance about relationship ethics from these sources amounts to traditional Christian teaching about 'no sex before marriage', which as discussed above, is a teaching that many adolescent and EA Christians either ignore or wish to get as close to 'the line', whatever 'the line' is, as possible.⁵³² Others are so scared of sex and sexuality, because of church teaching about it, that they are potentially crippled in this area, and so the idea of initiating or participating in relationships is itself potentially terrifying.⁵³³

But Experience also has a key part to play, since it is through experiencing of relationships that decisions about them can be made.⁵³⁴ Furthermore, Christians are part of, and so not able to escape, the wider contemporary cultural horizon. The ways Christians respond to culture are diverse.⁵³⁵ But one way or another they are influenced by culture as part of their Experience. The various scripts described in the previous subsection potentially have some degree of influence. And the matter of how God guides, and how people might expect God to guide, in the area of premarital relationships, is not separable from their experience of their context.

The following subsections in this chapter will continue to discuss this critical question of how God guides, along with other important questions.

3.5.2 How Certain Does Someone Need to be Before Going on a Date/Starting a Relationships/Getting Married etc.?

The first issue related to the topic of God's guidance is 'how certain does a person need to be before starting a relationship with another person'? King and Freitas highlight the problem of the extent of the focus on marriage in Christian culture, which, without a theology of dating, stresses the necessity of getting it right.⁵³⁶ One would expect somebody on the day that they were getting married (particularly within a capstone model

⁵³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 181.

⁵³¹ Freitas, *Sex and The Soul*, p. 82.

⁵³² 3.4.6-3.4.7.

⁵³³ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10 discusses this phenomenon, including sharing the account of one virgin Christian who had sexually 'shut themselves down' because of their experiences of sexual urges.

⁵³⁴ Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 9 observes the importance of Experience, especially in the area of sex, since 'our sexual experiences may be the most character-forming experiences we ever have'. This reasonably applies to the experience too of relationships of which sex is part.

⁵³⁵ Niebuhr, pp. 53-56.

⁵³⁶ King and Freitas, p. 27.

of marriage script) to have a high degree of certainty about the person to whom they are making a commitment. But this issue is potentially extrapolated to earlier stages of a relationship, to the point in some cases where some Christians might feel the need to be certain that they will marry somebody before going on a date or starting a relationship with them.⁵³⁷ The 'fear of relationships' that this creates at the earliest stages of a potential relationship could be deeply disabling.⁵³⁸ For some, it potentially makes relationship initiation extremely difficult, because of their lack of theology of dating. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining the experience of some Christian women that 'Christian men don't ask women out'.⁵³⁹ And when two people are going out, the question of certainty might remain as the relationship develops.

On the other hand, in wider contemporary culture for EAs, the sex scripts (e.g., hookups, FWBR) by their definition are not concerned about certainty and commitment, since they are intentionally sex scripts.⁵⁴⁰ Whether or not Christians participate in these sex scripts (a minority do as mentioned above), they convey a message that the age of the EA is one in which certainty, and its relationship with commitment are not important. Furthermore, the very common relationship script of serial monogamy amongst EAs emphasises that even when people are in a relationship, the relationship has the potential, further, is likely, to come to an end.⁵⁴¹ So the question of the role of certainty and relationship commitment is an important one.

3.5.3 How Does God Guide in the Context of Choice?

Another issue about God's guidance is how does God guide when there is lots of choice. The Internet has for many expanded the number of possible options with which people can have relationships, but associated with that is the potential to be 'cognitively overwhelmed'.⁵⁴² Furthermore, there are contexts, such as universities, where there may be lots of potential partners available. In places where there is choice there is entirely the possibility that people will be attracted to more than one person at the same time. So, within this context a key question for Christians would be how does God guide?

On the other hand, for some Christians there is seemingly very little, if any choice, at all. For those who are single in churches or communities where there is little prospect of

⁵³⁷ This is not explicitly said by King and Freitas, p. 27, but the level of certainty required might be implied.

⁵³⁸ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10 discusses the phenomenon of being 'frozen', that is having a 'fear of relationships or making mistakes'.

⁵³⁹ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 5.

⁵⁴⁰ 3.4.14-3.4.15.

⁵⁴¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 73.

⁵⁴² 3.3.2; Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 47.

meeting people, the issue of how does God guide can be a difficult question.⁵⁴³ For women (or men) who have accepted the 'waiting script', the incentive to go searching is not there.⁵⁴⁴ For some people who are searching, while they may be willing to try Internet dating, their real expectation is that they will meet someone through more traditional methods.⁵⁴⁵ For others, there is the question as to whether to date those outside the Christian community.⁵⁴⁶

For some, there is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness at ever finding somebody.⁵⁴⁷ Many in the RLLS acknowledged that while singleness could be a fulfilling Christian life, only 2% felt called to being single, while 39% said that they did not 'feel called to singleness', but they found themselves as single.⁵⁴⁸ The question within this context is equally how does God guide?

3.5.4 What role has Attraction, Desire and Sexual Activity in Premarital Relationships?

Another issue of dating is the question of what is the role of attraction and desire in premarital relationships? And how might this play out in terms of sexual activity? One of the issues discussed above highlighted that in many contexts sexual desire is effectively denied to exist within Christians prior to marriage.⁵⁴⁹ The problems associated with this are manifold. Firstly, there can be consequences for those who get married having spent so long denying sexual desires and having put up barricades against it. It can result in a great deal of work being required, as well as sometimes the need for therapy, to overcome these issues.⁵⁵⁰ Secondly, many adolescent and EA Christians realise their desires and seek to fulfil them, even if their experience is effectively denied in Christian teaching.⁵⁵¹ Thirdly, sexual desire and, to a lesser extent, sexual activity, are recognised

⁵⁴³ 3.3.3 mentions the particular problem of the imbalance of the sexes in churches, there often being more unmarried women than unmarried men.

⁵⁴⁴ 3.4.8.

⁵⁴⁵ Walker, location 1433 observes from the RLLS that a while little over 50% were willing to try Internet dating, 83.5% of those 'single and looking' thought that they would seek someone by their paths simply crossing, 82.7% thought they would meet someone in church, and 74% thought that friends would set them up.

⁵⁴⁶ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 8.

⁵⁴⁷ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 5 noted that 6% of participants of the RLLS described themselves as 'hopeless'. Furthermore, Walker, ch. 5 commented that 'The "hopeless" ranged early 20s to over 60 but were mostly female, in their late 20s to mid-30s, living in a city or big town (almost nine-in-ten), single, and looking but haven't had a significant relationship'.

⁵⁴⁸ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 2.

⁵⁴⁹ 3.4.9; Allender and Longman, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 96; Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10 quotes a response from the RLLS, in which the respondent spoke of their 'fear of sex', because of Christian teaching. Another spoke of how denial has led to the experience of 'constantly feeling horny'; see also Walker, ch. 2.

⁵⁵¹ See discussion in 3.4.6; King and Freitas, p. 27 notes the problem of not having a realistic perspective on sexuality.

as having an important role in relationship maintenance and development.⁵⁵² So any informed theology of dating needs to consider this question, which will be discussed in Section 3 after looking at what insights can be gained from examining the Song.

3.5.5 What is the Value Gained by Experiencing Premarital Relationships?

The last question to be raised by the discussion of the scripts is what value is there in terms of experience of premarital relationships that do not necessarily lead to marriage? Is there value in relationships otherwise? King and Freitas have already argued for the value gained by the experience of temporary friendships.⁵⁵³ Furthermore, Swami argues for the importance of real experience of relationships to enable people to determine their genuine preferences.⁵⁵⁴ While relationships can be difficult, the real value gained from the experience of them can potentially play a part in God's guidance, enabling Christians to make informed marital decisions (in a contemporary world in which choice is demanded).⁵⁵⁵ EAs may find they meet their spouse in the process.⁵⁵⁶ And perhaps there is an argument that experiencing dating can be fun and a worthwhile part of a fulfilling life in its own right. One female respondent in Regnerus and Uecker's research described romantic relationships as 'like training for learning how to have a relationship that could lead to marriage'.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵² See discussions in 3.4.9 and 3.4.12.

⁵⁵³ King and Freitas, p. 38.

⁵⁵⁴ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 125.

⁵⁵⁵ Freitas and King, p. 180.

⁵⁵⁶ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 73.

⁵⁵⁷ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 15.

Chapter 4: The Ancient Israelite Cultural Horizon

4.1 Introduction

The cultural worlds in which the HS were written and the contemporary world are vastly different. This is certainly the case in the way that love and sexual relationships are portrayed. Arranged marriage was the norm in the HS. And yet, as sexuality is an essential part of human experience, the HS also portrays sexuality as being more complicated than that, found both within and beyond arranged marriage. This chapter will briefly touch upon some ways that the HS (beyond the Song) is not monochromatic in terms of its perspective on sexuality. From this basis the latter part of this chapter will provide a Pentateuchal case study looking at the Jacob, Rachel and Leah narrative to demonstrate the importance of preference and choice in love and sexual relationships, as a key parameter for a Theology of Dating.

4.2 Marriage in the Ancient Israelite World

4.2.1 Why marriage? The Origins of Marriage in Prehistory

To discuss sexuality in the HS means some discussion of marriage, as the ‘norm in Biblical culture’.⁵⁵⁸ But why is this the case? Marriage is an ancient institution and it has its origins in the prehistoric mating of Homo sapiens. However, there are two main – and much debated – theories about the fundamental nature of sexuality amongst Homo sapiens as a species. The first is called the ‘standard narrative of human sexual evolution’, that humans form pair-bond relationships in order to reproduce, but also use other mating strategies (such as ‘extramarital’ sex) in order to increase the opportunity for reproduction.⁵⁵⁹ The second is that humans are inherently sexually promiscuous.⁵⁶⁰ This view is based upon the theory that hunter-gatherers were required to share their food resources, but that this sharing also extended to sexuality, which could involve ‘small, intimate bands in which most adults had several sexual relationships at any given time’.⁵⁶¹ Nevertheless, with the rise of agriculture (about 10,000 BCE) and the existence of personal property, it became necessary for individuals to guard their own property.⁵⁶² And with that ‘paternity became a crucial concern’.⁵⁶³ Paternity meant avoiding ‘devoting

⁵⁵⁸ Dowell, p. 125.

⁵⁵⁹ Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá, *Sex at Dawn: How We Mate, Why We Stray, and What It Means for Modern Relationships* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011), p. 7 discuss the two models; Helen E. Fisher, *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*, rev. edn (New York, NY: Norton, 2017), p. 47 is advocate of the first position.

⁵⁶⁰ Ryan and Jethá, p. 46.

⁵⁶¹ Ryan and Jethá, p. 12.

⁵⁶² Ryan and Jethá, p. 14.

⁵⁶³ Ryan and Jethá, p. 15.

scarce resources to raising children of another man'.⁵⁶⁴ However, the male ownership of property is also seen by Ryan and Jethá as being negative for females who 'went from occupying a central, respected role in foraging societies to becoming another possession for a man to earn and defend, along with his house, slaves and livestock'.⁵⁶⁵

Whichever narrative of human sexual evolution is ultimately correct, marriage developed as a cultural institution, and this applied within the Ancient Israelite context. Possession of the land was deemed incredibly important in the economic and theological history of Ancient Israel. Though, underlying this were also the processes of human sexuality. The Pentateuchal legislation around sexuality sought to control it, as well as issues around property more generally.⁵⁶⁶ The following discussion about marriage in the ANE world needs to bear in mind the sexual underpinnings.

4.2.2 The Official Purpose of Marriage in the Ancient Israelite world

Marriage in the HS was a social institution that performed several roles in lives of Ancient Israel. One of its purposes was as a method to prevent inalienability – the economic (and theologically sanctioned) practice of keeping the land in the possession of the Ancient Israelite tribes.⁵⁶⁷ This purpose was also associated with the economic ways that wealth was distributed amongst families and clans through marriage, through the existence of dowries and bride prices.⁵⁶⁸ Thus, marriage had a significant socio-economic purpose. Also, marriage served the purpose of creating 'personal and political alliances'.⁵⁶⁹ It is not an institution that emphasised the fulfilment of sexual desire or love. Instead, it is portrayed as being for the purposes of procreation and the continuation of lineage. This emphasis on procreation is reflected in numerous places in the HS. It is reflected in the creation ordinance given to humankind by God in Genesis 1:28, in which humankind is

⁵⁶⁴ David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 51.

⁵⁶⁵ Ryan and Jethá, p. 14.

⁵⁶⁶ Jennifer Wright Knust, *Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire* (London: HarperCollins ebooks, 2011), ch. Introduction. Kindle ebook; Carr, *The Erotic Word*, pp. 51-53.

⁵⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion about the purpose of marriage as preserving property in Ancient Israel, see Christopher Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990). Wright, p. 55 particularly discusses inalienability as being a key purpose of marriage. He notes how levirate marriage also (p. 57) serves this purpose.

Wright, p. 57 also notes the need of marriage for the purpose of keeping property within the kin group is also evident by the example of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12), who were required, because Zelophehad had no male heirs, to marry within the kin group to keep the land within the kin group and tribe.

⁵⁶⁸ Allen Guenther, 'A Typology of Israelite Marriage: Kinship, Socio-Economic, and Religious Factors', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 29.4 (2005), 387–407 (p. 388) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089205054754>>.

⁵⁶⁹ Guenther, p. 388; C.f. 1 Kings 3:1.

instructed to ‘be fruitful and multiply’⁵⁷⁰ It is potentially reflected too by the woman being given the name *ḥawwâ* (Eve) by the man, meaning ‘life’, which Sprinkle and Davidson suggest emphasises her procreativity.⁵⁷¹ And procreation is seen as an important aspect of the ‘patriarchal promise’ of countless descendants made by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁵⁷² Thus, procreation is portrayed as being a vital purpose of marital relations, necessary for the continuation of lineage. And from a pragmatic point of view, children were necessary to look after older parents.⁵⁷³

4.2.3 Marriage as Arranged Marriage

Within the patriarchal culture of the ANE, marriages were arranged marriages.⁵⁷⁴ They were one of the ways of ensuring inalienability.⁵⁷⁵ They were a ‘contractual arrangement’ organised by the father (or another male guardian) of the girl.⁵⁷⁶ Surrounding these arrangements were several exchanges of wealth that asserted that women were perceived as the property of men.⁵⁷⁷ And many of the rules regarding sexual behaviour in Exodus and Deuteronomy can be seen in light of these male property rights.⁵⁷⁸

In a couple of instances, there are examples of a male either being given or demanding some degree of choice as to whom they married, but in both of these instances their

⁵⁷⁰ Davidson, p. 49; John Witte, *The Western Case for Monogamy over Polygamy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 40; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), I, p. 33.

⁵⁷¹ Genesis 3:20; J. M. Sprinkle, ‘Sexuality, Sexual Ethics’, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. by T. Desmond Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 741–53 translates as ‘producer of life’; Davidson, p. 49; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 84 notes the potential ways that this name can be understood.

⁵⁷² Genesis 13:16; Genesis 26:4; Genesis 28:14; Sprinkle, p. 742.

⁵⁷³ William R. G. Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 51.

⁵⁷⁴ The patriarchal culture is affirmed by scholars including Michael Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says* (New York, NY: Hatchette, 2010), p. 25; Knust, ch. Introduction; Carr, *The Erotic Word*, pp. 51-53; Danna Nolan Fewell and D. M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 104.

⁵⁷⁵ Coogan, pp. 67, 70; for some examples of arranged marriage, see Ishmael (Genesis 21:21), Isaac (Genesis 24:1-9), and Er (Genesis 38:6), as listed in Jocelyn McWhirter, ‘Marriage’, in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. by John D. Barry and others (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵⁷⁶ Sprinkle, p. 743; Coogan, p. 69.

⁵⁷⁷ The two payments that would be made were the *mōhar* (bride-price) and the dowry. The *mōhar* (Genesis 34:12, Exodus 22:17, 1 Samuel 18:25) was paid by the bride-groom to the father of the bride, at which point a couple were betrothed and were bound by marriage law, and the bride became the bride-groom’s property (see Coogan, p. 69). According to Deuteronomy 23:22-27, any man who lies with a betrothed woman commits adultery. This is based upon the understanding of adultery in the HS as the violation of a betrothed/married man’s rights (Leviticus 20:10) - see Carr, *The Erotic Word*, p. 5.

The dowry would be given by the father of a bride as the ‘equivalent to the daughter’s share of the family estate, held in trust for her by her husband’. See David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 5; Davidson, p. 379.

⁵⁷⁸ Knust, ch. Introduction; Carr, *The Erotic Word*, pp. 51-53, Fewell and Gunn, p. 104.

parents are still portrayed as being part of the transaction.⁵⁷⁹ Jacob was told by Isaac that he was not to marry ‘one of the Canaanite women’, but was to marry ‘one of the daughters of Laban’ which gave him a very limited choice (within the arranged-marriage framework), but it is a form of choice nonetheless;⁵⁸⁰ Samson tells his parents to get the ‘Philistine woman’ that he saw at Timnah to be his wife because she ‘pleases’ him, even though his parents question his choice, because of the implications of marrying a foreign woman.⁵⁸¹

While these are unusual examples of where some degree of choice was granted for a man, a woman in the ANE world had no such choice, as a father had the power to veto any marriage of his daughter.⁵⁸² In one unusual instance, Rebekah was asked if she would go with Isaac’s servant to meet Isaac, to which she consented, which demonstrates some consultation of her wishes.⁵⁸³ But this consulting with a woman about her marital wishes was very much an exception in the HS. As marriage within this culture served a particular socio-economic purpose, choice of partner is not something that was dominant in Ancient Israelite culture. It fits the recognised anthropological phenomena that courtship practices do not exist in cultures that have arranged marriages, since they are not necessary.⁵⁸⁴

4.2.4 The Legal Formation of Arranged Marriage

Arranged marriage is portrayed as being regulated by laws in the HS. *Bērīt* (covenant) is the word mainly used for the relationship between God and Israel, but it is also used in the HS to describe the relationship of marriage, emphasising its importance.⁵⁸⁵ In terms of the process of marriage, how laws would be applied, there would be a betrothal, which would be followed by a wedding and consummation.⁵⁸⁶ There is very little evidence as to what

⁵⁷⁹ McWhirter, *Marriage*.

⁵⁸⁰ Genesis 28:1-5; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), II, p. 213.

⁵⁸¹ Judges 14:1-13; Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), VIII, p. 332; similarly, while there are debates about whether Shechem raped (Dianne Bergant, *Genesis: In the Beginning* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013, p. 150) or seduced (Calum Carmicheal, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010)), he subsequently demanded that his father Hamor set up an arranged marriage (Genesis 34:4) with her; Jocelyn McWhirter, *Marriage*.

⁵⁸² Sprinkle, p. 743; Exodus 22:16-17.

⁵⁸³ Genesis 24:58; Sprinkle, p. 743; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 389, Coogan, p. 67.

⁵⁸⁴ Monger, p. 87.

⁵⁸⁵ Malachi 2:14 and Ezekiel 16:8; Gordon J. McConville, ‘bērīt’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 747–55 (p. 748); Coogan, p. 69. Davidson, p. 378 observes that when *bērīt* is used in the Prophets to describe the relationship between God and Israel, the imagery is often that of marriage imagery; e.g. See Hosea 2:16-20[EN], Ezekiel 16:8.

⁵⁸⁶ Coogan, p. 69.

weddings would have looked like in the ANE world.⁵⁸⁷ However, there is evidence that a formation of a marriage in ancient Israel (and the wider ANE) involved the creation of a marriage contract, and it is likely that this contract was made in a wedding ceremony.⁵⁸⁸ Davidson insists that sexual intercourse or two people living together was not enough to constitute a marriage.⁵⁸⁹ Instead, a contract was required, evidenced by the Code of Hammurabi.⁵⁹⁰

However, in theory, a sexual relationship outside marriage (except for adultery or incest) was not possible in Ancient Israel, because of the obligations, according to Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29 for a man to be required to take a virgin as his wife if he sleeps with her.⁵⁹¹ In effect this meant that ‘there is no such thing as a casual, obligation-free sexual encounter, in principle at least’.⁵⁹² However, as will be discussed shortly, things are more complicated than this.

4.2.5 Polygamy as Part of the Ancient Israelite Cultural Horizon

Polygamy was a further legitimate way in the HS that men were able to have more than one sexual partner.⁵⁹³ Perhaps polygamy’s existence shows an outworking within a patriarchal culture of the alternative ‘narrative of sexual evolution’ – that is that human beings are inherently promiscuous.⁵⁹⁴ Polygamy – technically Polygyny (one man marrying more than one woman) – existed in ANE cultures as a whole from the earliest known law codes.⁵⁹⁵ Witte describes well the portrayal of polygamy in the HS, that

More than two dozen polygamists appear in the Hebrew Bible – almost all of them kings, judges, or members of aristocratic families. Many of these were good men who were faithful to God; two of the kings, in fact, were given their multiple wives directly by God’s prophets. None of these men was punished for practicing polygamy. And not a single commandment against it – or for – polygamy appeared in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁸⁷ Davidson, p. 380 makes this observation, as well as pointing out from the Middle Assyrian Laws what would have been involved in a man’s marriage to his concubine; see James Bennett Pritchard, *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), MAL A § 41.

⁵⁸⁸ Davidson, pp. 378, 380; Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Davidson, p. 380.

⁵⁹⁰ Pritchard, *ANET*, § 128. Davidson, p. 380.

⁵⁹¹ Witte, p. 47, Lawrence, p. 22, Davidson, p. 434.

⁵⁹² Lawrence, p. 23.

⁵⁹³ Knust, ch. Introduction.

⁵⁹⁴ Ryan and Jethá, p. 11.

⁵⁹⁵ Davidson, pp. 178-180 discusses the ‘law reforms of King Uru-inimgina of Lagesh’, ‘The Middle Assyrian Laws’ and ‘Ancient Egyptian texts’, all of which stress the commonality of polygamy in ANE culture; Davidson, p. 177 also notes that polyandry (one woman marrying multiple men) was allowable under the early law codes of the Sumerians, but they were ruled out by King Uru-inimgina.

⁵⁹⁶ Witte, p. 36; Lawrence, p. 18 makes the same observation regarding the legislating of polygamy in the Torah.

It is fair to say that polygamy was an established part of the horizon of elite Israelite culture.⁵⁹⁷ It may have only been the wealth required that stopped more men from polygamous marriage.⁵⁹⁸ This is not to say that those who participated in polygynous relationships in the HS did not experience difficulties.⁵⁹⁹ There are examples of rivalry between wives, problems between children over inheritance, as well as 'competition among the half-siblings that ultimately escalated to rape, incest, adultery, kidnapping, enslavement, banishment, murder, and even civil war'.⁶⁰⁰ But the approach of the Mosaic Law was to accommodate polygamy.⁶⁰¹

But bearing in mind that polygamy was a form of relationship that existed within the horizon of ancient Israel, what were its roles, beyond potentially meeting sexual needs? Firstly, there are examples of polygamy for the purpose of procreation, a prime example is that of Abram, Sarai and Hagar.⁶⁰² Abram had been promised descendants as many as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5), and grains of sand on the seashore.⁶⁰³ However, as Sarai had not borne Abram any children for ten years, she specifically instructed Abram to 'go into my slave girl'.⁶⁰⁴ Thus, Genesis 16:3 describes how 'Sarai, Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife'.⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, the relationship between Hagar and Sarai did not develop in a positive way.⁶⁰⁶ But the point is that this approach to multiple relationships was justified in the HS on the grounds of procreation. From this narrative, the Rabbis said that a man who is married to a woman who would or could not conceive must 'marry another to procreate through her'.⁶⁰⁷ The biblical command to procreate was regarded by them as being of primary importance.

Secondly, polygamy was potentially, within its socio-economic context, regarded at times as essential because of the security which it brought. The patriarchal socio-economic model meant that polygamy may have been seen as being better than the alternatives of a woman being unmarried or widowed, bearing in mind that this would otherwise

⁵⁹⁷ Witte, p. 36; Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 21.

⁵⁹⁸ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 22; Knust, *Unprotected Texts*, ch. 2.

⁵⁹⁹ Lawrence, p. 21; Witte, p. 36; Davidson, p. 180.

⁶⁰⁰ Witte, p. 36.

⁶⁰¹ Witte, p. 36.

⁶⁰² Witte, p. 41; Lawrence, p. 21; Davidson, p. 184.

⁶⁰³ Genesis 15:5, 22:17.

⁶⁰⁴ Genesis 16:2; Witte, p. 41; Davidson, p. 184 notes how this specific practice of a wife offering a slave girl was a contemporaneous ANE practice.

⁶⁰⁵ NRSV.

⁶⁰⁶ Genesis 16:4 says how Hagar 'looked with contempt on her mistress' when she saw that she had conceived; See Witte, p. 41.

⁶⁰⁷ Witte, p. 40.

economically tie them to the household of their father or brother.⁶⁰⁸ In particular, at times when there was a shortage of men to go around, because of war or famine, Isaiah portrays polygamy as a realistic option.⁶⁰⁹ Furthermore, polygamy was a practice allowable under levirate marriage law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) – the custom of a man marrying the (childless) widow of his deceased brother – a version of which Ruth appealed to, as a means of security.⁶¹⁰ The importance of procreation within Ancient Israelite culture was a reason for the practice of levirate law, as was providing some financial security for the woman.⁶¹¹

Thirdly, within its patriarchal culture where women were seen as male property, polygamy potentially brought men status in terms of showing off their power and wealth. The fact that numerous patriarchs, kings and judges had multiple wives is indicative of this.⁶¹²

In summary it follows that polygamy performed particular roles within Ancient Israel, noting that sexuality was also implicitly part of the reason for it. There were certainly problems associated with it, such as it being part of the general way that women were treated as property, as will be highlighted in more detail in the Pentateuchal case study below. But polygamy was not a practice that was outlawed or denounced in the Pentateuch, and as such it shows part of the complexity of the portrayal of sexuality in the HS.⁶¹³

4.3 Sexuality Within and Beyond Societal Purposes in Ancient Israel

4.2.1-4.2.5 discussed arranged marriage as the portrayed norm within Ancient Israel, performing economic, theological, procreative and social purposes. Underneath all of this, though, it is argued that sexuality has a role to play, and the rules in the HS are part of the patriarchal societal ways of seeking to control this. The discussion will now continue to consider sexuality within and beyond societal purposes in Ancient Israel, continuing to show its complexity.

⁶⁰⁸ Witte, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁰⁹ Isaiah 4:1; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, rev. edn (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson), xxiv, pp. 72; Witte, p. 45.

⁶¹⁰ Witte, pp. 45-46; scholars debate about the way that this rule is understood, particularly with reference to 'brothers living together' (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). See Davidson, p. 202; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 2002), 6B, p. 608. Lawrence, p. 26.

⁶¹¹ Davidson, p. 467.

⁶¹² Witte, p. 43.

⁶¹³ Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 32; Witte, p. 36.

Moreover, the emphasis on procreation in Israel is significant, because it meant that 'sexuality is consistently viewed as something good, intended by God'.⁶¹⁴ Fewell and Gunn observe that

it is not portrayed as something "dirty" ... Women, particularly virgins, widows and divorced women, may be obliged to be chaste because of the male system of lineage and inheritance, but no one is required or even encouraged to be celibate because sexual activity is evil of itself.⁶¹⁵

It can be argued that the HS also portrays sexual intercourse as something important beyond procreative purposes. One interesting example showing the importance of sexuality is the tragic story of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:37), who specifically wishes to mourn her *bēṭûlîm* (virginity) at the prospect of being a human sacrifice.⁶¹⁶ Schneider emphasises that this wish to mourn is specifically at the loss of the opportunity for sexual experience.⁶¹⁷ Davidson sees this passage as portraying 'a sense of looking forward to more beyond virginity, in the consummation of sexuality in marriage, and a sense of loss and sadness is portrayed in virginity when by tragedy a virgin is prevented from fulfilling or completing her sexuality'.⁶¹⁸

There are also examples of rules and wisdom from the HS that positively affirm sexuality, such as the law (Deuteronomy 24:5) that a newly wedded Israelite man be granted exemption from a year's military service, to enable him to 'make his wife happy'.⁶¹⁹ Similarly, Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 can be read in a sexual sense, urging a man to 'enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life'.⁶²⁰ Lawrence argues that such an emphasis on sexuality is affirmed in later and ongoing Jewish tradition.⁶²¹ He notes the work of Rabbi Feldman, who argues that 'sexual intercourse was even granted in certain circumstances the status of *mitzvah*, ... for example, when performed in response to a woman's yearning, as when she is nursing or prior to a journey separating her from her husband'.⁶²² Lawrence goes as far as suggesting that 'In Jewish History coitus has been

⁶¹⁴ Fewell and Gunn, p. 104.

⁶¹⁵ Fewell and Gunn, p. 104.

⁶¹⁶ Lawrence, p. 16.

⁶¹⁷ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, ed. by David W Cotter, Jerome T Walsh, and Chris Franke, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 181 stresses that this mourning is not about motherhood, since this 'goes against the pattern of women in the book so far'; This is discussed in Butler, p. 291;

See also Mercedes L. Garcia Bachmann, *Judges*, ed. by Ahida Calderon Pilarski, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), VII, p. 143.

⁶¹⁸ Davidson, p. 341.

⁶¹⁹ Carr, *The Erotic Word*, p. 53.

⁶²⁰ Carr, *The Erotic Word*, p. 53.

⁶²¹ Lawrence, pp. 16-17.

⁶²² David Feldman, *Marital Relations: Birth Control and Abortion in Jewish Law* (New York, NY:

consistently and unambiguously valued for the sheer joy and pleasure of it, even where procreation was obviously impossible'.⁶²³ In his view, 'virginity and celibacy are viewed as rebellion against the divine command, a rejection of creation itself'.⁶²⁴

4.3.1 Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3:1-18)

The discussion will now look at a specific example of unusual behaviour in the HS that does not follow the neat legal formation of arranged marriage described in 3.2.4, but shows complexity in terms of relationship formation and the role of sexuality within that.

The example of sexual behaviour that does not follow convention is that of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3:1-18).⁶²⁵ Following the suggestion of Naomi (Ruth 3:1-5), Ruth initiates a sexual encounter with Boaz, which would have been a highly unconventional thing for a woman to do within patriarchal ANE culture.⁶²⁶ Tribble describes Naomi's plan as an 'outrageous scheme, dangerous and delicate'.⁶²⁷ Naomi suggests a plan that involves Ruth washing and anointing herself, putting on her best clothes and going down to the threshing floor. She is then instructed, when the man has finished eating, to 'make yourself *known*' to the man, and to '*uncover his feet and lie down*', common euphemistic language used in the HS, strongly suggesting a sexual implication.⁶²⁸ Ruth is told (3:5) that Boaz will tell her what to do.⁶²⁹ And Ruth, wearing her best clothes is suggestive of dressing with the purpose of seduction.⁶³⁰ In the narrative, in which Ruth carries out her mother-in-law's suggestions (Ruth 3:6-7), both the portrayal of secrecy (3:7) and that it is a night-time scene (3:8), adds to the strong impression that what is being portrayed is sexual in

Schocken Books, 1974), p. 69 in Lawrence, pp. 16-17.

⁶²³ Lawrence, pp. 16-17.

⁶²⁴ Lawrence, p. 16. Davidson, pp. 448, 453 affirms the importance of procreation in the HS. Mathias Nygaard, 'Asceticism', in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. by John D. Barry and others (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012) observes that procreation was a 'religious duty' in Judaism.

⁶²⁵ Some scholars who observe this behaviour as being unusual include Fewell and Gunn, p. 104, who view the unusualness of a woman initiating; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 182.

⁶²⁶ John Goldingay, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 179; Carr, *The Erotic Word*, p. 50; Knust, *Unprotected Texts*, ch. 1; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 183 notes how this second meeting with Boaz was intentional, not by chance; André LaCocque, *Ruth*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 92; Alice Laffey and Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, ed. by Amy-Jill Levine, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), VIII, p. 110.

⁶²⁷ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 182.

⁶²⁸ Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, pp. 102, 106 suggests that *yd'* (to know) is used in a sexual sense here, as is *škb* (to lie) (examples may include Genesis 19:33 and 35 and in Leviticus 18:20, 22-23); also, *margēlōt* (feet), may be used in a sexual sense as in Exodus 4:25, Judges 3:24 and 1 Samuel 24:4. For discussion of this vocabulary, see Davidson, pp 9-11. See also Knust, ch. 1; Coogan, p. 10; LaCocque, *Ruth*, p. 91; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 182.

⁶²⁹ Knust, ch. 1; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 182 observe that Naoami is suggesting a seduction by this line.

⁶³⁰ Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 102; Goldingay, p. 179 suggests that it could be for seduction or it could be for marriage.

nature.⁶³¹ Furthermore, Boaz both instructs Ruth to remain with him, potentially because he wants to be with her during the night, and to leave early (3:14) in the morning, since that 'it must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor'.⁶³² The implication is that there is the potential for what has happened to be perceived as being scandalous.⁶³³ One might go as far as to say that her behaviour is the stuff of some male fantasies.⁶³⁴

Moreover, one important action happens in the dialogue which indicates Ruth's hope, that Boaz will take her as his wife. Instead of following Naomi's instructions to the letter, Ruth does not wait for the man to tell her what to do, but instead asks that he will spread his cloak over her, for the reason being that she is his next of kin (3:9).⁶³⁵ In Ezekiel 16:8, this spreading of the cloak implies both protection and covenant, and thus marriage is implied.⁶³⁶ But whether she was coming to 'proposition' him with the hope that he will accept her or to 'propose' to him by her actions is not clear in the text.⁶³⁷ Neither does it make clear if they had sexual intercourse by her staying at his feet all night.⁶³⁸ But what can be said is that Ruth's behaviour and Naomi's suggestion does not follow the expected conventions of HS law texts.⁶³⁹ The text does not portray Naomi having any issues with suggesting this course of action, and Ruth agreeing to it, implying by their understanding that under the horrific situation that they were enduring, that a woman being sexually assertive was appropriate, as was the implication that sexual intercourse was not 'limited' to marriage.⁶⁴⁰ While Ruth and Naomi were potentially prepared to pragmatically work with the levirate marriage law (within the wider patriarchal structure), they did so in a way that did not conform to the norms of the law texts of the HS.⁶⁴¹

⁶³¹ Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 111 makes these observations, and notes that this could not have happened this way during daylight hours.

⁶³² Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 121 suggests that this might be one Boaz might want her to remain over night; another might be safety.

⁶³³ Jenni Williams, *God Remembered Rachel: Women's Stories in the Old Testament and Why They Matter* (London: SPCK, 2014), p. 30 makes the observation that if people from the community found out, the assumption will be that they had sex, even if they did not; Knust, ch. 1; LaCocque, *Ruth*, p. 102.

⁶³⁴ Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 112 observes this and makes the point that had a man done this it would be seen as sexual harassment.

⁶³⁵ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 184 observes the importance of the difference between Naomi's plan and what Ruth actually does in the narrative.

⁶³⁶ Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 114; Knust, ch. 1; Goldingay, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth for Everyone*, p. 180; LaCocque, *Ruth*, p. 96; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 184. Davidson, p. 115 discusses the marriage imagery of the Ezekiel passage.

⁶³⁷ Knust, ch. 1 argues that here Boaz is being propositioned by Ruth; Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. 101 suggests that it could be a proposal or seduction; Goldingay, p. 180 more confidently asserts a proposal. Davidson, p. 277 sees it as a proposal.

⁶³⁸ LaCocque, *Ruth*, p. 96.

⁶³⁹ Fewell and Gunn, p. 104.

⁶⁴⁰ Knust, ch. 1.

⁶⁴¹ Two matters should be noted here. Firstly, numerous scholars assert the connection the Book

4.3.2 Other Relationships in which Sexuality is Portrayed as Having a Role

Various other passages in the HS could be discussed which emphasise the role of sexuality beyond procreation. Lawrence suggests examples would include ‘Jacob and Rachel, Shechem and Dinah, Michal and David, and even Bathsheba and David’.⁶⁴² They demonstrate the complexity of sexuality both within and beyond the societal norm of arranged marriage. This thesis will now examine one of these relationships in more detail to consider how sexuality plays a part in the construction of this relationship.

4.4 A Pentateuchal Case Study: Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:4-30)

This chapter so far has highlighted some of the complexity surrounding marriage and sexuality in the HS. This final section will consider one important text which portrays the presence of attraction, desire, and choice, in terms of one particular arranged marriage, that of Jacob and Rachel. It will be discussed how this sexuality element is portrayed within the passage, and what role it provides in partner selection.

Furthermore, it will be observed here how the concept that will be explained more in the next chapter – Exum’s EI – is used within the Jacob and Rachel narrative, creating a direct link between the portrayal of sexuality in the Song and this Pentateuchal narrative.

4.4.1 A Partner Choice Motivated by Attraction (Genesis 29:4-18)

4.2.2 mentioned that Jacob was instructed by Isaac to marry ‘one of the daughters of Laban’ (Genesis 28:1-2) giving him a sort of choice. Genesis 29:9-12 describes Jacob meeting Rachel, during which he ‘kissed’ her and ‘wept aloud’. Speiser describes it as being an ‘impulsive kiss’.⁶⁴³ It may have been a conventional custom of someone meeting a kin member, a potential spouse specifically, or something that he felt motivated to do (because of attraction or wanting to show off).⁶⁴⁴ He has already been told that she is the daughter of Laban (29:6) and he has been instructed to marry one of Laban’s daughters,

of Ruth with Levirate marriage. See Davidson, p. 480 for discussion; Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman, p. lxxiv. As a relative, Boaz can redeem Ruth (Ruth 2:20).

Secondly, Davidson, p. 277 describes them as ‘functioning within the norms of a patriarchal society’. According to Knust, ch 1, they do not question that they are seen as property.

⁶⁴² Lawrence, p. 28.

⁶⁴³ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), I, p. 223.

⁶⁴⁴ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 466 sees this as being ‘customary among relatives’; Speiser, p. 222 suggests that it may have been culturally usual, but also suggests it could be him wanting to show off; C. John Collins, ‘nāšaq’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 196–97 (p. 196) emphasises it as being ‘an act of kinsman’s affection’; Bergant, *Genesis*, p. 127 dismisses any potential of this being a passionate kiss, since this is their first meeting, but a kiss does not have to be passionate to be wanted.

so this is likely to create a particular context for the way he behaves.⁶⁴⁵ It is true that the reader is not told about Rachel's beauty yet.⁶⁴⁶ But the fact that he weeps as well as kisses her shows an emotional response to something, which could include his attraction for her.⁶⁴⁷ Bearing in mind that prior to kissing Rachel, Jacob *rā'â* (saw) Rachel and then singlehandedly moves a large stone from a well, this 'Herculean action appears to be motivated by the mere appearance of Rachel and the flock of his uncle'.⁶⁴⁸ There could be several plausible reasons why he behaves in this way, like him wanting to impress.⁶⁴⁹ But he responds in the way he does upon seeing Rachel, and then he kisses her and weeps. There seems to be more than just kinship affection here!⁶⁵⁰

In Genesis 29:16-17 the narrator introduces the other daughter, Leah (29:16) and makes a comparison in terms of appearance between the two daughters (29:17). The reader has already been told that Jacob stayed with him for a month, having been invited to do so by Laban (29:14), so Jacob has had the opportunity to spend some time with them. The narrator emphasises the beauty of Rachel over Leah.⁶⁵¹ This does not necessarily mean that Leah was unattractive, bearing in mind that she was the mother of six of the tribes of Israel.⁶⁵² But in comparison, the text portrays Rachel as 'being stunning'.⁶⁵³

This comparison between the two women is followed immediately (Genesis 29:18) by the narrator saying that Jacob 'loved' (*ye'ēhab*) Rachel, the verb being one of the key word groups (*'hb*) for love in the Song.⁶⁵⁴ Petrus Els suggests that in this passage the

⁶⁴⁵ David A Bosworth, 'Weeping in Recognition Scenes in Genesis and the "Odyssey"', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 77.4 (2015), 619–39 (p. 623) notes that this is the wider context of his behaviour.

⁶⁴⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 231; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 265, n. 371.

⁶⁴⁷ Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 265 notes that Jacob is emotionally overwhelmed; Bosworth, 'Weeping in Recognition Scenes in Genesis and the "Odyssey"', p. 621 makes the point that there has not been much extensive research on weeping.

⁶⁴⁸ Quotation from Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 265; Speiser, p. 223; Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 313.

⁶⁴⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 223 observes that this is a classic example of a potential suitor being 'inspired to a display of superhuman prowess at the very first sight of Rachel'.

⁶⁵⁰ William E Phipps, 'The Kiss of Love', *Pastoral Psychology*, 23 (1972), 27–32, (p. 29) sees it as 'love at first sight'; so, does James McKeown, *Genesis*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 143.

⁶⁵¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 266; William C. Williams, 'yāpā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), II, 494–96 (p. 495).

⁶⁵² Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 266.

⁶⁵³ Arnold, *Genesis*, p. 266; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 225 describes Rachel as being of 'outstanding beauty'.

⁶⁵⁴ See discussion of the use of *'hb* in 2.5.2. DCH, Vol. 1, p. 138 classifies this example of love under the title 'sexually', and the uses of *'hb* in the Song (1:3, 4:7, 3:1, 2, 3, 4) are classified in the same way.

David S. Vanderhooft, 'Philological Observation on 'āhēb/'ahābāh in the Hebrew Bible', in *Ahavah: Die Liebe Gottes Im Alten Testament.*, ed. by Manfred Oeming (Leipzig: Evangelische

meaning of *'hb* should be understood as 'desiring and experiencing love in an all-encompassing or more general sense'.⁶⁵⁵ This is as an alternative to the more specific 'erotic-sexual semantic' group.⁶⁵⁶ In response to this, it is the case that the verb of root *'hb* is not used here in a context with sexual imagery. And bearing in mind that Jacob has stayed with Laban for a month, *'hb* can be interpreted in numerous ways. However, what is vital to observe here is that the reference to Jacob 'loving' Rachel immediately follows the narrator emphasising her physical beauty in comparison to Leah. Attraction (and assumed underlying desire) should be seen as being portrayed by the verb of root *'hb* here. This is not to say that *'hb* does not have an 'all-encompassing sense', but this use should include the sense of physical attraction (and underlying desire).⁶⁵⁷ Feldman describes Jacob's love for Rachel as being 'the grand passion'.⁶⁵⁸

It follows that *'hb* acts a motivation for Jacob.⁶⁵⁹ Immediately after stating that Jacob *'hb* Rachel the passage stresses Jacob's intention to serve Laban for seven years to receive his younger daughter Rachel (29:18). The text portrays Jacob as having a goal in mind, an intention which results in action to achieve that end. But this intention is directly linked to Jacob's *'hb* of Rachel (by the explanatory use of the conjunction *wa*).⁶⁶⁰ Jacob's *'hb* towards Rachel results in his action.

4.4.2 Jacob's use of the Erotic Imperative (Genesis 29:21)

The narrative of the relationship between Jacob and Rachel also uses a key textual feature that will be discussed more in the next chapter – Exum's EI. After 7 years of service, Jacob makes his demand for Rachel to be his wife to Laban (Genesis 29:21) by explicitly expressing his sexual will in terms of his wish for sexual intercourse with her. He uses the imperative *hābā* (give) to make his demand of Laban. And he expresses his intention to *bw'* (go into) Rachel using a cohortative.⁶⁶¹ Brodie too observes the sexual desire expressed in this passage by the means of this cohortative.⁶⁶² Furthermore, this

Verlagsanstalt, 2018), pp. 41–56 (p. 46) notes the infrequent usage of human male to female love portrayed by *'āhēb*.

⁶⁵⁵ Els, *'āhab*, p. 291.

⁶⁵⁶ Els, *'āhab*, p. 291.

⁶⁵⁷ Els, *'āhab*, p. 291.

⁶⁵⁸ Yael S Feldman, "'And Rebecca Loved Jacob", But Freud Did Not', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 1.1 (1993), 72–88 (p. 83).

⁶⁵⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 235 implies this, but does not state it explicitly; Lawrence, p. 28 sees Jacob and Rachel as an example of the outplaying of the 'erotic and sensuous impulse' underlying their relationship.

⁶⁶⁰ NRSV; NKJV; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 233 translate *wa* as 'so'; Cf. ESV and NIV. Here *wa* is being read in this way, and not as sequencing.

⁶⁶¹ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, p. 10 observes how *bw'* is used in some contexts as an expression for sexual intercourse in various HS texts, including listing v. 21.

⁶⁶² Brodie, p. 314; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 235 comments upon Jacob's 'keenness' expressed by the verb.

verbal root is also used as a means of expressing sexual want at the first climatic point in the Song (4:16).⁶⁶³ The use of the EI in the narrative text of Jacob and Rachel demonstrates both Jacob's sexual desire for her, as well as the significance of the EI in other texts beyond the Song.

4.4.3 More Expressions of Preference by Means of 'hb

The narrative continues (Genesis 29:22-29) by describing Laban's deception of Jacob by arranging that he marries and that he 'went into' Leah.⁶⁶⁴ After Jacob challenges Laban (Genesis 29:25), Laban instructs Jacob that for seven more years of service he take Rachel as his wife also.

In verse 30 the narrator says that the Jacob went into Rachel. What is significant about this verse is that it continues to express a preference between the two daughters by the verb of root 'hb: Jacob 'hb Rachel 'rather than Leah'.⁶⁶⁵ The text here contains a 'comparison of exclusion', in which only Rachel (as the subject) has the quality ('hb) described, whereas Leah is excluded from this quality.⁶⁶⁶ The narrative again makes a distinction between the two women to whom Jacob is now married. Interestingly, Vanderhooft observes that in the few places in the HS where the verb of root 'hb is used for a man's 'love' for a woman, in all but one situation (Isaac and Rebekah), the verb is used in contexts where the man 'is in relationship to other females who constitute legitimate subjects that he could love, but the male is not said to love any other female'.⁶⁶⁷ In other words, Vanderhooft critically observes that within these context 'hb expresses some aspect of choice.⁶⁶⁸ Furthermore, this aspect of choice is further reiterated by the final use of the verb of root 'hb (Genesis 29:32) in this narrative in which Leah expresses her hope that after the birth of Reuben, Jacob would 'hb her.⁶⁶⁹

Moreover, expressing preference is not confined to men having preferences about women. Chapter 10 below will discuss how the FP expresses preference for her lover

⁶⁶³ 4:16 uses a jussive form of the verb.

⁶⁶⁴ Commentators see the feast described (29:22) as being a wedding feast, and note that the use of a wedding veil made this deception possible (Wenham, *Genesis*, p. 236, Bergant, *Genesis*, p. 128).

⁶⁶⁵ Bruce Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 14.4.e, p. 265; McKeown, p. 144 observes that Jacob has a preference for Rachel.

⁶⁶⁶ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 265.

⁶⁶⁷ Vanderhooft, pp. 46-47 lists the following relationships where 'hb is used for a male 'hb female relationship: 'Isaac for Rebekah (Genesis 24:67), Jacob for Rachel (Genesis 29:18, 20, 30), Samsung for Delilah (Judges 16:4), Elkanah for Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5), Solomon for his many wives (1 Kings 11:1), Rehobam for Maacah ... (2 Chorincles 11:21), King Ahaswerosh for Esther (Esther 2:17), and Hosea for Gomer (Hosea 3:1)'.
⁶⁶⁸ Vanderhooft, 'Philological Observation on 'āhēb/'ahābāh in the Hebrew Bible', p. 47.

⁶⁶⁹ Vanderhooft, 'Philological Observation on 'āhēb/'ahābāh in the Hebrew Bible', p. 47.

over and above others. But how might *'hb* be understood in the context of vv. 30 and 32 in this passage? Quell and Wallis read *'hb* in both verses as having a potential sexual sense (probably in terms of desire) and this makes sense within this context.⁶⁷⁰ Williams suggests not seeing *'hb* in v. 32 as referring to 'romantic love', since this 'cannot simply happen to order', suggesting instead to read as 'caring' love, as this would be 'expected in a society that arranges marriages'.⁶⁷¹ While the verb in v. 32 could be read in the caring sense, the wider contextual use of its use in the passage seems to express preference, and so Leah wanting to be loved romantically (with underlying desire) is also plausible.

4.4.4 Expressions of Preference Being Acted Out

There is one final element to discuss in the Jacob, Rachel and Leah triangle, and that is what were the consequences for Jacob's expression of preference? In Genesis 29:31, 33 the narrative describes Leah as *śn'* (hated).⁶⁷² This deeply sad situation for Leah is presumably at least partially created by the institution of an arranged marriage, as well as being created by Laban's trickery and Jacob's unkindness. While it may be a 'technical term for an unfavoured wife', in practice the verb no doubt had 'emotional implications' for Leah.⁶⁷³

The narrative progresses (29:32-35), describing the birth of Leah's four children, and her wish that Jacob would *'hb* her (v. 32). Significantly 29:35 expresses that 'she ceased bearing children', but no explanation is given as to why.⁶⁷⁴ One likely reason is that Jacob simply stopped having intercourse with her, which is backed up by the fact that Leah conceives after sleeping with him on a later occasion (30:17).⁶⁷⁵ Before this occasion, Leah verbalises her perspective on the situation, that Rachel had *lqh* (taken away) her husband.⁶⁷⁶ This verb emphasises that Jacob's attention was focused on Rachel, and thus Jacob's expression of preference continued in practice for this to happen.

⁶⁷⁰ Quell, p. 24; Wallis, p. 107.

Furthermore, Wallis, p. 107 notes that Ugaritic potentially supports this sexual sense of the verb. In the context of 29:30, 32, Wallis, p. 107 sees this verb as referring 'more to experiencing and desiring love'. This is because the verb *bw'* tends to be used for sexual intercourse.

⁶⁷¹ Williams, *God Remembered Rachel*, p. 14.

⁶⁷² DCH, Vol. 8, p. 169 categorises the use in Genesis 29:31 as 'hated'. Davidson, p. 187 notes the strength of this verb.

⁶⁷³ Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York, NY: Norton, 1996), p. 155.

⁶⁷⁴ Williams, *God Remembered Rachel*, p. 16.

⁶⁷⁵ Williams, *God Remembered Rachel*, p. 16 makes this observation, but also gives an alternative suggestion that the reason that Leah stopped having children might have been 'secondary infertility'.

⁶⁷⁶ Genesis 30:15; P. J. J. S. Els, 'lāqah', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 812–17 (p. 813) notes this meaning 'as to deprive of'.

After the night that Jacob slept with Leah, the text says that she bore two further sons and a daughter.⁶⁷⁷ However, what is also important to observe is the way that the text portrays Jacob and Leah's relationship after the mention of the birth of Dinah (30:21). One of the most significant points is that after Jacob wrestles with the divine being at Jabbok (32:22-32) out of Jacob's four wives, only Rachel is ever mentioned again in reference to 'conjugal relations' in Genesis.⁶⁷⁸ Before Jabbok, Jacob referred to both Leah and Rachel as his wives.⁶⁷⁹ But from Jabbok he only refers to Rachel as his wife.⁶⁸⁰ The preference continues to be expressed afterwards, for when Jacob refers to the burial of Leah in 49:31 he does not call her his wife.⁶⁸¹ And in the genealogy list in Genesis 46, out of Jacob's four wives, only Rachel is called his wife.⁶⁸² In practice this could be something directly related to the Jabbok experience.⁶⁸³ But the most likely root of the situation is Jacob's *'hb* of Rachel in 29:18.

4.4.5 Non-Permanency and Expression of Preference in Practice

While the cultural world of Genesis is not one where non-permanent marital relationships was a cultural convention, it could be suggested that however much Jacob cared (or not) for Leah because he was obliged to do so, that after Jabbok the lack of the expression of marriage relationality with Leah in Genesis suggests that their relationship was not of any significance to him. It would be too much to say that their relationship was in effective non-permanent. However, in the contemporary Western world, where arranged marriages are not the cultural norm, when marriage is freely entered by choice, and for the cultural reasons of love, one might imagine that Leah's experience would be less likely to happen. If a contemporary woman was in an unloving monogamous marriage, she might get divorced. But conventionally she probably would not choose to get married if she knew that her future spouse had preferences for somebody else. If Diana had known about Charles' preference for Camilla, then they may not have got married. The Jacob, Rachel, Leah triangle in Genesis demonstrates how preference in effect had a significant part to play. While culture has significantly changed since Pentateuchal times, the expression of preference, and the consequences that it has remain.

⁶⁷⁷ Genesis 30:18-21.

⁶⁷⁸ Genesis 35:16-18; Davidson, p. 188 makes this observation, including that only Rachel is recorded as having any children from this point on (Genesis 35:18).

⁶⁷⁹ Genesis 30:26. Genesis 44:27; Davidson, p. 188.

⁶⁸⁰ Genesis 44:27; Davidson, p. 188.

⁶⁸¹ Davidson, p. 188, Genesis 49:31.

⁶⁸² Davidson, p. 188 notes that though Leah, Billah and Zilpah are also on the list, they are described as women who 'bore [children] to Jacob'. Genesis 46:15, 18-19, 25.

⁶⁸³ Davidson, p. 188 uses this incorrectly as an argument for monogamy. The divine being does not criticise polygamy in the Jabbok narrative.

The Jacob and Rachel case study has shown the particular role of sexuality in the formation and construction of relationships through attraction, desire and preference, which as will be discussed are important characteristics of the portrayal of sexuality in the Song, as 'the preeminent biblical affirmation of the erotic and sensuous'.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁴ Lawrence, p. 29.

Part 2: The Horizon of the Song of Songs

Chapter 5: The Erotic Imperative and the Language of Desire

5.1 Introduction

This brief chapter discusses in more detail the work of two feminist scholars who contribute significantly to the work of this thesis. Firstly, Exum, who argues for the EI as way of understanding the use of volitional verbs in the Song. Secondly, Walsh, who provides some useful descriptors for examining the language of desire in the Song. Together, the tools that they propose aid the interpretation of the Song as a text communicating the developing of desire and relationality between the lovers.

5.2 The Erotic Imperative

5.2.1 What is the Erotic Imperative and Why is it Significant?

In her commentary on the Song, Exum argues for something she terms ‘the Erotic Imperative - the call to love by means of grammatical imperatives, jussives and cohortatives’.⁶⁸⁵ This definition is key and needs to be unpacked here. At the heart of Exum’s analysis is that at a syntactic level, jussives, cohortatives and imperatives act as a set of Hebrew volitional forms.⁶⁸⁶ As volitional verbs, they express the will - or the want - of the speaker.⁶⁸⁷ They call the hearer to respond in some way. Volitional verbs are a vital component of language since ‘through the volitional forms a speaker aims to impose his or her own will on some other (or, in figurative language, something).’⁶⁸⁸ They are a way of expressing ‘want’.⁶⁸⁹

Importantly, the Song has many of these volitional verbs contained in the text, expressing the will of the lovers, that are listed in Appendix 2.⁶⁹⁰ Their sheer provenance is highlighted because the Song opens with a volitional verb and ends with volitional verbs.⁶⁹¹ Furthermore, the climatic and probably most well-known verse of the Song -- 8:6 -- contains a volitional verb.⁶⁹² And there are numerous others that feature prominently in

⁶⁸⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5; J. Cheryl Exum, ‘The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs’, in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs; or Perspektiven Der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. by Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 78–95.

⁶⁸⁶ Waltke and O’Connor, p. 564.

⁶⁸⁷ Waltke and O’Connor, pp. 564–565.

⁶⁸⁸ Waltke and O’Connor, p. 565.

⁶⁸⁹ Mark Jary and Mikhail Kissine, *Imperatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 56 notes that there are examples ‘across languages, straightforward and everyday uses of the imperative that are not expressions of desire’. However, the context of the Song is strongly indicative that want is being expressed by volitional verbs.

⁶⁹⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

⁶⁹¹ 1:2, 8:14; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

⁶⁹² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

the erotic text of the Song, as will be discussed in the commentary section below. The significance of volitional verbs in the Song cannot be overstated.⁶⁹³

Exum's observation of the importance of the role of volitional verbs in the Song is a key way of understanding the text as a whole.⁶⁹⁴ It emphasises that the Song is a text that gives prominence to the expression of volition. Recognising the EI enables the reader to recognise that want is being expressed, for it is one of the principle means by which one lover expresses their want for the other lover to do something. And as these EIs operate within erotic discourses, it enables the reader to see how the want for sexual experience and the associated pleasure is expressed.⁶⁹⁵ They are EIs because they express erotic want in the context of erotic discourse, as will be shown in the commentary discussion.

5.2.2 Syntax and the Statement of Volition in Hebrew

Now that the purpose for examining volitional verbs in the Song has been discussed, it is necessary to briefly discuss how they are expressed by jussives, cohortatives and imperatives in Hebrew.⁶⁹⁶ A detailed discussion of their syntactical use is provided in Waltke and O'Connor.⁶⁹⁷ Cohortatives are first-person volitional forms, imperatives are second-person volitional forms and jussives are mainly third-person volitional forms.⁶⁹⁸ As there is not much overlap, together they 'comprise one unified system for the expression of the speaker's will'.⁶⁹⁹ However, there is not a grammatical mood for the three forms, since they are 'morphologically independent'.⁷⁰⁰ Waltke and O'Connor include the following table to summarise the ways that volition is expressed by the volitional verbs:⁷⁰¹

First person	Cohortative
Second person (positive)	Imperative/non-perfective
Second person (negative) ⁷⁰²	'I + jussive//' + non-perfective
Third person	Jussive

⁶⁹³ Spencer, p. 193 similarly observes these as a 'common pattern in the Song's expressing love's desired outcomes or intense longings.

⁶⁹⁴ Spencer, p. 193 recognises the importance of Exum's work in the interpretation of the Song.

⁶⁹⁵ Walsh, p. 1 has implicitly observed the importance of volitional verbs by her observation of Song 1:2 as expressing 'sexual want'.

⁶⁹⁶ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 564.

⁶⁹⁷ Waltke and O'Connor, pp. 564-579.

⁶⁹⁸ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 565.

⁶⁹⁹ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 564.

⁷⁰⁰ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 564.

⁷⁰¹ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 565.

⁷⁰² As can be seen from the table, there is a small amount of crossover, in that the grammatical jussive is also used to express a negative imperative. Waltke and O'Connor, p. 565. Interestingly, there are very few negative volitional verbs expressed in the Song, the only being 1:6 and 7:2.

5.2.3 Some Observations on the Expression of Volition in the Song

There are a couple of observations that should be made about the expression of volition on a syntactic level in texts which have some implications for interpretation. Firstly, although volitional verbs may be of one grammatical form, they can express 'varying degrees of volition'.⁷⁰³ The three factors that affect what degree of volition is being expressed are the social standing of the speaker relative to the addressee, the 'social context of the discourse', and the 'meaning of the verb'.⁷⁰⁴ In the Song both main characters engage with each other using all three volitional forms, and the fact that there is freedom for both to express their wants to each other (as well as the portrayal of the lovers in the wider discourse) strongly suggests that their social standing to each other is portrayed as equal.⁷⁰⁵

Secondly, as Black observes, 'the text [of the Song] is active in interacting with its readers'.⁷⁰⁶ In terms of the EI, this means that the reader has the experience of the second person imperative being addressed to them. In other words, in the dialogue between the lovers of the Song, the reader experiences the voice of one of the lovers addressing them directly. The textual implication is that the other lover is being addressed. But the reader experiences being addressed with erotic volition for themselves. As the reader is being addressed erotically, or led to think about erotic actions towards another, this can affect the reader. Its effect on the reader can further support the erotic nature of the text.

5.2.3 Developing the Erotic Imperative

Exum's observation about the importance of volitional verbs provides a basis from which to develop ideas about the expression of volition in the Song. Interestingly, Exum does not continually refer to the EI in her commentary, even though it is clearly a prominent feature in her thinking as whole.⁷⁰⁷ The discussion in this thesis is often more developed in terms of discussing the use of the EI within passages than Exum is in her commentary. Furthermore, this thesis studies EIs within their textual contexts, to understand how sexual desire is portrayed in these passages, and how it relates to the wider discourse. Walsh has implicitly observed the importance of understanding volitional verbs erotically by her observation of Song 1:2 as expressing 'sexual want'.⁷⁰⁸ Examining the volitional verbs

⁷⁰³ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 545; Georg Henrich August von Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1891), p. 16.

⁷⁰⁴ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 545.

⁷⁰⁵ See table in Appendix 2 for list of uses of the EI.

⁷⁰⁶ Fiona C. Black, *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies in the Song of Songs*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies, 392 (London: Clark, 2009), p. 39.

⁷⁰⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

⁷⁰⁸ Walsh, p. 1.

that the ML and FP use in the Song enables an examination of their expression of sexual desire, as well as how this relates to other features in the text. In particular, this study will show how the EI plays a role in terms of the recognition of relationality between the lovers.

Furthermore, to aid the discussion, this thesis provides a table of the use of jussives, cohortatives and imperatives in the Song (Appendix 2), as well as including a dot plot (Appendix 1) which shows the clusters of the various volitional verbs in the different passages.

5.3 The Language of Desire

In addition to Exum's work, another feminist scholar who has contributed to this thesis' thinking is Walsh, who especially emphasises sexual desire as a key theme of the Song.⁷⁰⁹ In an attempt to provide some framework for discussing the language of desire in the Song, Walsh has proposed three different types of language. In the commentary chapters that follow, there will be times when Walsh's categorisations will be referred to. They will be used as a tool for helping to understand what is going on in terms of the development of desire in passages. While Walsh admits the limitation of her study, the descriptors she proposes enable some interesting observations to be made.⁷¹⁰

The three types of language of desire that Walsh recognises are 'aesthetic appreciation', 'affective description' and 'the physical impact of yearning'.⁷¹¹ 'Aesthetic appreciation' is the expression of 'sheer appreciation of the other's beauty', focusing mainly on the 'physical characteristics of the other'.⁷¹² The Song uses a great deal of language in which the lovers verbalise the physical attractiveness of the other, and so recognising this is of particular value. As Walsh observes, part of the significance lies in the language that focuses on the 'object of one's affections'.⁷¹³

'Affective want' or 'affective depiction', as Walsh's second form of language, centres on the 'feelings of the lover', and thus they focus on 'the lover as subject'.⁷¹⁴ It is a verbalisation specifically of the 'emotion of desiring', in essence giving voice to 'how he or she feels while wanting'.⁷¹⁵ Importantly, this form of discourse notices the 'motives of the speaker', and as such the relationship between the EI, with its verbalisation of the volition

⁷⁰⁹ Scholars who stress the value of Walsh's work include Hess, p. 32 and Spencer, pp. 193-194.

⁷¹⁰ Walsh, pp. 55-56.

⁷¹¹ Walsh, p. 56.

⁷¹² Walsh, p. 56.

⁷¹³ Walsh, p. 56.

⁷¹⁴ Walsh, p. 56.

⁷¹⁵ Walsh, p. 56.

of the speaker, and 'affective want', which focuses on the motives of the 'lover as subject', together help to understand the portrayal of desire from the main characters' perspectives. Walsh sees this as verbalising greater desire than 'aesthetic appreciation'.⁷¹⁶

The final type of language is 'an expression of the physical impact of yearning'.⁷¹⁷ This form of language centres on the speaker as subject, focuses on the 'self-assessment of desire's impact'.⁷¹⁸ It can include the portrayal of a range of experiences 'from feeling faint, giddy, and sexually aroused to enjoying pleasures themselves'.⁷¹⁹ This self-reflection aspect of desire has some important consequences. It demonstrates the significant impact that desire has on one of the lovers from their perspective, and the role that this plays in the wider discourses of desire in the Song. Walsh sees it as the highest level of verbalisation of desire in the text.⁷²⁰

5.4 Passages to be Examined in this Thesis

Having discussed both Exum's EI and Walsh's study of the use of the language of desire in the Song, this thesis will now highlight which passages will be particularly examined and discussed.

In the early stages of research when considering which passages to examine in detail, the use of volitional verbs became an important criterion, as they stood out as a key feature of the Song. Reading the Song from beginning to end and observing the use of volitional verbs, where they are concentrated and their potential role within the text, it became apparent that some passages in particular needed detailed examination.

The dot plot in Appendix 1 provides a helpful tool to explain which passages have been examined and discussed in this thesis. The diagram shows all of the uses of the volitional verbs of jussives, imperatives and cohortatives expressed by the characters of the Song.⁷²¹ And it shows how these volitional verbs are often found in clusters. At the bottom of the diagram, the labelling indicates the sections of the Song according to its macrostructure. This enables the viewer to be able to see where particular volitional verbs are used in reference to this structure. Furthermore, labelling on the diagram in the form of rectangles enables the viewer to be able to see which parts of the Song are referred to or

⁷¹⁶ Walsh, pp. 73-75.

⁷¹⁷ Walsh, p.56.

⁷¹⁸ Walsh, p. 57.

⁷¹⁹ Walsh, p. 57.

⁷²⁰ Walsh, pp. 73-75.

⁷²¹ These are also given as a list in Appendix 2.

discussed in this thesis. Those rectangles with a black border show which verses are discussed through detailed exegesis in the chapters that follow. Those rectangles with a blue border show verses that have volitional verbs that are referred to in this thesis' discussion, but are not studied in a detailed way.

There are some important observations that should be made about which passages are to be discussed. Firstly, the black rectangles show that detailed exegesis is carried out on verses with volitional verbs from all six sections that make up the macrostructure of the Song. Thus, there is good overall coverage of the Song. And this coverage of verses from every Section means that the sense of progression which is argued for (taking account of the reading strategy described in 2.3.5) can be observed by comparing material from later Sections with those from earlier sections. In particular, the passages that are chosen allow the reader to see development in the use of language (as the Song builds upon previous motifs and imagery), as well as the way that imagery becomes more sexually explicit, and shows a more developed relationship in the second half of the Song compared to the first.⁷²² Importantly, verses from both the beginning and the end of the Song (which both use the EI) are included in this study, asserting the importance of the EI and its role in the development of the portrayed relationship between the lovers.

Secondly, the use of the black rectangles shows that passages that have a high concentration of volitional verbs are a particular focus of this study, showing particularly intensity in terms of the expression of volition.⁷²³ Examining them demonstrates the role of the EI in the Song, as well as allowing comparison of discourse between these passages. Thirdly, the use of rectangles also shows that the central Sections (2, 3, 4 and 5) receive a lot of cover. The reason for this is due to the significance of these passages in terms of the role of volitional verbs.⁷²⁴ However, what they also show is some degree of continuity in terms of the coverage of the Song, since many of the passages considered come after each other or relatively soon after each other. There is effectively some degree of a central block of coverage of the Song as a whole.

⁷²² See discussion in 11.4.4.

⁷²³ See discussion below for why 6:13[EN] is in a blue rectangle.

⁷²⁴ For example, 2:8-17 and 3:1-5 were chosen for examination because of the particular significance of these verses in terms of the use of the EI.

Through looking at the diagram, it may be observed that 5:2-8 has only one volitional verb and that 5:8-6:3 has none, and yet they are still studied in detail. This is because of the significance of the particular use of the EI in 5:2 by the ML and the response given by the FP. This will be discussed in thesis Chapters 8 and 10.

Fourthly, the blue rectangles (which show verses that have been referred to, but not discussed through detailed exegesis) are those verses that, though they may have volitional verbs in them, are not seen as being EIs, because they do not express an interaction between the lovers.⁷²⁵

Fourthly, looking at the dot plot, there are a few verses that contain volitional verbs that are not discussed in this thesis. 1:6 has a jussive, in which the FP tells the DoJ not to *tir'û* (gaze) on her.⁷²⁶ While this passage would be interesting to discuss, it does not portray an interaction between the lovers.⁷²⁷ 1:7 and 1:8 on the other hand do portray an interaction between the lovers, using three imperatives, but what is portrayed in these verses, when compared to what follows in the full scheme of the Song, is not particularly sexual explicit, and for the sake of brevity there is not the space to be able to discuss them in detail. The way that they show the sense of progression of the overall scheme of the Song is relative to their positioning within the Section 1. Similarly, the EI in 6:5 in which the ML addresses the FP, while not discussed in exegetical detail for the sake of brevity, could arguably be seen to demonstrate the high level of the expression of sexual desire relative to the high level found in Section 5 as a whole.⁷²⁸

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has briefly discussed two scholars who have contributed to some of the thinking behind this thesis, Exum in terms of her emphasis on the use of volitional verbs in the Song, and Walsh by her approach to recognising the language of desire in the Song. This thesis will refer to these concepts in the commentary below, and what will also be

⁷²⁵ 2:5 and 3:11 contain volitional verbs in which the FP addresses the DoJ (see discussion in 2.4.3 and 13.2.3, as well as shown in Appendix 2). Similarly, 6:13 contains four imperatives and a cohortative in which the DoJ addresses the FP (see discussion in 11.2.2, as well as shown in Appendix 2). In neither of these contexts does one lover address the other.

However, there is one verse (5:1) in the context of the middle climax of the Song in which the DoJ address the lovers together (see discussion in 9.3.7 and listing in Appendix 2) in which they call the lovers to sexual pleasure by four imperatives. While these imperatives do not express an interaction between the lovers, they do develop the portrayal of sexual activity in the passage and the lovers are being encouraged to carry out their lovemaking. They are found in the context of numerous EIs (which are discussed in detail in thesis Chapter 9).

⁷²⁶ Hess, p. 56, Duguid, p. 84, Fredericks and Estes, p. 306; Longman, p. 95.

⁷²⁷ It would be interesting to discuss because the most popular reading of this amongst commentators is the FP's sense of embarrassment about the darker colour of her skin (from the sun), thus making her appear unusual by the standards of beauty in her cultural world. Garrett, p. 132, Longman, p. 95, Duguid, pp. 81-82, Hess, p. 55.

⁷²⁸ In 6:5 the ML addresses the FP with the imperative *hāsēbbî* (turn), in reference to her turning his eyes away from him (Hess, p. 201). The ML gives a reason, that they *rhb* (overwhelm) him). It is an example of Walsh's 'expression of the physical impact of yearning' (Walsh, pp. 56,75). Murphy, p. 178 observes that her eyes are also referred to in 4:9, along with the affect that they have upon the speaker. This imperative (6:5) at nearly the beginning of this section shows how affirms the high level of expression of sexual desire at this point of the Song.

highlighted is how the language of desire and the expression of volition interact. This will enable the discussion to highlight how desire develops in the Song alongside the development of relationality.

Chapter 6: Starting with the Erotic Imperative (1:2-4)

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 gave an explanation as to what the EI is. This chapter substantiates the use of the EI by examining its use by the FP in the opening lines of the Song. The fact that these are the opening verses of the Song substantiate the importance of the use of these volitional forms in the text and they provide a basis for discussion of the use of the EI in other parts of the Song. The discussion will highlight the role that desire plays, making them EIs, as well as the role of communal desire of the DoJ towards the ML. As the opening words it portrays the first encounter of the reader with the ML and FP, and it is from this basis that the portrayal of the relationship between them develops.

6.2 Translation and Textual Context

6.2.1 Translation (1:2-4)

FP

- 1:2a: Let him kiss⁷²⁹ me with kisses of his mouth,
2b: because your lovemaking⁷³⁰ is better than wine,
3a: better⁷³¹ than the fragrance of your oils.
3b: Your name is oil poured out⁷³²,
3c therefore the young women love you.
4a: Draw me after you, let us flee!
4b: The king brought me to his bedroom.

DoJ

- 4c: We will exult and rejoice in you!
4d: We will extol your lovemaking more than wine!

FP

- 4e: Understandably,⁷³³ they love you!

⁷²⁹ It is possible to translate this as an imperfect or a jussive, but here the jussive has been used. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125, c.f. Garrett, p. 125.

⁷³⁰ LXX, and Vulgate reads the Hebrew consonants *ddyk* as 'your breasts', instead of as *dōdēkā* (your lovemaking), Murphy, p. 125.

⁷³¹ LXX reading is comparative ('and the scent of your ointment better than all spices'). *The Lexham English Septuagint*, ed. by Rick Brennan and others (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

⁷³² There is gender incongruity, since there is no feminine antecedent (Hess, p. 40). Consequently, some translations read as a proper noun; Pope, p. 300.

⁷³³ LXX reads *mesarim* as *eututes egapesen se* (righteousness loves you). Vulgate reads it as *recti* (the upright).

6.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

This passage is situated immediately after the title of the Song in v. 1⁷³⁴. It portrays the opening words of the FP desiring the kisses and lovemaking experience of the ML, who is unnamed in this passage.⁷³⁵ It is a passage which strongly vocalises desire.⁷³⁶ In vv. 2a-4b, the FP speaks, addressing three audiences, the DoJ, the ML and the reader. The DoJ then join in the praising of the ML in v. 4c-d. V. 4 is a natural ending to this opening section, with vv.5-6 being different in its content.⁷³⁷

6.2.3 Overview of the Erotic Imperative in this Section

This passage contains six uses of the EI in the form of one jussive (1:2a), one imperative (1:4a) and four cohortatives (1:4a, 1:4c, 1:4c, 1:4d). The jussive (*yīššāqēniy*: let him kiss me), imperative (*moškēnî*: draw me) and the first cohortative (*nārûšâ*: let us flee) are spoken by the FP, while the remaining three cohortatives ((*nāgîlâ*: we will exult), (*nišmēḥāh*: we will rejoice) and (*nazkîrâ*: we will extol)) are spoken by the DoJ. The commentary will highlight how the use of the EI is erotic in this section. It will also show how both personal and communal desire is demonstrated in this section, since both the FP (with the first three uses of the EI) and the DoJ (with the remaining three uses) participate in the desiring of the ML.

6.3 Commentary

6.3.1 A desire to be Kissed and Communal Desire (1:2-4)

In the opening line (1:2a) after the title of the Song, the reader hears the voice of a woman longing to be kissed by a man, expressed by the first jussive (*yīššāqēniy*) with its first-person direct object, 'me'. The jussive is not morphologically different from other prefix forms, so a minority of commentators read as an indicative.⁷³⁸ However, the traditional reading and most popular amongst commentators is to read as a jussive.⁷³⁹ It is one of the many volitional verbs that will be encountered in this text as a whole. The jussive is immediately followed with the preposition *min* before *nēšîqôt* (kisses), which is read as being partitive (with kisses).⁷⁴⁰ The text vocalises how the FP wishes to be kissed, the

⁷³⁴ 2.3.1 discusses the meaning of this.

⁷³⁵ Rosalind S Clarke, 'Canonical Interpretations of the Song of Songs' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2013), p. 189.

⁷³⁶ Desire, longing or yearning is used to describe this passage by commentators including Walsh, p. 1; Duguid, p. 79; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 89; Spencer, p. 7; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 127; Keel, p. 40; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 9.

⁷³⁷ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 95.

⁷³⁸ C.f. Garrett, p. 125.

⁷³⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125; Pope p. 291; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 92; Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 89-91; Keel, p. 40; Duguid, pp. 78 - 83; Walsh, p. 1; Hess, p. 40.

⁷⁴⁰ Pope, p. 298; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125.

plural emphasis of kisses conveying that ‘no peck on the cheek will do’.⁷⁴¹ This is ‘the language of excess’, being the first EI in the Song.⁷⁴² Walsh describes this opening line and the ones that follow as being ‘a bald declaration of sexual want’.⁷⁴³

1:2b starts with the conjunction *kî* which is construed as being causative, linking what is expressed in 1:2a with what follows in this line.⁷⁴⁴ As *kî* is most often used in the causative sense in the HS, it is the most straightforward way of reading it here.⁷⁴⁵ This causative reading makes the most contextual sense of 1:2b, since it provides a reason for the use of the jussive by the FP in 1:2a.⁷⁴⁶ The fact that there is a grammatical change of person in 1:2b is an example of enallage, a common phenomenon of Hebrew poetic texts.⁷⁴⁷ The text thus vocalises the FP asserting a reason for her longing to experience the kisses of his mouth.⁷⁴⁸

The reason given is comparative.⁷⁴⁹ The text vocalises the FP expressing that the ML’s *dōdē* is better than wine.⁷⁵⁰ The line makes the comparison of the ML’s lovemaking with wine, indicated by his lovemaking being described by the adjective *ṭōbîm* (good). As discussed above, the masculine plural form of *dōdî* used in the Song should be read in a broad (and non-prescriptive) sense as referring to the sexual activity.⁷⁵¹ 6.4.2 will discuss the ambiguity as to whether the FP is commenting here on previous experience of *dōdē* or whether it is imagined.

⁷⁴¹ The quote is from Spencer, p. 7; Walsh, pp. 1, 121 makes this implication.

⁷⁴² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5.

⁷⁴³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5, Walsh, p. 1.

⁷⁴⁴ T. A. Perry, ‘The Coordination of Ky / ‘I Kn in Cant. i 1-3 and Related Texts’, *Vetus Testamentum*, 55.4 (2005), 528–41 (p. 529) notes that the causative reading is the most usual translation.

Commentators who specifically note the causative reading implied by the conjunction *kî* include Exum, p. 94; Hess, p. 40; Provan, p. 265. Other scholars that translate as a causative meaning, but are not explicit about this include Keel, p. 40; Duguid, p. 57; Longman, p. 89; Fox, p. 96; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 80; Fredericks and Estes, p. 303.

⁷⁴⁵ Perry, p. 529 discusses this and provides other sources that back up this argument.

⁷⁴⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 94.

⁷⁴⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 7; Pope, p. 297; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 90; Provan, p. 264.

⁷⁴⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 94; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 91; Perry, pp. 529-533; Fredericks and Estes, p. 303.

⁷⁴⁹ See for example, Murphy, *The Song of Songs*; pp. 124-124; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 89; Hess, p. 40; Keel, p. 40.

⁷⁵⁰ Walsh, pp. 12-13; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 9, Garrett, p. 128; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 91; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 93; Spencer, p. 8.

⁷⁵¹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 137 describe *dōdē* as ‘a comprehensive term for lovemaking’. See discussion in 2.5.3.

The next line (1:3a) is also read here as comparative, because of the preposition *lě*.⁷⁵²

This comparative reading compares *dodē* to the fragrance of his oils, conveying that his lovemaking is better.⁷⁵³ The FP expresses her desire for the kisses of the ML because of comparison of the appreciation of his lovemaking with other sensual sources of pleasure. His lovemaking is better!

1:3b continues the fragrant oil imagery of the previous line, describing the ML's *šēm* (name) is *ryq* (poured out).⁷⁵⁴ The thought of fragrant oil being poured out is a sensual image, evoking again the pleasure of experiencing the smell of the oil.⁷⁵⁵ Here *šēm* may be used in a literal sense, referring to the name of the man as being what gives the FP this pleasure.⁷⁵⁶ But *šēm* is often used in a figurative sense in the HS to refer to either the reputation or character of a person.⁷⁵⁷ This is the most common understanding of its use here, and it makes most contextual sense of what is a difficult image to interpret.⁷⁵⁸ It is the sensual appreciation of both the perception of his lovemaking and the pleasure that his *šēm* gives her that are her personal motivation for wanting to be kissed by him.

⁷⁵² Garrett, p. 128; Duguid, p. 57. Pope, pp. 290-300, William Foxwell Albright, 'Archaic Survivals in the Text of the Canticles', in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver*, ed. by D. W. Thomas and W. D. McHardy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 1-7 (p. 2, n. 4) note this use in Ugaritic. Keel, p. 40 similarly makes a comparative reading, but gives no explanation why.

Emphatic and dative readings are also possible. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 90 provides an example of the emphatic reading. Murphy, p. 126 discusses the options of the different readings.

⁷⁵³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 125 observes how the comparative reading carries into this verse; Garrett, p. 129.

⁷⁵⁴ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 80 notes the uncertainty of the verb *ryq*. Jerry Shepherd, 'Rîq', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 1106-9 (p. 1106) notes that the difficult verb 'basically relates to the idea of emptying' and in the context of Song 1:3, it refers to 'the contents of a container'.

⁷⁵⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 94.

⁷⁵⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 94; Garrett, p. 129; Spencer, p. 8.

Allen P. Ross, 'šēm', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), IV, 147-51 (p. 147) observes that in most of the 770 times that the *šēm* is used in the singular, it just literally means name.

⁷⁵⁷ Ross, pp. 147-148 notes the way that names are used to signify character and reputation; C.f. Proverbs 22:1.

⁷⁵⁸ Bloch and Bloch, p. 138 note the difficulty in interpreting this poet image.

The following are some of the commentators read *šēm* as character or reputation: Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 10; Duguid, p. 80; Fredericks and Estes, p. 305; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 92. Pope, p. 300 makes the similar observation that *šēm* represents the 'whole essence of the person'. However, Ross, p. 148 issues caution against this, being too much of a 'sweeping connection', since 'just because a name can describe a personality [it] does not mean that it is a person's soul'.

1:3c introduces some new characters, the ‘*ālāmôt* (young women).⁷⁵⁹ It seems likely that these young women refer to the DoJ, the FP’s companions throughout the Song.⁷⁶⁰ Importantly, the text also affirms that these also ‘*āhēbû* the ML. Bearing in mind that the emphasis of this passage until now has been upon the FP desiring the ML, Bloch and Bloch have observed how ‘*āhēbû* should be read as referring to the ‘physical attraction’ of the DoJ towards him.⁷⁶¹ Longman makes the related observation that they desire him.⁷⁶² The FP is not alone in her ‘*āhēbû* for the ML. Walsh has observed that ‘the Song’s testimony to love ... is surprisingly nonmonogamous in spirit’.⁷⁶³ 6.4.4 below will discuss this first example of communal desire in this passage.

1:4a introduces two further EIs made by the FP, the first being the imperative *moškenî* and the second being the cohortative *nārûšâ*. Having these two EIs next to each other creates a sense of urgency in the text. They convey a sense of urgent demand from the FP.⁷⁶⁴ The urgency expresses the intensity of her desire.⁷⁶⁵ Here the FP is directly calling the ML to respond to her. The lines before in which the FP expresses her desire for his kisses because of the quality of his lovemaking provide the context, and likely, the reason why she uses the EI to call him to respond.⁷⁶⁶

The next line (1:4b) similarly conveys that desire is the reason for the FP’s use of the EI in 1:4a. The text vocalises the FP as saying that the *melek* (king) has brought me into his *hăddārāy* (bedroom), being a place of privacy.⁷⁶⁷ The context suggests that this action is

⁷⁵⁹ Pope, p. 300 reasonably argues that ‘*ālāmôt* in this line should be understood as representing a ‘reference to sexual ripeness without presumption one way or another as to virginity or sexual experience’.

John Walton, ‘‘*almâ*’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), III, 415–17 (p. 417) observes one example (Isaiah 54:4) where ‘*almâ* is used for a married woman, indicating that a generalisation cannot be made that this refers to women who are virgins. Instead, Walton, p. 417 observes some commonality about being of ‘childbearing age’ in the two texts from Isaiah (7:14, 54:4) suggesting that this is a reference to age. This understanding is observed by DCH, Vol. 6, p. 428.

⁷⁶⁰ Scholars who comment on the likelihood of the DoJ and the ‘*ālāmôt* being the same include Spencer, p. 5; Murphy, p. 127; Fredericks and Estes, p. 305; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 94.

⁷⁶¹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 138.

⁷⁶² Allender and Longman, p. 48 makes the related observation that this is desire.

⁷⁶³ The quote is from Walsh, p. 125; as Provan, p. 265 comments, ‘it is not clear whether their knowledge of the man’s lovemaking is real or imagined and whether it is first-hand or second-hand knowledge’.

⁷⁶⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 5; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 92; Hess, pp. 52-53.

⁷⁶⁵ Spencer, p. 6 observes the way that the FP’s pining is expressed by EIs of 1:4a; Hess, p. 53.

⁷⁶⁶ Duguid, p. 81 notes that ‘desire seeks satisfaction’; similarly, Hess, p. 53.

⁷⁶⁷ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 90 translates *hăddārāy* as bedroom; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, p. 70 observes that this noun is used for an ‘inner room, especially a bedroom’; DCH, Vol. 3, p. 163 observes that the noun is used to refer to an ‘inner room’.

The *heder* is also the place referred to in 2 Samuel 13:10, being a place where Amnon raped Tamar, thus, a place of privacy.

in response to the Els made by the FP.⁷⁶⁸ Who is this *melek*? In this reading the king is understood to be a figurative description of the ML.⁷⁶⁹ He is in her perception like a king, 'as far as she is concerned'.⁷⁷⁰ It is the first example of the royal imagery that is used at places through the Song.⁷⁷¹

Moreover, the text continues to express the appreciation of the DoJ for the ML, but this time most likely in their own voice.⁷⁷² In 1:4c they use the cohortatives *nāgîlâ* (we will exult) and *nišmēḥāh* (we will rejoice) to praise him.⁷⁷³ And in 1:4d they, similarly to the FP in 1:2b, praise the perceptions of the ML's *dōdē* (lovemaking) as being better than wine, using the cohortative *nazkîrâ* (we will extol).⁷⁷⁴ This theme of the communal desire for the ML is then commented on in 1:4e by the FP. The text verbalises her as saying *mēšārîm* 'āhēbûkā (understandably do they love you). The adverbial sense of *mēšārîm* is well recognised amongst scholars.⁷⁷⁵ The sensual context makes this a debated word.⁷⁷⁶ The other uses of *mēšārîm* in the HS describe a range of verbs and have 'different shades of meaning' depending on context, that can include the sense of 'level way, order, justly, uprightness, straightness, equity, justice [and] integrity'.⁷⁷⁷ Different aspects of rightness

⁷⁶⁸ Commentators who read as present action, and not a past event, include Hess, p. 53; Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 92-93; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 95.

⁷⁶⁹ This is discussed in 2.4.2. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 98; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 11; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 95; Bloch and Bloch, p. 138.

⁷⁷⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 95.

⁷⁷¹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 138; Spencer, p. 6; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 11.

⁷⁷² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 95 sees the likeliest reading is that the FP and DoJ praise the ML together in this line; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 128 makes the same observation about speakers.

⁷⁷³ The object of these cohortatives are both masculine singular verbs, suggesting that the DoJ are praising the ML only, and not the couple (c.f. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 94). This is supported by the use of the masculine singular object of the verb *āhēbû* in 1:3c.

⁷⁷⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 94 makes the specific observation of the affirmation of the DoJ about their perceptions of the ML's lovemaking.

⁷⁷⁵ BDB, p. 449; Ludwig Koehler and others, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 578; DCH, Vol. 5, p. 264; Pope, p. 305, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 36; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 126.

⁷⁷⁶ Moshe Weinfeld, 'Justice and Righteousness—טָשַׁח - Expression and Meaning', in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, ed. by Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), cxxxvii, 228-246, p. 228.

mesarîm almost always appears in parallel in poetic passages and so its use without a parallel makes the meaning less clear. Also, it is the only time that *mēšārîm* is used to describe the action of 'hb. Furthermore, it is the only one of its uses in the HS in which it is used to refer to an identifiable group of people. In Isaiah 33:15 *mēšārîm* is adverbially used to describe the speech of a group of people who walk righteously, but its passage is not specifically describing a group of people, as putting forward a vision of the sort of people that God 'wants to dwell with him'; Watts, p. 498 and Hess, p. 54.

DCH, Vol. 5, p. 264 notes that an emendation can be made, based upon its use in 7:10[EN]. But such a reading in this context requires unnecessary emendations, as asserted by Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 96; Hess, p. 41.

⁷⁷⁷ Hannes Oliver, 'yāšar', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), II, 563-68 (p. 567).

are conveyed by words of this root.⁷⁷⁸ In agreement with the numerous commentators, the most appropriate contextual meaning of *mêšārîm* is understandably.⁷⁷⁹ The FP considers it completely fair that the DoJ desire the ML too.

6.4 Interpretation

6.4.1 Erotic Imperatives in Terms of Desire

It is absolutely critical that the opening words of the FP of the Song are a jussive expressing her personal want to be kissed by the ML, followed by an explanation for why she wishes to be kissed. The Song starts with the words of desire, emphasising both the importance of desire in the Song, as well as its importance for the FP, and its association with the use of the EI.⁷⁸⁰

She wants to be kissed because of her perceptions of his lovemaking which is better, more pleasurable than wine.⁷⁸¹ And she wants to be kissed because she perceives that his lovemaking is better than the aroma of his oils.⁷⁸² The comparison with wine as a symbol of pleasure within Ancient Israel, as well as the reference to his oils, emphasises that she wants a sensual experience, because of her perceptions of the sensuality of his lovemaking.⁷⁸³ This want of sensuality portrayed by the EI is something that occurs time and again in the Song. At this FP's voice, expressing her desire, opens the way for how the relationship between the lovers will be portrayed as the Song develops.

Furthermore, the expression of her desire for the ML presumably provides the reason that she calls him to take him with her and for them to flee (1:4a), using an imperative and a cohortative (two further EIs).⁷⁸⁴ The evidence for these two EIs being motivated by desire are that they follow the sensual reasons why the FP wants to be kissed by the ML (1:2-

⁷⁷⁸ Oliver, p. 564 notes the literal understanding of the verbal root *ysr* as referring to the 'physical quality that describes the linear or surface dimensions of an object or movement in relation to a (geometrical) prototype that is widely held as standard that is "right" or "regular"'.
⁷⁷⁹ Pope, p. 305; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 96; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 94; Walsh, p. 125; Provan, p. 265; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 10.

⁷⁸⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 92 summarises the power of these opening words by expressing that 'desire bursts suddenly and dramatically onto the scene'. She (p. 5) also observes the significance of these first words being the first EI as evidence for its role in the Song.
Walsh p. 1 observes how these opening words set up desire as a key theme for the rest of the text; Murphy, p. 127 makes a similar observation.

⁷⁸¹ 1:2b. Allender and Longman, p. 46; Walsh, p. 13; Fredericks and Estes, p. 305; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 127; Duguid, p. 79, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 9; Garrett, p. 128; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 91; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 93; Spencer, p. 8 observe the sensuality aspect of this comparison.

⁷⁸² 1:3a. Garrett, p. 129; Bloch and Bloch, p. 139 note the sensuality of the reference to oils.

⁷⁸³ Walsh, p. 118 observes that 'wine is the ruling metaphor for sexual pleasure in the Song', evidenced by this verse, as well as 4:10 and 5:1.

⁷⁸⁴ Allender and Longman, p. 48 observe that desire is the reason for the FP's actions here.

3c), and they precede 1:4b in which the FP tells the reader that ‘the king’ has brought her into his chambers. For all of these EIs given by the FP at the beginning of the Song, desire provides the context, and the explicit reason.

6.4.2 Media Res with Intentional Ambiguity

The Song starts in the middle of the action, in *media res*.⁷⁸⁵ The poet drops the reader into the middle of a situation. But reading from the beginning as first-time readers when no background is known deliberately creates a degree of ambiguity as a rhetorical technique. Walsh observes correctly that there is no introduction of who the characters are or what the context is.⁷⁸⁶ The reader encounters the characters and has to work out through their encounter who they think the characters are, and what they think is happening. Furthermore, the reader does not know what form of existing relationship there is between the ML and the FP. They do not know what experience the FP has of the ML’s kisses nor of his lovemaking. They do not know what his lovemaking entails, so are left to the suggestiveness of the text.⁷⁸⁷ All that they know of the relationship is constructed by their encounter with the text. The poet has created a feast for the imagination!

What is evident though is the extent of the expression for her want of his kisses.⁷⁸⁸ Maybe the FP has experienced his kisses and his lovemaking before, and so knows what they are like, how pleasurable they are.⁷⁸⁹ This seems entirely plausible by the forwardness of this EI. Alternatively, this could be a fantasy of her imagination, imagining what the kisses of this certain man might be like, and her wanting kisses because of the assumption his lovemaking must be amazing.⁷⁹⁰ It is even possible to imagine that she has already experienced the kisses of others, and so knows what kisses are like, and from that experience she now wants to experience *his* kisses. The intentional ambiguity means that any of these readings above are possible, and it will take further encounters with the text to get a more developed sense of the relationship that is being portrayed.

In addition to the expression of the FP’s want to experience the ML’s kisses (by means of the EI), the passage also tells the reader that ‘the king’ brought her into his bedroom.⁷⁹¹ In

⁷⁸⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 13; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 127; Fredericks and Estes, p. 304.

⁷⁸⁶ Walsh, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁷ See discussion of *dôdî* in 2.5.3.

⁷⁸⁸ 6.4.1.

⁷⁸⁹ Spencer, p. 6; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 10 read this passage as referring to a relationship based upon existing experience; Exum, p. 93 is perhaps slightly more cautious, saying that ‘we might imagine that he has already kissed her many times’.

⁷⁹⁰ Fredericks and Estes, p. 303 argues that her experience of *dôdê* is imaginary.

⁷⁹¹ 1:3.

this interpretation the 'king'; is used in figurative sense for the ML.⁷⁹² It is the ambiguity of the use of the word *melek* that has contributed to so many different interpretations of the Song.⁷⁹³ But he is *the* king, not *my* king, perhaps suggesting that there is some distance between her and this man at this point in the text.⁷⁹⁴ It is not as personal as the many epithets that have a first person pronominal suffix that are used for the lovers later on in the text.⁷⁹⁵ The reader is left with their first impressions about the form of existing relationship between the characters. It could be argued that this portrayal is not of a well-developed relationship, even though the FP wants his kisses. There is enough deliberate ambiguity to interpret this passage in numerous ways.

6.4.3 Name, Reputation or Character

One of the interpretative issues as to what is being portrayed here depends on the meaning of the reference to the name of the ML giving the FP pleasure.⁷⁹⁶ It was argued above that *šēm* is understood to be the character or reputation of the ML. Reading in this way means that the desire for the ML is not separable from the wider person that he is, unless of course his reputation is to do solely with his lovemaking.⁷⁹⁷ It is more likely that the ML being portrayed is both physically attractive from the women's perspective, as well as having a good reputation or good character (depending on how well the FP knows him). If this passage is read in this way, then the sexuality expressed by the FP is certainly about sexual and physical attraction. But this passage does disassociate this from the ML's reputation or character.⁷⁹⁸ He is desirable because he is good looking, and because he has got a good reputation. Perhaps he is known as one who comes from a good family.

6.4.4 The Significance of Communal Desire

The evidence for communal desire in this passage is found in 1:3c (therefore the maidens 'āhēbû you) and in 1:4e (understandably do they 'āhēbû you). There is significance to the Song portraying understandable communal desire of the ML for several reasons. Firstly, textually, it sets up the portrayal of the ML as a very attractive man, which is developed by the FP's descriptions throughout the song. Secondly, it paints a picture of a cultural world

⁷⁹² 2.4.2. Spencer, p. 6, who has a similar intentional first-time reader approach, also interprets the king in a figurative sense.

⁷⁹³ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 70.

⁷⁹⁴ *Melek* is also used in the Song in 1:12, 3:9, 11; 7:6. Interestingly, *melek* is never used with a first-person pronominal suffix.

⁷⁹⁵ See Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 29 for more personal epithets that are used.

⁷⁹⁶ 1:3b.

⁷⁹⁷ As mentioned above, these are some of the commentators who read name as referring to reputation or character: Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 10; Duguid, p. 80; Fredericks and Estes, p. 305; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 92.

⁷⁹⁸ Davidson, p. 585.

where multiple people can be attracted to the same person and that is considered understandable, because of perceptions of who he is and perceptions of his lovemaking. This is not a cultural world where each individual is only attracted to one person (for life), but a real world in which multiple people can be attracted to the same person. Importantly, the text portrays the FP approving of the communal desire of the ML.⁷⁹⁹ This is hugely significant. As Davidson puts it, in this passage, ‘eros is inclusive’.⁸⁰⁰ The FP recognises how fair it is that they desire him, because he is desirable.⁸⁰¹ To put it colloquially, he is hot!

Bearing in mind that this opening passage can be read for the first time with some degree of distance being portrayed between ML and FP, one possible way to understand communal desire might be as a group of young women having a crush, perhaps a celebrity crush, comparing notes about which members of band they find most attractive.⁸⁰² Or alternatively a group of young women sharing how attracted they are to young men in their church fellowship group. The language of communal desire is also potentially found in 1 Samuel 18:6-7, where the women of Israel compared Saul and David, Saul having slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.⁸⁰³

Later the discussion will highlight how, as well as portraying multiple people being attracted to the same person, the Song also acknowledges the potential for the FP to be attracted to other men, by its emphasis on the expression of preference.⁸⁰⁴ In this later passage, the emphasis is upon the FP not having a preference for any other man. But nonetheless, it portrays a cultural world where it is possible to be attracted to multiple people.

⁷⁹⁹ Allender and Longman, p. 48.

⁸⁰⁰ Davidson, p. 150.

⁸⁰¹ Allender and Longman, p. 48; Duguid, p. 80 describes the DoJ as the ‘arbiters of what constitutes male desirability’.

⁸⁰² Yuna Engle and Tim Kasser, ‘Why Do Adolescent Girls Idolize Male Celebrities?’, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 20.2 (2005), 263–83 (pp. 264, 275, 277)

<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558404273117>> make some interesting observations. They note the longstanding cultural phenomenon of celebrity crushes from Elvis onwards. What is interesting to note is that teenage girls who were more likely to have a celebrity as an idol were also those who had ‘more dating and boyfriend experience’.

⁸⁰³ Saul resented that David received higher praise than him (18:8). Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), While this may be associated with perceptions of power, this could be read in a communal desire sense.

⁸⁰⁴ 10.4.2.

6.4.5 The Role of the Female Protagonist's Personal Desire over the Communal Desire of the Daughters of Jerusalem

Another observation to be made here is how the FP by using the call to love by means of the EI constructs her relationship with the ML as being subtly distinct from the DoJ. While the DoJ and the FP together are portrayed in this text as sharing communal desire for the ML, the FP also makes distinctions between them and herself. She makes this distinction by her additional use of the EI. While the DoJ as a group praise the ML (1:4c) and their perceptions of his lovemaking (1:4d) using cohortatives (themselves EIs), the FP is distinct by her additional *personal* use of EIs (a jussive) in 1:2a and 1:4a (an imperative and a cohortative).⁸⁰⁵ To put it another way, they praise his lovemaking, but *she* stands out and makes claims on the ML.

In contrast to their communal desire (and inaction), her personal desire causes her to act by calling him to focus on *her*. Hers is the voice that initiates action.⁸⁰⁶ And in the process she marks herself (and her relationship) as being distinct from that of her companions.

6.4.6 The Significance that the Female Protagonist, as a Woman, Expressing these Erotic Imperatives

There is huge significance of the FP issuing the opening words of the Song, as well as that she is the one who effectively 'initiates the pursuit of the relationship' in this passage.⁸⁰⁷ She is the main character and the text opens with a woman's desire on full display to the reader within the HS, which is a remarkable and important thing.⁸⁰⁸ And the fact that she expresses her desire by means of volitional verbs to communicate – to the ML, and the reader – what she wants, is a powerful witness within the Song and the Canon.⁸⁰⁹

6.5 The Importance of the Erotic Imperative

This chapter has discussed the first uses of the EI in the Song.⁸¹⁰ Some important observations have been made: that the EI is related to desire; the desire of the FP is also associated with his reputation or character; the DoJ share communal desire for the ML;

⁸⁰⁵ Allender and Longman, p 47 interestingly rightly observe the phenomenon that the DoJ also desire the ML, but they do not comment on the fact that the DoJ desire him because of perceptions of his lovemaking.

⁸⁰⁶ Allender and Longman, p. 47 says that 'she has won his attention' in comparison to the DoJ. This is a similar observation, but the use of the EI here asserts the FP as being the primary mover by her use of it.

Fredericks and Estes, p. 305 over-emphasises the ML's role, making it his selection, while it is the FP's words that make the selection.

⁸⁰⁷ The quotation is from Allender and Longman, p. 45.

⁸⁰⁸ Spencer, p. lviii; Walsh, p. 1.

⁸⁰⁹ Walsh, pp. 1-4 notes the importance of these verses as the start of the Song within the Canon.

⁸¹⁰ 1:2-4.

and the FP makes herself distinct from the DoJ by responding to her personal desire by means of the EI. As will be demonstrated further, the EI plays a key part throughout the text in the construction of the portrayal of desire of the lovers.

Chapter 7: The Springtime passage (2:13c-17)

7.1 Introduction

This short chapter examines the use of some of the EIs and the expression of relationality in the first springtime scene of the Song, particularly focusing on the way that the text portrays the inaccessibility of the FP, as well as the role of the first refrain of mutual possession, in terms of understanding their relationship.⁸¹¹ The way that the EI is used here is different from the way that it is used in later passages, and so the portrayal sets the scene for the discussion as to how the relationship continues to develop in later chapters.

7.2 Translation and passage Context

7.2.1 Translation (2:13c-17)

ML

2:13c: Arise, my friend,

13d: my beauty, and come!

14a: My dove in the clefts of the rock

14b: in the hiding places⁸¹² of the cliff.

14c: let me see your face,

14d: let me hear your voice,

14e: for your voice is pleasant

14f: and your face⁸¹³ is lovely.

FP

15a: Catch for us the foxes,⁸¹⁴

15b: the little foxes

15c: that damage the vineyards,

15d: for our vineyards are in blossom.

16a: My lover is mine

16b: and I am his

16c He feasts⁸¹⁵ among the lilies.

⁸¹¹ 2:8-17.

⁸¹² BDB, p. 712 notes that *sēfer* can be understood as meaning a hiding place, which is the translation that Fredericks and Estes, p. 324 uses.

⁸¹³ *Mar'ē* has a literal meaning of appearance, according to BDB, p. 909.

⁸¹⁴ NIV translation also inserts the word 'for' in this line.

⁸¹⁵ *R'h* can mean to feed animals (transitive) or for animals to feed (intransitive); see (DCH, Vol. 7, p. 517, Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p 139). Hess, p. 86 is correct to observe that the latter of these seems more contextually appropriate, i.e., the ML is an animal doing the eating. Bloch and Bloch, p. 65 translate this word as 'feasts'.

17a: Until the day breathes,
 17b: and the shadows flee,
 17c: turn, my lover
 17d: and be like a gazelle or young deer
 17e: on the cleft⁸¹⁶ mountains.

7.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

The verses being discussed are part of a wider poetic ‘exhilarating’ description of springtime, being the time of abundant life.⁸¹⁷ It immediately follows the first adjuration passage of the Song, and so this, and the change in imagery, indicates a new section.⁸¹⁸ The section is described from the perspective of the FP, describing the ML’s attempts to get her to become accessible to him.⁸¹⁹

7.3 Commentary

7.3.1 The Male Lover uses Erotic Imperatives to Seek Access to the Inaccessible Female Protagonist (2:13c-2:14)

In 2:13c the ML repeats a call upon the FP for her to come outside, using the same Els (*qûmî*: arise; *lěkî*: come) that he did in 2:10. In these previous verses the ML has sought to persuade the FP to come outside of her house because it is spring.⁸²⁰ He invites her to ‘share in ... [its] delights’ by appealing to her senses.⁸²¹ There is a sense that ‘with the beauty of nature he seeks to seduce her’.⁸²² Bergant correctly notes that this calling to experience the new life of spring ‘is really calling her into love’.⁸²³ By using springtime imagery as the reason to come outside, the ML is emphasising the timeliness of the moment.⁸²⁴ It is time to find a mate.⁸²⁵

⁸¹⁶ Vulgate interpret Hebrew *bāter* as *Bether* (Pope, p. 409); LXX refers to the ‘mountains of ravines’ (Brenan et al, Pope, p. 409); ESV; NRSV, Exum, p. 120 translate as ‘cleft’ mountains.

⁸¹⁷ 2:8-17. Davidson, p. 609.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. 13.2.1 further discusses how the adjuration passages bring a section to an end.

⁸¹⁹ Spencer, p. 44.

⁸²⁰ 2:10-13. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 126. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 29; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 121 observe the use of ‘motive clauses’ following the imperatives that are indicated as such by the conjunction *kî*.

⁸²¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 127; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 29 similarly notes the use of the senses.

⁸²² Landy, p. 72; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 126.

⁸²³ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 30; Hess, p. 92 makes a similar observation, noting that while vv. 10-13 describe the natural world, and not the lovers nor their love, the imperatives in 2:10 and 13 ‘leave no doubt that this is part of a larger picture with this focus’; see also Fredericks and Estes, p. 327.

⁸²⁴ Commentators who recognise timeliness in various ways include Hess, pp. 93-94; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 12; Duguid, pp. 97-98.

⁸²⁵ Duguid, p. 98; Spencer, p. 48; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 122 describes this springtime imagery as denoting timeliness for ‘joyous lovemaking’.

Now in 2:13c, the repeat of these EIs indicate a couple of things.⁸²⁶ Firstly, the FP has not responded to the first request of the ML by his previous use of them (2:10), so she is portrayed as continuing to be at a distance to him. Secondly, they reinforce the volition of the ML for her to come outside so that she can be with him.

In the next verse (2:14) the ML uses imagery to further emphasise the FPs inaccessible to him.⁸²⁷ Previously, she has been inaccessible because she has been portrayed as being inside the house.⁸²⁸ Now he describes her as a dove in clefts of rock and in the hiding places of the cliff.⁸²⁹ Both of these places particularly stress that she is inaccessible.⁸³⁰ At this point (2:14cd) the ML uses another two further EIs in close succession showing even more expression of his want of FP. However, unlike the EIs in 2:10, 13, where there is an *implied* explanation as to why he wants her to come outside by the springtime imagery, these two imperatives (2:14cd) make it clear that he wants *her*, being words that express his desire.⁸³¹ *Har'îniy* (let me see) expresses his want to see her face;⁸³² *hašmî'îni* (let me hear) expresses his want to hear her voice. Furthermore, in 2:14ef both of the EIs of 2:14cd are associated with the conjunction *kî*, providing a reason as to why the ML wants hear her voice and see her face.⁸³³ Her voice is *'ārēb* (sweet) and her face is *nā'we* (beautiful).⁸³⁴ Spencer rightly comments that 'he simply wants to see her as she is'.⁸³⁵

7.3.2 Commentary: an Imperative Calling for Protection (2:15)

The next verse is one of the most elusive verses in the Song and has baffled commentators over the ages, since it is not clear who is speaking and why they should call for the strange response that they do in the context of this passage.⁸³⁶ In 2:15 the

⁸²⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 126; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 140; Hess, p. 95 note that the repeated use of the imperatives forms an inclusio.

⁸²⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 127; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 30; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141; Fredericks and Estes, p. 328; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 123; Munro, p. 24.

⁸²⁸ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141.

⁸²⁹ *Seter* is used in the sense of a hiding place. Hess, p. 86, Andrew E. Hill, 'sātar', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), III, 301–3 (p. 302).

⁸³⁰ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 30; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 123. C.f. Jeremiah 49:16.

⁸³¹ Hess, p. 96.

⁸³² *Mar'a* can refer to her face, her appearance or form; Jackie A. Naude, 'rā'ā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), III, 1007–1015 (p. 1012). Whether the male lover is calling to see her face to her overall appearance perhaps matters little. The point is that he wants to see her.

⁸³³ Hess, p. 96; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 123.

⁸³⁴ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 578 sees *nā'we* as beautiful.

⁸³⁵ Spencer, p. 51.

⁸³⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 117; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 128; extensive discussion in Pope, p. 403.

speaker says *ʿeḥēzû-lanû* (catch for us) *šû ʿālîm* (foxes), *šû ʿālîm qēṭannîm* (little foxes) *mēḥabbēlîm* (damage) *kēramîm* (vineyards). The first interpretative matter is the speaker. Since the ML uses the imperative *ḥašmîʾînî ʿēt-qôlēk* (let me hear your voice) in 2:14, the most logical reading is that the FP is speaking in response to this request, even if it is a strange response to give.⁸³⁷

The next matter is who is being addressed. The verb is a second person masculine plural.⁸³⁸ Here this is read as the FP addressing the DoJ, because the plural form is more suggestive of a group than a single person.⁸³⁹ It does not matter that the verb is of a masculine form, since this form is probably used to address the DoJ at other points in the text.⁸⁴⁰ They are the audience that the FP consistently engages with in the Song.⁸⁴¹ If she is the speaker, then them being the recipient is coherent.

Moreover, the next matter is who or what are the foxes. These little foxes *mēḥabbēlîm* (damage) the vineyards.⁸⁴² The FP goes on to state the reason for catching them is ‘for our vineyards are in blossom’. Together, the imperative ‘catch for us’ and the reference to ‘our vineyards’ suggests a sense of joint ownership of the wish for the foxes to be caught by ‘us’, and that either there are multiple vineyards with multiple owners being referred to by ‘our’, or multiple vineyards under shared ownership.⁸⁴³

In 1:7 the FP says that ‘my own vineyard I have not kept’.⁸⁴⁴ Commentators note that this can be taken as double entendre, referring to a literal vineyard, as well as the woman’s sexuality in some way.⁸⁴⁵ The imagery of the vineyard is a wonderfully abundant image, with the fruitfulness of the vine being a sustaining part of ANE life.⁸⁴⁶ If the FP is

⁸³⁷ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 128; Provan, p. 288; Fox, p. 256 observe the coherency of the FP speaking here.

C.f. Garrett, p. 160 who suggests that the DoJ speak here.

⁸³⁸ Cf. some scholars interpret this as referring to the ML, e.g., Luter, 2:15; Fredericks and Estes, p. 331; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 31. However, the few times that a masculine plural verb is used in the Song can also be read as referring to the DoJ.

⁸³⁹ Keel, p. 108 notes that a group is being addressed here. Bloch and Bloch, p. 157 suggest that a male group is being addressed here, e.g., the brothers, but it would be strange to introduce characters of whom the readers of the Song are not aware.

⁸⁴⁰ Masculine plural imperatives are used in 2:5 ‘sustain me’, ‘refresh me’ by the FP to address the DoJ. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 116; Spencer, p. 52, Fredericks and Estes, p. 321.

⁸⁴¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 7.

⁸⁴² *Qātān* (little) can refer to refer to young age or small size. DCH, Vol. 7, pp. 240-241. Both work within this context. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 129 reads them as ‘young ones’.

⁸⁴³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 141 notes the plural group.

⁸⁴⁴ The imagery of the vineyard has been previously used thrice in the Song, twice in 1:7 and once in 1:14. It is then used in 7:13, 8:11 (twice) and 8:12.

⁸⁴⁵ Munro, p. 99.

⁸⁴⁶ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 15 sees the relationship between vineyards and ‘female sexual fecundity’; Munro, p. 100.

addressing the DoJ in 2:15, then the reference to 'our vineyards are in bloom' includes them and their vineyards.⁸⁴⁷ Reading in this way means that the FP does not use 'our vineyards' to refer to the ML and her owning more than one vineyard. This makes most sense, if the imagery is used in some way to refer to female sexuality.⁸⁴⁸

Bearing in mind that animal imagery is used to describe the ML in this passage, the foxes might best be understood to be other men that are interested in the FP.⁸⁴⁹ In her discussion about desire, Walsh argues how foxes are 'little animals [that] listen to their own desires'.⁸⁵⁰ That is probably the tone of the passage here, since the foxes are presumably ruining the vineyards in pursuit of the grapes.⁸⁵¹ It also juxtaposes the ML in this scene, also seeking his desire, demonstrated by the whole of this wider springtime passage.⁸⁵²

But this leaves the question as to whom the 'us' refers to in the imperative 'catch for us', in addressing the DoJ and calling them to catch the foxes. Spencer sees this as meaning that the FP acts as supplicant, speaking on her own terms and on the ML's behalf.⁸⁵³ If this is the case, then this is the first time the FP speaks on behalf of the ML and her using of a first-person plural pronoun, which is significant.⁸⁵⁴ She is requesting that the DoJ catch for them the foxes.⁸⁵⁵ This would presumably reduce the impact that these foxes had on the FP, and enable her to focus on her lover.⁸⁵⁶ And Spencer also implies that here the FP is encouraging the DoJ to seek to get men for themselves.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁴⁷ Spencer, p. 53.

⁸⁴⁸ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 15; Pope, pp. 326-8; Fox, p. 102; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 128; Bloch and Bloch, p. 41.

⁸⁴⁹ He is described as a gazelle or young deer in v. 9.

Scholars who interpret foxes as referring to other men include Spencer, p. 53, Keel, p. 110; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 129, Provan, p. 288; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 31.

C.f. Garrett, p. 161, Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 124-125 who read as 'anything that prevent the young couple from coming into full bloom'.

⁸⁵⁰ Walsh, p. 80.

⁸⁵¹ Walsh, p. 80; Garrett, p. 160 notes that 'in the ancient world, foxes were notorious for stealing grapes from the vineyards'.

⁸⁵² Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 30.

⁸⁵³ Spencer, p. 52 points out that the plural use of 'our land' in 2:12 suggests that 'us' may here to refer to the couple. Pope, p. 402. Hess, p. 97 similarly sees the couple speaking here.

⁸⁵⁴ Prior to this point in the Song, first-person plural pronouns are used in 1:16 (our couch), 1:17 (our house, our rafters) and 2:9 (our wall - which does not refer to the male lover). Longman, *NICOT*, p. 108 observes that the first-person plural possessive pronouns in 1:16 and 1:17 do not mean that they own the couch, house and rafters, but that they describe the place where their intimate encounter takes place.

⁸⁵⁵ Spencer, p. 52.

⁸⁵⁶ Spencer, p. 52.

⁸⁵⁷ Spencer, p. 52; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 130.

This argument can be built on by looking at the verb of root *'hz* that is used for 'catch', 'hold', 'seize', 'grab'.⁸⁵⁸ Later it will be shown that in 3:4 *'hz* is used for the FP's hold of the ML, stating that she will not let him go.⁸⁵⁹ Exum makes the following observation from her feminist perspective:

Young men can roam about freely in search of romance, like foxes romping through the vineyards. They want our favors, and we want theirs, but we [women] are not so free as they are to dally. The important thing for us is not to enjoy the random fox but to catch a fox for our very own (each of us, her own fox). These free and easy young men need to be caught, seized hold of and brought home.⁸⁶⁰

7.3.3 Commentary: The First Refrain of Mutual Possession (2:16ab)

For the first-time reader, it might be expected that what follows is linked to the imperative calling for protection that has just been used.⁸⁶¹ The text says that 'my lover is mine and I am his'. There is no reason to assume a change in speaker here, so the FP makes this declaration. Importantly, this is the first time in the Song that either lover describes the nature of the relationality between them. Prior to this the FP mainly refers to him as 'my lover'.⁸⁶² And he refers to her as 'my friend'.⁸⁶³ But this is specifically the first time that she refers how they relate to each other, in one statement. Hess says that in this verse the FP 'defines' the relationship.⁸⁶⁴ She uses the language of ownership to describe the relationship between her and her lover.⁸⁶⁵ In doing so, she is expressing a sense of mutuality and egalitarianism.⁸⁶⁶ This refrain of mutual possession is a key point in the text, because it perhaps expresses the FP's own realisation of her relationality with the ML.⁸⁶⁷

It will become apparent to the first-time reader that this is not the only time that the FP will use an expression like this.⁸⁶⁸ But for this first use, an important observation needs to be made. This first refrain has two main clauses: 'my lover is mine' and 'I am his'. The first-

⁸⁵⁸ DCH, Vol. 1, p. 186.

⁸⁵⁹ A. H. Konkel, 'āhaz', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 354–58 (p. 354); Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 130.

⁸⁶⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 130.

⁸⁶¹ Commentators who link 2:16 to their interpretation of the previous verse include Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 130; Luter, 6:3.

⁸⁶² *Dôdî* (lover) is used in 1:13; 1:14; 1:16; 2:3; 2:8; 2:9 and 2:10 up till this point. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 32 notes this. The FP also has addresses him as 'you whom my soul desires' (1:7).

⁸⁶³ *Ra'yatî* (my friend) is found in 1:9; 1:15; 2:2; 2:10; 2:13 up till this point. Bergant, p. 32 notes this.

⁸⁶⁴ Hess, p. 98.

⁸⁶⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 125; Hess, p. 98.

⁸⁶⁶ Hess, p. 99; Keel, p. 114 note the mutuality that is being expressed. Davidson, p. 569 observes the egalitarianism.

⁸⁶⁷ 7.4.2.

⁸⁶⁸ This is the first of three refrains of mutual possession. See also 6:3 and 7:10.

time reader does not know that the second clause will come after the first. As Hess comments, ‘only with the last word does it become clear that the intent is to balance the relationship with the affirmation of mutual possession’.⁸⁶⁹ It will be argued later why the ordering of these clauses is particularly important, compared to the later two different refrains of mutual possession.⁸⁷⁰

7.3.4 Commentary: Erotic Imperative of simile (2:16c-17)

Having affirmed the relationality between her and her lover (2:16ab), the FP describes (2:16c) the ML as *r’h* (feasting) on the *šôšanîm* (lilies), symbolising ‘some act of intimacy’.⁸⁷¹ This animal imagery recalls the ML being described as a *šēbî* (gazelle) or ‘*ōper* (young deer).⁸⁷² 2:17cd uses this imagery explicitly again, linking it with two imperatives in close proximity to each other, the first *sōb* (turn), followed by *dēmē-lēkā* (be like) a gazelle or young deer, upon the mountains of *bāter*.

The earlier animal imagery described the ML ‘leaping upon the mountains’ and ‘bounding over the hills’ to be with the FP.⁸⁷³ This imagery of leaping and bounding created a sense of ‘excitement and eagerness’.⁸⁷⁴ They are verbs too that involve energy, especially when they involve leaping and bounding over hills and mountains, to overcome that distance that separates the lovers.⁸⁷⁵ This perceived excitement of the ML by the FP at his coming to see her, as well as her excitement, is heightened in the way that the FP communicated his approach.⁸⁷⁶ The description also alludes to his visual attractiveness as a gazelle or

⁸⁶⁹ Hess, p. 99.

⁸⁷⁰ 10.4.4, 11.4.2.

⁸⁷¹ The notes of 7.2.1 observe that *r’h* has two independent roots which means both to make animals graze or to be an animal that grazes. The second seems the most contextually appropriate reading.

Longman, *NICOT*, p. 125 describes the meaning of this line in this way. It is unclear for the first-time reader what is being referred to by this poetic language, but having just expressed the refrain of mutual possession, an intimate meaning seems particularly likely.

⁸⁷² 2:9.

⁸⁷³ 2:9.

⁸⁷⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 119 and Luter, 2:8.

⁸⁷⁵ Garrett, pp. 158-159 notes the way that energy is being portrayed here. Spencer, p. 44 says that ‘he pursues her with unbounded energy ... befitting the youthful cervine image’. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 120 makes the observation about distance.

⁸⁷⁶ The communication involves interjections by the FP. Paul J Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI.: Brazos, 2011), p. 64; Garrett, pp. 158-159.

young deer.⁸⁷⁷ Several commentators observe that desire is being expressed by excitement of the FP by her description.⁸⁷⁸

Moreover, the ELs in 2:17 call the ML to turn and be like a gazelle or young deer on the mountains. In this reading he turns to herself.⁸⁷⁹ And a time limit to this is given for the EL of simile for this to happen until 'the day breathes and shadows flee', perhaps suggesting from night until morning.⁸⁸⁰ While some commentators take the mountains to refer to a physical typological place, it is unclear as to where that would be.⁸⁸¹ Instead, as this reference to the mountains is used in the imagery of a simile, a figurative erotic reading seems more appropriate. *Btr* is used in Genesis 15:10 to refer to cutting in two, as in the way that Abraham cut the sacrificial animals.⁸⁸² This has reasonably led many scholars to potentially recognise it as referring to the imagery of the cleavage of the FP, meaning that she is calling him as an excited, attractive deer to 'play with her breasts'.⁸⁸³

7.4 Interpretation

7.4.1 The Interest of Other Men in the FP as Suggested in 2:15

The potential reference to the presence of other men in the world of the Song is important. The reading of the fox imagery which sees the foxes as portraying other desirous men as being some sort of threat to the FP (and ML) portrays a world where there are other men

⁸⁷⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 121 observes the wordplay of the homonym *šēbî* (gazelle and beauty).

Walsh, p. 81; Pope, p. 390; Hess, p. 89; Michael S. Moore and Michael L. Brown, 'Sebi', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 739–40 (p. 740) all note the physical attractiveness of the deer imagery.

Pope, p. 390 also sees the physical appearance of the deer, as well as his approach together conveying the imagery of the simile.

⁸⁷⁸ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 29; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 140; Spencer, p. 44.

Moore and Brown, p. 740 also observe the potential erotic connotations of deer in both Arabic poetry and Mesopotamian incantations.

⁸⁷⁹ Scholars debate which direction the ML is being called to turn to, whether away from herself (Hess, p. 99) or towards herself (Longman, *NICOT*, p. 126). Given the reading of the mountain imagery which follows, and the context of the previous verse, the second response seems to be the more expected reading. However, the verb in this context has a sense of ambiguity (Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 131), and might imply that the FP is sending her away, though this seems less likely. Determining the direction is dependent upon the meaning of the mountain imagery. If they refer to the mountains from where the ML came, then the imagery could be read as her sending him away. But this perhaps seems odd (Hess, p. 100) at this point of realisation (7.3.3) for the FP.

⁸⁸⁰ Scholars debate whether this imagery of the day breathing and shadows fleeing refers to the evening or morning, as the imagery has the potential to be read either way. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 126 provides discussion of the debates. This is also complicated further by the prepositional phrase, which could be read as 'until', 'when' or 'while'.

⁸⁸¹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 194 notes the obscurity if this was a literal-typological reference.

⁸⁸² DCH, Vol. 2, p. 291; BDB, p. 144.

⁸⁸³ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 126; Goulder, p. 25 reads in this way, and assumes that what the ML is being called to is 'petting'.

out there, all with the potential to be a lover of the FP.⁸⁸⁴ These men seek the attention of the FP, hoping that she will take an interest in them in return. It is a world where multiple men are not afraid of trying their luck at catching the FP for themselves this springtime, the time for mating. This again reinforces a world where the complexity of desire and relationality are illustrated, in that multiple men can be interest in, and try to get, the same woman for themselves.

There is one particular consequences of this interpretation. The reading of the imperative here is potentially an active encouragement for the DoJ to get men for themselves.⁸⁸⁵ They are to catch the foxes, because in doing so they take the men's focus from the FP. It is a point where the FP potentially encourages the other women to be like her, for she sees them as having the ability, and opportunity, of catching foxes.

7.4.2 A Recognition of Relationality in Verses 15-17

The imperative calling for protection (2:15), followed immediately by the first refrain of mutual possession (2:16), and then followed by the EI of simile together show some development in the recognition of relationality between the FP and ML. In 2:15 the FP potentially speaks on behalf of the ML for the first-time (by the first-person plural pronoun) and immediately afterwards she vocalises the first refrain of mutual possession.⁸⁸⁶ Read in this way, there is a link between the two. The FP speaks on behalf of her lover, and then makes the observation that her lover is hers and she is his.

It seems likely that with the use of the first-person plural pronoun, followed by the first refrain of mutual possession, there is a verbalised realisation as to how her relationship with the man is developing. In the calling for the DoJ to catch foxes (2:15), she is portrayed as affirming that she has got a man for herself. And she realises this to the extent that she can call the DoJ to act on behalf of them, as well as then describing their relationship with the first refrain of mutual possession.⁸⁸⁷ In the context of her verbalised realisation, the FP then probably invites the ML to herself, using the EI of simile (2:17), bearing in mind that he has been using EIs to gain access to her throughout the earlier part of the passage (2:10-14).

⁸⁸⁴ 2:15. 7.3.2.

⁸⁸⁵ Spencer, p. 52; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 130.

⁸⁸⁶ 7.3.2.

⁸⁸⁷ 7.3.2-7.3.3.

Moreover, Davidson observes correctly how the use of the refrains of mutual possession verbalise a form of 'developing security' in this relationship.⁸⁸⁸ This first landmark declaration (2:16) verbalises the FP recognising the security she has in this relationship. This security is affirmed by the possible relationship between the imperative of 2:15 and 2:16. What is essential to observe is that up till this point, this security has not been explicitly stated. Some commentators read the statement of mutual possession and assume that the security being portrayed by this verse applies to everything that comes before. Bergant writes,

Every passionate sentiment, every erotic description in the Song of Songs, flows from or exemplifies the reality represented in this simple but profound declaration— "He is mine, and I am his."⁸⁸⁹

But the first-time reader of the Song might draw different conclusions. Bergant's statement here is an assumption from a particular 'flat' reading of the Song. Before this point the level of security is not explicitly asserted. This is not to say that there is no sense of security being portrayed by what comes before. One might assume that the potential sexual behaviour being portrayed before requires some level of relational security. But this is not explicitly stated, and as much of the imagery has focused on physical appearance (e.g., 1:9) or some sensual experience (e.g., 2:3), it may be overstating to assume the growing level of security until it is explicitly stated.⁸⁹⁰ This 'developing security' in the relationship will become clearer as the Song progresses, including through the use of the EI.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁸ Davidson, p. 600.

⁸⁸⁹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 32.

⁸⁹⁰ The one image that some scholars may read as showing security is found in 2:3, where the female protagonist describes how 'with great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste'. However, as Hess, p. 78 has noted, the imagery of being in his shadow can be read as referring to the pleasure of being close to him.

⁸⁹¹ Davidson, p. 600.

Chapter 8: Overcoming obstacles (3:1-5, 5:2-8)

8.1 Introduction

At two points the Song portrays the FP trying to overcome obstacles, which must happen for the portrayal of the relationship to continue.⁸⁹² This chapter discusses the portrayal of these obstacles - both being found in night-time passages - and through this discussion it will consider the way that the EI is used to portray the relationship between the lovers.

To enable discussion of 3:1-5 and 5:2-8 both individually and comparatively, firstly translations are given for both of these passages, followed by commentary discussion of each passage. It will then provide a comparative commentary discussion (particularly considering the role of the EI).

8.2 Translations

8.2.1 Translation (3:1-5)

FP

3:1a: Upon my bed at night⁸⁹³

1b: I sought him whom my soul desires.

1c: I sought him, but did not find him.⁸⁹⁴

2a: I must⁸⁹⁵ get up now and go about the city,

2b: in the streets and in the public squares.⁸⁹⁶

2c: I must⁸⁹⁷ seek him whom my soul desires.

2d: I sought him, but did not find him.

3a: The watchmen found me as they went about the city.

3b: Have you seen him whom my soul desires?

4a: I had just passed them

4b: when I found him whom my soul desires.

4c: I held him and would not let him go

⁸⁹² Garrett, p. 171 observes from his reading of 3:1-5 that 'in reality, sexual pleasure and the fulfilment of a relationship require effort, maturity, active participation, and a determination to overcome obstacles'.

⁸⁹³ 3:1a This sequence uses the plural word *lêlôt* (night) that is translated as having a singular meaning, being a verb of generalisation. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 145; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 128, Pope, p. 415.

⁸⁹⁴ The LXX contains an additional line ('I called him, but he gave no answer'). This line is also found in 5:6 in MT.

⁸⁹⁵ NASB.

⁸⁹⁶ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 128 notes how *rêhōbôt* could refer to public squares or open city spaces; see James D. Price, 'rêhōb', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 1092–93.

⁸⁹⁷ NASB.

4d: till I had brought him into my mother's house
 4e: and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
 5a: I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
 5b: by the gazelles or the wild does,
 5c: do not incite or excite love until the time is right.

8.2.2 Translation (5:2-8)

FP

5:2a: I slept, but my heart was awake.
 2b: A sound!⁸⁹⁸ My lover is knocking!
 2c: "Open to me, my sister, my friend,
 2d: my dove, my perfect one,
 2e: for my head is wet with dew,
 2f: my locks⁸⁹⁹ with the moisture⁹⁰⁰ of the night."
 3a: I had stripped off my robe,⁹⁰¹
 3b: must I put it on again?⁹⁰²
 3c: I had washed my feet,
 3d: must I dirty them?⁹⁰³
 4a: My lover thrust his hand through⁹⁰⁴ the hole,
 4b: the core of my being⁹⁰⁵ thrilled for him!
 5a: I arose to open to my lover,
 5b: and my hands dripped myrrh,
 5c: my fingers with liquid myrrh,
 5d: on the handles of the bolt.
 6a: I opened to my lover,
 6b: But my lover had turned⁹⁰⁶ and was gone.

⁸⁹⁸ *Qôl* literally translates as sound (Murphy, p. 165); ESV uses this translation.

⁸⁹⁹ *Qêwûşşôt* is hapax (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 165); DCH, Vol. 7, p. 237 translates as locks.

⁹⁰⁰ James Swanson, 'rāsîs', in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997) translates *rêsîsê* as moisture.

⁹⁰¹ Duguid, p. 63; NIV; Hess, p. 161 also translate *küttānt* as robe. Murphy, p. 165 notes that this noun refers to 'the main undergarment of both men and women'.

⁹⁰² A rare interrogative adverb 'êkakâ, while only used elsewhere in the HS in Esther 8:6 marks each of these lines as having a question in them. This adverb is also found in 5:3d. DCH, Vol. 1, p. 5:3. A similar translation is used by Fredericks and Estes, p. 364; Hess, p. 170 - 171; Duguid, p. 63.

⁹⁰³ See discussion of notes for 5:3b.

⁹⁰⁴ *Min* should be read as 'through'. See Pope, p. 518.

⁹⁰⁵ JB translates *mê'a* as 'the core of my being'.

⁹⁰⁶ DCH, Vol. 3, p. 258 notes that *hmq* in its other use (Jeremiah 31:22) as being 'turn hither and thither'. But here it is qal form, so it is read simply as 'to turn'. Exum, p. 183.

6c: I died inside⁹⁰⁷ when he turned away.⁹⁰⁸

6d: I sought him, but did not find him.

6e: I called him, but he gave no answer.

7a: The watchmen found me

7b: as they went about the city.

7c: They beat me, they wounded me,

7d: They took away my cloak,⁹⁰⁹

7e: those watchmen of the walls.

8a: I adjure you, O Daughters of Jerusalem,

8b: If you find my love, tell him this:

8c: I am sick with love.

8.3 Textual context of 3:1-5

8.3.1 Form, Structure and Setting

This passage is situated immediately after the ‘springtime’ passage, which has a narrative feel to it, with its ‘narrative movement, ... sense of closure, a tension and a resolution’.⁹¹⁰

The refrain at the end of 2:17 marks a break between these two passages.⁹¹¹ In 3:1-5 the text continues to present the first person perspective of the FP and it also has a narrative feel to it.⁹¹² However, unlike the previous passage where the FP addresses the ML, here he does not speak.⁹¹³ Instead, the passage provides a description of the FP seeking and finding him.⁹¹⁴

The setting of this passage, which makes it similar to 5:2-8, is night-time. The FP is described as being on her bed, and the absence of the ML leads her to seek him in the

⁹⁰⁷ Duguid, p. 64 similarly translates *yāšē’ā* as ‘almost died’. See discussion in 8.7.1.

⁹⁰⁸ *Dabbērō* is read here as having root verb *dbr* ‘to turn’ (see DCH, Vol. 2, p. 396, *dbr* III), instead of *dbr* ‘to speak’. This reading is noted by Keel, p. 194; Pope, p. 525; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 171; Duguid, p. 127.

⁹⁰⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 165 observes the uncertainty regarding the meaning of *rēdīdi*. This is used elsewhere only in Isaiah 3:23. DCH, Vol. 7, p. 420 suggests ‘veil, shawl, headcloth, mantle, [or] cloak’ as possible translations.

⁹¹⁰ The springtime imagery passage is 2:8-17 and is discussed in Chapter 7. Quotation is from Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 123.

⁹¹¹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 335. Contra Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 123, who argues that this passage should be linked to 2:8-17, because of its similarity to 5:2-6 in terms of one lover calling the other outside, 2:8-17 and 5:2-6 are sufficiently different in content to see these as being different ‘events’ at different points in the lovers’ relationships. 2:8-17 does not necessitate a link with 3:1-5.

⁹¹² The lack of change of speaking has led Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 119-138 to consider this passage to be a continuation of 2:8-17, being, by her labelling, ‘The Woman’s first Long Speech’. Exum, p. 123 discusses the narrative feel of 3:1-5. Spencer, p. 59 observes a similar narrative feel to this passage.

⁹¹³ Keel, p. 119.

⁹¹⁴ Davidson, p. 579; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 127.

city streets. Commentators debate whether this passage should be classed as a dream sequence.⁹¹⁵ The two main reasons for this are, firstly, that the FP is upon her *miškābî* (bed) and it is *lêlôt* (night); and secondly, the events portrayed are seemingly an unusual thing for a woman to do. But neither of these reasons mean that this passage must to be seen as a dream. The bed is merely the location where she is.⁹¹⁶ And behaviour considered unusual does not mean that it cannot happen. Unusual behaviour raises useful questions as to what extent she challenges social norms by her behaviour. Bergant is justified in saying that ‘despite some of the uncharacteristic behaviour of the woman, it sounds like an actual event’.⁹¹⁷ The text does not make any serious implication that this passage is a dream.⁹¹⁸ But as this text is imaginative poetry, in many ways the distinction perhaps does not necessarily matter.⁹¹⁹

8.3.2 Overview of the Erotic Imperative in this passage

This passage uses three consecutive cohortatives verbs (*’āqûmâ*: I will get up; *’āsôbēbâ*: I will go about; *’ābaqšâ*: I will seek) all in 3:2. Through these the FP conveys determination and purpose.⁹²⁰ Exum makes the observation that these cohortatives can be read as an example of a verbalised decision making.⁹²¹ The FP asserts what she is going to do, and then in the following line, she does what she says she is going to do.

8.4 Commentary 3:1-5

8.4.1 What Happens in this Passage?

3:1 begins with the FP telling the reader that is she is ‘upon her bed at night’, a place where one might expect lovemaking to take place.⁹²² Here she sought (*biqqaštî*) the ML, but she tells the reader he is not there, as she found (*mēšā ’tî*) him not. The repeated use of *biqqaštî* suggests that this is what this passage is going to be about, a quest to find him.⁹²³ But the verb also has a potential yearning connotation, found for example, in Psalm 27:4, Jeremiah 2:33 and 5:1⁹²⁴. This yearning makes contextual sense of the FP wanting her ML to be with her on the bed.⁹²⁵

⁹¹⁵ Duguid, p. 101 says that the passage has a ‘dreamlike quality’; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 113 touches upon the interpretive discussion.

⁹¹⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 145.

⁹¹⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 34.

⁹¹⁸ Garrett, p. 174.

⁹¹⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 129; Duguid, p. 101; Keel, p. 120; Spencer, p. 60.

⁹²⁰ Garrett, p. 171; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 145.

⁹²¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 136.

⁹²² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 128; William C. Williams, ‘miškāb’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1997), II, 1129–30 (p. 1129).

⁹²³ Hess, p. 101.

⁹²⁴ Keel, p. 122; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 34.

⁹²⁵ Keel, p. 122; Cf. Hess, p. 102.

The reason for his absence is not explained in the text. Either he is usually not there at night (i.e. they do not usually share a bed) or else he would usually be there, but is not.⁹²⁶ Bearing in mind the ML's calling upon the FP in 2:8-17, it seems likely that they do not usually live together.⁹²⁷ It may well be that the lovers cannot be fully together at this point, i.e. they are unmarried.⁹²⁸ What is emphasised in 3:1b is her deep desire to be with him, expressed by the verb *'āhābā* and its object *napšī*.⁹²⁹ As Longman observes, 'he is named by her desire'.⁹³⁰ In 3:1, he, the one that she is holistically passionate about, is not there. From the FP's perspective this is an obstacle that she seeks to address.

After saying that she did not find him on her bed, the FP uses the EI (in the form of the three cohortatives), expressing her decision to go and find him, and her urgency to do this.⁹³¹ A particle of entreaty *nā'* (now) further emphasises her urgency and the expression of her desire.⁹³² Furthermore, the proximity of 'I sought him but did not find him' to these three successive cohortative verbs links the obstacle (him not being there) to her response (*'āqûmā*, *'āsôbēbā*, *'ābaqšā*). The use of the po'lel form of the verb (*'āsôbēbā*: go about) portrays further the intensity of her resolve.⁹³³

The place that she goes around is a *îr* (city) with *sēwāqîm* (streets) and *rēḥôbôt* (public squares).⁹³⁴ Although the FP expresses her decision to seek him by the third cohortative (*'ābaqšā*), the text reiterates that she still could not find him (3:2d).⁹³⁵ Instead in 3:3 the FP is found (*mēšā'û*) by the watchmen, and their appearance comes as a surprise for the first-time reader of the Song.⁹³⁶ She asks them had they seen her lover, using her passionate epithet for him. They give no response -- they are silent -- suggesting that they had no answer to give or she was not prepared to wait for a response.⁹³⁷ They do not help

⁹²⁶ Hess, p. 102 suggests his support for the former view; Griffiths, p. 75 supports the latter view.

⁹²⁷ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, pp. 230, 233; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 59 observe that the lovers have different houses.

⁹²⁸ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 233.

⁹²⁹ This epithet has already been used by the FP to speak of her lover in 1:7. See discussion of *'hb* word group in 2.5.2.

⁹³⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 129.

⁹³¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 136 notes the decision-making aspect. Davidson, p. 579 notes how the NASB translates this, using the word 'must' to emphasise her intentionality. This has been adopted in the translation of this thesis.

⁹³² Davidson, p. 579.

⁹³³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 145; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 136. This also acts as a contrast to the qal form of the verb *sôbēbîm* describing watchmen in v. 3.

⁹³⁴ 3:2. This is the first mention of the city in the Song. Griffiths, p. 75.

⁹³⁵ 3:1d is repeated in 3:2d, 'she sought (*biqqaštî*) him but did not find (*mēšā'û*) him. Hess, p. 104 observes the text conveying the problem of him not being there.

⁹³⁶ Garrett, p. 171.

⁹³⁷ Hess, p. 104, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 136. If they had no answer to give this may be because they do not know who he is (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 113) or they have not seen him (Hess, p.

her, neither do they obstruct her.⁹³⁸ However, 3:4 presents a resolution to the problem of him missing, since just after passing the watchmen, she finds him.⁹³⁹

After the FP tells the reader that she has found him, it immediately says 'I held him and would not let him go, till I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me'.⁹⁴⁰ The FP again initiates an action responding to the situation. Longman observes, 'she is no passive wallflower waiting for the advances of the more active male'.⁹⁴¹ The reference to her mother's chamber should be read as being 'a place associated with intimacies'.⁹⁴² In today's world, thinking about the sex life of our parents might be considered revolting, but this does not seem to be the case for the world of the Song.⁹⁴³ Bergant notes that 'the mother is described as the one who conceived, not the one who gave birth', establishing the importance of this place as one of sexual intercourse.⁹⁴⁴ It was a place where her mother had experienced sexual intimacy like the passion the FP now experiences.⁹⁴⁵ Munro comments on the privacy and security of such a place, in comparison to the city streets.⁹⁴⁶ Holding him so tightly and fervently, until she brought him to this particularly intimate location indicates that she does not want them to be separated again, until her desire for him can be fulfilled.⁹⁴⁷

This experience is followed in 3:5 by the second adjuration passage in which the FP addresses the DoJ, adjuring them, 'by the gazelles or the wild does' not to 'incite or excite love until it is ready'.⁹⁴⁸

8.5 Interpretation 3:1-5

8.5.1 Absence as the Obstacle in this Passage

In this passage, the key issue is the obstacle that the FP seeks to address, that the ML is simply not with her, introduced to the reader by the words 'I sought him, but did not find him', and then reinforced by the words, 'I called him, but he gave no answer'. It is an example of the seeking and finding motif in the Song.⁹⁴⁹ The number of uses of the words

104).

⁹³⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 157.

⁹³⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 137.

⁹⁴⁰ 3:4cd.

⁹⁴¹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 130.

⁹⁴² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 131. Fredericks and Estes, p. 335 observes the 'undeniable sexual overtones' of this place.

⁹⁴³ Spencer, p. 211.

⁹⁴⁴ BDB, p. 247 notes meanings as 'conceive, become pregnant'; Bergant, p. 35.

⁹⁴⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 137; Keel p. 124.

⁹⁴⁶ Munro, p. 70; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 131; Fredericks and Estes, p. 335.

⁹⁴⁷ Fredericks and Estes, p. 335 makes the observation that she does not want to lose him again.

⁹⁴⁸ 13.2.4.

⁹⁴⁹ Davidson, p. 579.

seek and find demonstrate this motif: Firstly, she seeks him, but does not *find* him; then the watchmen *find* her instead; then, she finds her lover; and lastly, she does not let him go (so that he cannot become absent again).⁹⁵⁰

Significantly, this is the first time in the Song when the absence of the ML, by the fact that she is unable to find him, is specifically communicated to the audience.⁹⁵¹ Here she specifically states his absence, since he is not alongside her in bed, where she desires him to be. Thus, the obstacle that she has to overcome in this passage is simply his absence. And the whole passage describes her seeking to overcome that obstacle.⁹⁵²

8.5.2 Strangeness of the Behaviour of the Female Protagonist

The FP's behaviour in this passage is often perceived as being odd.⁹⁵³ At night the city is a potential place of danger, highlighted perhaps by the presence of the watchmen.⁹⁵⁴ But it could be even more dangerous for a woman. Keel notes how the Middle Assyrian law code only permitted women on the streets for particular reasons during the day, and so a woman found on the streets at night would have been suspicious.⁹⁵⁵

Some scholars suggest the FP might be mistook for a prostitute in this passage, her wandering the city streets at night looking for her lover, leading them to draw that conclusion.⁹⁵⁶ Scholars note Hosea 2:7, where Israel is portrayed as a woman chasing the Baals (her lovers).⁹⁵⁷ They also more interestingly note Proverbs 7:10, where the woman is described as being dressed as a prostitute, going around the streets and squares of the city.⁹⁵⁸ It would be fair to say that there is a similarity between Proverbs 7:10 and this passage, even though there are differences.⁹⁵⁹ Her behaviour would be

⁹⁵⁰ Davidson, p 174.

⁹⁵¹ The fact that his absence is explicitly mentioned is noted by Hess, p. 101.

⁹⁵² 8.4.1 mentions the different arguments about whether the ML is usually there or not.

⁹⁵³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 135 observes that some commentators see her behaviour as being 'unconventional'. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 34 describes her behaviour as being 'uncharacteristic'.

⁹⁵⁴ Duguid, p. 101; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 130 note the danger of night. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 136, Davidson, p. 579 note the qal form of *sbb* (went about) is used in 3:3, suggesting the routineness of their actions, stressing perhaps potential danger. See also Hess, p. 104. C.f. Jeremiah 6:17.

⁹⁵⁵ Keel, p 122.

⁹⁵⁶ Garrett, p. 174. Spencer, pp. 64, 66 suggests that this mistake could be a possibility for the watchmen, as watch the FP is doing 'looks really bad'.

⁹⁵⁷ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1987), xxxi (p. 48). This passage portrays the woman as seeking her lovers, but not finding him, being similar to Song 3:2.

⁹⁵⁸ Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas TX: Thomas Nelson, 1998), xxii (p. 43) discusses this as well as discussing Genesis 38:14-15 as giving insight that prostitutes might have dressed in a particular way.

⁹⁵⁹ Davidson, p. 541 discusses some differences

considered unusual in the Ancient Israelite context, should a woman wish to want to avoid being perceived as a prostitute. This, and the night time setting, put her at potential risk. But that seems of little concern to the FP in this passage, who is simply driven to find her absent lover.⁹⁶⁰ Her need to find him supersedes any concerns about how her behaviour might be perceived.

8.5.3 The Use of the Erotic Imperative in this Passage

The actions of the FP should be read in the context of her volition expressed by the 3 uses of the cohortative in v. 2 of this passage. The commentary highlighted ways in which this passage expresses the yearning of the FP: e.g., the seeking of the ML, the use of the epithet which expresses her desire, and the fulfilment of that desire by taking him to her mother's house etc.⁹⁶¹ All of these provide the erotic context for her expression of volition by the cohortatives, indicating her erotic intention to be reunited with her absent lover. The EI shows the FP's intentionality to overcome the obstacle of absence that stands between them, because of her continuing desire for him.⁹⁶² In this passage the EI expresses her action, and her underlying call to love. She is motivated by her desire to be with him.

8.6 Passage Context 5:2-8

8.6.1 Form, Structure and Setting

In this second night-time passage the FP again verbalises her first-person perspective.⁹⁶³ It is identifiable as a new passage, because the FP speaks of *yěšēnâ* (having slept) in 5:2, in contrast to the ending of 4:16-5:1⁹⁶⁴. The text portrays the ML seeking to get access to the room where the FP is, but the FP fails to grant him access, and he leaves. She then goes out in pursuit of him, but is discovered by the watchmen who attack her. Like 3:1-6, this scene portrays the presence/absence motif, the idea that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder'.⁹⁶⁵

As with 3:1-5, some commentators see this passage as being a dream.⁹⁶⁶ The discussion centres around the contrast between the verbs *yěšēnâ* (slept) and *ʿēr* (awake) in 5:2. How is it possible to be asleep and awake/aroused at the same time? Suggestions include that what is portrayed is a dream, that it describes a half-asleep/half-awake state or that it is a

⁹⁶⁰ Spencer, p. 63.

⁹⁶¹ 8.4.1.

⁹⁶² Spencer, p. 63 comments that 'desire, not least erotic desire, yearns for what it does not have and cannot fully possess' ... Absence makes the heart groan with anxiety as much as grow fonder'.

⁹⁶³ Keel, p. 186.

⁹⁶⁴ This will be discussed in Chapter 9 below.

⁹⁶⁵ Davidson, p. 579.

⁹⁶⁶ One advocate of this is Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary*, rev edn (New York, NY: KTAV, 1974). See discussion in Pope, p. 511.

fantasy.⁹⁶⁷ Out of these, the second sounds like a good explanation, perhaps in the form of a 'light sleep'.⁹⁶⁸ Like 3:1-5, the strangeness of this passage does not mean that what is portrayed is implausible.⁹⁶⁹ It provides 'a description of experience'.⁹⁷⁰ Through in a poetic portrayal. This does mean that it needs to be interpreted as a dream.⁹⁷¹

This passage also contains numerous double entendre, which as will be discussed further, means reading on both a literal and an erotic level.⁹⁷²

8.6.2 Overview of Use of the Erotic Imperative in this Passage

What is important to observe is that there is so little use of the EI in this passage. Its only use is in 5:2c, but this does not lead to a straightforward outcome. This passage begins with the FP pointing out the presence of the ML by using the exclamation *qôl* (a sound!) and the reader is told that it is the ML is present by her description of his *dôpēq* (knocking).⁹⁷³ This is followed by the single use of the EI in this passage (*pîthî-lî*), in which the ML calls on the FP to 'open' to her.⁹⁷⁴ However, she does not (on a literal level) respond to his EI straight away. It takes from vv.2-6 for the FP to actually respond to his imperative, which she does by opening to her lover.⁹⁷⁵

The gap (on the literal level) between *pîthî-lî* (5:2c: 'open to me') and *pātaḥtî* (5:6a: 'I opened') is significant, because, in comparison with many of the other uses of the EI, it is such a large gap between the request of the ML and the response of the FP. It is so different from the majority of uses of the imperative where the reader is led to believe (as they are not told otherwise) that the two lovers respond immediately to each other's requests. They are usually in synchronisation with each other.⁹⁷⁶ But this passage is unusual both because the reader is *told* that a response is given to the EI, and because of this gap between request and response. It is hugely important for the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers, and so what happens within this gap needs discussion. It affirms again the role of the EI in the portrayal of the development of the lovers' relationship.

⁹⁶⁷ Duguid, p. 123 sees it as referring to a half awake/half asleep state, as does Keel, p. 196 and Exum, p. 192 similarly sees it as 'light sleep'. Murphy, p. 165 observes the possibility that it could be a 'dream or fantasy'.

⁹⁶⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 192.

⁹⁶⁹ Garrett, p. 206; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 60; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 168.

⁹⁷⁰ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 168; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 160 provides a similar description.

⁹⁷¹ Garrett, p. 206; Pope, pp. 510-511 observe that it does not use usual Semitic vocabulary to describe a dream. Keel, p. 188 notes that at no point does the Song mention dreams or dreaming.

⁹⁷² 8.8.1- 8.8.2.

⁹⁷³ Pope, p. 512. The exclamation is also used in 2:8.

⁹⁷⁴ Luter, 5:2 notes the demand expressed by this imperative.

⁹⁷⁵ Landy, p. 47; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191.

⁹⁷⁶ Keel, p. 186.

8.7 Commentary 5:2-8

8.7.1 The Erotic Imperative and its Response on a Literal Level

On a 'literal level' the FP hears the calling of the ML to open to her (5:2cd) and his justification (5:2ef) of why he is making this request. This is immediately followed by the FP saying that she had taken off her garment (5:3a), and asking how could she put it on again (5:3b).⁹⁷⁷ She then makes a statement parallel to 5:3a that she had bathed her feet (5:3c), and she then asks another question as to how could she soil them.⁹⁷⁸

Since no answer is given to these questions they should be read as rhetorical questions, not requiring a response.⁹⁷⁹ They may perform the role of a soliloquy, expressing her private thoughts to the audience or they may be meant to be heard by the ML, and offer a verbal response to his request to open to her.⁹⁸⁰ The former makes more sense, since if the ML lover was meant to hear her comments, he might have engaged with them, but he does not. Furthermore, the tone of these rhetorical questions is not determinable by the text, and so allow a range of interpretations. Longman translates the questions 'should I get dressed again?' and 'should I get them (my feet) dirty?', which interprets them as opening up the possibility that she might decide to do so.⁹⁸¹ Some scholars translate the questions as 'must I put it on?', portraying some annoyance of the FP at being disturbed or indifferent to the presence of the ML.⁹⁸² Such a negative response to the ML's presence is very different to her excitement at his presence in the distance in 2:8, but perhaps makes sense of annoyance at an unexpected interruption in the night.

As the FP has not yet opened the door, in the next line (5:4) the ML puts his hand through the hole, the keyhole of the door.⁹⁸³ This may be one final attempt to get the attention of the FP by sticking his hand through the door, or alternatively an aim of pulling at the bolt,

⁹⁷⁷ Pope, p. 515 makes the point that this refers to the 'usual practice of dressing before answering the door'.

⁹⁷⁸ 5:3d is also parallel to 5:3b.

⁹⁷⁹ DCH, Vol. 1, p. 209 lists the interrogative adverbs in both Esther 8:6 and in these verses under the description of 'introducing rhetorical questions'; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 185.

⁹⁸⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 194 observes the difference in potential audience of this verse.

Fredericks and Estes, p. 368; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 194 read these words as being heard by her lover, and Fredericks and Estes make the implication that her reply results in him leaving.

⁹⁸¹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 162. Exum, p. 183 opts for a similar translation of the questions: 'Am I to put it on again?' and 'Am I to get them dirty?'

⁹⁸² Fredericks and Estes, pp. 364, 368; Hess, pp. 170 - 171. Duguid, pp. 63, 126, S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers: Including a New Paraphrase and a New Translation of the Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 61.

⁹⁸³ Other uses of *hōr* (hole) are 1 Samuel 14:11, 2 Kings 12:10, Ezekiel 8:7, Nehemiah 2:13, Zechariah 14:12, Job 30:6. Hess, p. 172 reads this a keyhole and Luter, 5:4 considers this a credible reading, Hess stresses that keyholes were larger in antiquity. See Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 31-33.

hoping that the door is actually unlocked.⁹⁸⁴ In terms of the EI, by attempting to gain access one way or another, the ML is not waiting for a response from the FP to his imperative *pithî-lî*. Instead, he is trying to gain access to the house himself.⁹⁸⁵ Here 'The Message' paraphrase expresses the sentiment, that 'my lover wouldn't take no for an answer'.⁹⁸⁶

Next the FP gets up to open the door.⁹⁸⁷ However, the text portrays a delay in getting to the door, because of what happens next, the FP's hands drip with myrrh, with liquid myrrh upon the handles of the bolt.⁹⁸⁸ One possible literal reading is that the FP puts myrrh on her hands.⁹⁸⁹ However, the imagery also has an erotic meaning, to be explored below.

Finally, in 5:6ab, the FP opens the door, but the ML has gone.⁹⁹⁰ The text expresses her extreme feeling. She refers, like in 3:3 to her *nepeš*, saying that her *napšî* (soul) *yāšē'â* (literally 'went out').⁹⁹¹ Translations and commentators differ on whether the direction of the will is a positive one (e.g. 'my heart leaped') or ('my soul failed me').⁹⁹² Genesis 35:18 provides a useful comparison, linking the experience to death.⁹⁹³ The portrayal of the metaphorical death of the *nepeš* on a literal level may either refer to a sense of devastation or a sense of longing.⁹⁹⁴ Most importantly, the text directly links the cause of the feeling with the action of the ML. It is because her lover turned away that she experienced this feeling.⁹⁹⁵

In the next two lines (5:6de) the FP tells the reader that she goes searching for her lover: 'I sought him but I did not find him, I called him but he gave no answer'. The suddenness

⁹⁸⁴ Hess, p. 172. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 147 notes the ambiguity of this line, making both interpretations possible on a literal level.

⁹⁸⁵ Keel, p. 194; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 167.

⁹⁸⁶ 5:4. Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005)

⁹⁸⁷ 5:5. Hess, p. 173; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 195; Fredericks and Estes, p. 368; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 167; Luter, 5:5.

⁹⁸⁸ Hess, p. 173.

⁹⁸⁹ Keel, p. 194; Fredericks and Estes, p. 369; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196.

⁹⁹⁰ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 65; Luter, 5:6; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 168; Fredericks and Estes, p. 369.

⁹⁹¹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 165; Duguid, p. 127; Keel, p. 127; Hess, p. 175.

⁹⁹² For a positive reading of the directional movement, see NKJV.

⁹⁹³ DCH, Vol. 4, p. 256. Cf. Genesis 12:5 and Genesis 35:18. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 165; Keel, p. 194; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196.

⁹⁹⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 168; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196. Hess, p. 175; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 65 see this as her being devastated. Perhaps this situation is best represented by her swooning (Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196 and Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 65), which can include both understandings.

⁹⁹⁵ Keel, p. 194; Pope, p. 525; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 171; Duguid, p. 127. As mentioned in the notes of 8.2.2, here *hmq* is read as turn.

of these verses expresses the urgency and desperateness of her action.⁹⁹⁶ Since they are immediately after both the disappearance of the ML, and her statement that her *napšî yāšē`â* as a consequence, there is good reason for the seeking and finding to be linked to her feelings towards his absence. She seeks, like in 3:1-5, because he is absent, but also because of her feelings about his absence. At the point of discovering the absence of the ML, the topic of the passage changes to seeking and finding.⁹⁹⁷

In 5:7 the text, like 3:3, makes reference to the watchmen, implying that the FP is now performing a search in the city streets. Significantly, FP describes them as being violent towards her, which will be discussed in more detail below.⁹⁹⁸ This verse is then followed by a unique adjuration of the FP to the DoJ, in which the FP involves them in her search.⁹⁹⁹ She adjures that should they find the ML that they tell him that she is sick with love (*‘hōlat`ahābā`anî*). Keel observes rightly that, ‘the only one able to cure this type of illness is the one who caused it’.¹⁰⁰⁰ There is no resolution as to the absence of the ML.¹⁰⁰¹ It is not until 6:2 that the location of the lover is communicated to the reader.¹⁰⁰²

8.7.2 What Happens on an Erotic Level?

As an erotic text this passage can be read on multiple levels, and its use of double entendre blurs the distinction between the literal meaning (perhaps called an ‘innocent’ reading), and its erotic tones.¹⁰⁰³ Examining the erotic level of double entendre in this passage provides a different interpretation to what occurs in this scene. Exum argues that reading the double entendre on an erotic level means ‘blurring of distinctions between the more literal level of wishing, dreaming, desiring, and the figurative level of consummation’.¹⁰⁰⁴ In other words, the build up to the FP realising that her lover had gone is itself a point where the reader might imagine that coitus takes place, a reading which is supported by various commentators.¹⁰⁰⁵

Probably the most significant line on an erotic level though is 4a where the male protagonist makes a further move to gain access, and the imagery is very explicit.¹⁰⁰⁶ The

⁹⁹⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 171 notes the suddenness of this motif found also in 3:1-5. However, the reference to the urgency of her action is unique to this thesis.

⁹⁹⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191.

⁹⁹⁸ 8.8.5.

⁹⁹⁹ 5:8. Fredericks and Estes, p. 369, Hess, pp. 178-179. See further discussion of this adjuration in 10.3.1.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Keel, p. 195.

¹⁰⁰¹ Luter, 6:2 sees this section of the Song as demonstrating ‘separation’.

¹⁰⁰² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 175; Luter, 6:2.

¹⁰⁰³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 190-191; Davidson, pp. 599, 612.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191; Pope, p. 519; Garrett, p. 208.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191.

ML *šālah* (thrust) his *yād* (hand) into the *hōr* (hole). The use of *yād* for phallus is well substantiated by scholars, and so the reference to a hand being inserted into a hole is evocative of coitus.¹⁰⁰⁷ And this is further supported by her reaction to this happening.¹⁰⁰⁸ Her *mē'a* ('the core of [her] being') was *hāmtû* ('thrilled') because of him.¹⁰⁰⁹ *Mē'a* may also be a specific reference to her genitals.¹⁰¹⁰ It seems likely that this might be seen as an orgasm on the erotic level.¹⁰¹¹

However, reading in this way means that there is not a 'sequential description of sexual intercourse' on the erotic level, since only in the next line (5:5a) does it say that she 'arose to open to him'.¹⁰¹² In the next lines (5:5bd) the imagery of the myrrh and liquid myrrh portray the bodily fluids of lovemaking.¹⁰¹³ Only in the next verse does she literally open to him.¹⁰¹⁴ On the erotic level, this could be read as 'sexual union', but on the literal level it is the point where he is no longer there.¹⁰¹⁵ The key point though here is that the use of the verb open in response to the ML's use of the EI specifically makes the imperative erotic in this context.

8.8 Interpretation

8.8.1 The Erotic Imperative *pithî-lî*

As mentioned above, there is a gap between the EI in 5:2 and the response given by the FP.¹⁰¹⁶ *Pithî-lî* is used in this context as a request of the ML to be 'let into' her 'dwelling'.¹⁰¹⁷ The imagery of the ML *dôpēq* (knocking) portrays the ML as being outside of the house, with the FP on the inside.¹⁰¹⁸ On a literal level they are separated from each

¹⁰⁰⁷ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, p. 9; Pope, p. 519; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, pp. 147-148; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 167; Pope, p. 519; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Mē'a* can be used to referred to the reproductive organs (Cleon L. Rogers, 'Meeh', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 1012-13 (p. 1012); Longman, p. 167; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 148). Furthermore, it is also possible to read *mē'a* as well on a metaphorical level being the place of erotic emotion (Rogers, p. 1012; Pope, 519), and that is reflected in the JB translation.

Davidson, p. 579; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 183 both use the translation 'thrilled' for *hāmtû*.

¹⁰¹⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 148.

¹⁰¹¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 148 sees this as being a sexual thrill. C.f. Pope, p. 519.

¹⁰¹² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 195.

¹⁰¹³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196.

¹⁰¹⁴ 5:6.

¹⁰¹⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 196.

¹⁰¹⁶ 8.6.2.

¹⁰¹⁷ DCH, Vol. 6, p. 682.

¹⁰¹⁸ DCH, Vol. 2, p. 459. Keel, p. 188 notes how in other contexts this verb refers to pushing or forcing (Genesis 33:13; Judges 19:22). However, in this context the Hebrew seems to be expressing knocking.

other, presumably by a door that can be knocked though a door is not explicit in the text.¹⁰¹⁹ Here knocking should be understood as banging the door, emphasising the ML's desperation to gain access.¹⁰²⁰

Thus, the ML is expressing to the FP that he does not want to be separated from her, but wants to overcome that barrier through involving her participation. He needs her involvement, and is desperate to gain access, emphasised in the text by the plethora of titles that he uses immediately after the imperative to address her (sister, friend, dove, perfect one).¹⁰²¹ This is a good example of the ML expressing his desire with the EI, within an erotic context.¹⁰²²

Furthermore, the ML gives a reason for his use of the EI, that he is seeking shelter from the dampness of the dew.¹⁰²³ This is not the real reason for him seeking entrance, the real reason being his desire for sex with her.¹⁰²⁴ But his reason adds urgency to his request that she opens the door. This desire for sexual intercourse is expressed by the erotic reading of the EI, requesting her to be sexually open to him.¹⁰²⁵ Such a reading is consistent with the other uses of the word open in this passage, when read on an 'erotic level' (5:5a, 5:6a). What is important to observe here is that however protracted her response might be, she eventually responds to the ML's EI on both an erotic and literal level.

8.8.2 The Difference Between these Literal and Erotic Levels

The comparison of the literal and erotic levels in this passage show discontinuity between them, with the FP having an experience of arousal to a different point to her literally opening to the ML.¹⁰²⁶ The two levels recognise two different levels of human experience, the level of literal action and the erotic level of desire also at play. Having these two

¹⁰¹⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 193 observes how *dôpēq* is used in Judges 19:22 to refer to a door, so notes that it is implied. However, she also notes that it is not specifically named because of the passage's use of double entendre. Furthermore, Fox, p. 143 argues that this verb should be understood as entreating, based upon Ibn Ezra. Bearing in mind that what the ML is doing with the imperative in this context is entreating on an erotic level, Exum's suggestion (p. 193) that this verb could mean both entreating and knocking on the two different levels (erotic and literal) is a good argument.

¹⁰²⁰ Garrett, p. 206 emphasises the force of banging portrayed by this verb, if interpreted in the light of Judges 19:22. It would be as if beating the door down.

¹⁰²¹ Davidson, p. 579 notes how this is 'the longest string of endearments found anywhere in the Song'.

¹⁰²² Davidson, p. 579 stresses the ML's 'eagerness for her'.

¹⁰²³ 5:2ef. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 193; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 170.

¹⁰²⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 170; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 170; Duguid, p. 124.

¹⁰²⁵ Fox, p. 144; Hess, p. 168; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 166.

¹⁰²⁶ 8.7.2.

elements together asserts the 'wholistic' portrayal of sexuality in the Song including the thoughts under the surface of actions.¹⁰²⁷

However, Davidson asserts that 'although there may indeed be sexual double entendre in these sections of the Song ... these cannot be allowed to overshadow or even overcome the basic absence-presence motif that dominates these sections'.¹⁰²⁸ This is definitely something to take on board, since it is because of what happens on a literal level (the physical absence of the lover) that there is an obstacle that the FP needs to overcome. It is this aspect of the literal reading that should be recognised in this passage. 5:6c describes her feelings at his physical absence.¹⁰²⁹

But the ML is requesting more than the physical opening of the door with his use of the EI, and it is through acknowledging this, and the underlying erotic level that the 'wholistic' nature of the Song is demonstrated.¹⁰³⁰ Prioritising the literal level (what happens in terms of actions) is key to understanding the development of this relationship. But the erotic level, underlying the actions of the lovers is there, and needs to be acknowledged.

8.8.3 The Seeking and Finding Motif in this Passage

As with 3:1-5, this passage includes the seeking and finding motif.¹⁰³¹ However, unlike the earlier passage, this section ends without the ML having been found by the FP. Ultimately, she reports his presence again in 6:2¹⁰³². But this passage critically ends without the presence of the ML. One point to observe in terms of the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers is that once the reader has encountered this passage for the first time, they know that the ML continues to be in relationship with the FP. Whatever happened with regards the watchmen and being separated from the man did not result in the Song suddenly ending. If the text ended at this point (5:8), readers would have a very different reaction to it. It would be an open ending in which there was no resolution whether the couple were to continue relating to each other. However, the point is that this text could have hypothetically ended at this point with a failed search. It would not be a comfortable or logical ending, but for the first-time reader the separation in this passage – bearing in mind its difference in form from all of the other times that the lovers separate up till now – does not necessarily guarantee that the lovers will join together again. However, as readers, our experience is that this is not the end, but that the lovers are reunited.

¹⁰²⁷ Davidson, p. 581.

¹⁰²⁸ Davidson, p. 580.

¹⁰²⁹ 'I died inside when he turned away'; Duguid, p. 64.

¹⁰³⁰ Davidson, p. 581.

¹⁰³¹ Davidson, p. 580.

¹⁰³² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 175; Luter, 6:2.

8.8.4 Interpretation: The Lovers Being out of Synchronisation as the Obstacle in this Passage

Having considered the call and response to the EI on both the literal and the erotic level, the discussion will now consider what is happening here between the couple on both levels. The key point is that it takes the FP from vv. 2-6 to respond on a literal level to the EI of the ML, which is much slower than she would usually respond.¹⁰³³ His desperation for access to her is emphasised by this passage. But as stated above her rhetorical questions reasonably emphasise her annoyance or 'bored indifference' at being interrupted during the night.¹⁰³⁴ There is conflict between the lovers.¹⁰³⁵

The response by the FP is different from any response given by her before to the ML. And the tone is different from that of in 5:2¹⁰³⁶. When the ML tries to get access, on an erotic level the FP is aroused, but her slowness, and the ML's impatience to his failure to gain access to the room (and to her) makes this passage an example of being out of synchronization, both on the literal and erotic levels.¹⁰³⁷ Keel describing them as being 'out of phase' is a good way to understand this passage, since they both (at different points) demonstrate desire for each other, and both (at different points) want to be together, but their wanting to be together is not in synchronisation with each other.¹⁰³⁸ Munro similarly describes this as being a case of 'bad timing [which] provokes a series of disastrous events'.¹⁰³⁹

Moreover, the annoyance or indifference of the FP in response to the EI, and the failure of the ML to be willing to wait for a response, acts as an obstacle in the development of the relationship between the lovers in the text.¹⁰⁴⁰ As Estes observes, 'she is putting thoughts of herself ahead of him'.¹⁰⁴¹ Their lack of synchronisation could have disastrous consequences for the lovers. Keel affirms this, arguing that unless everything is to be lost, she must go after him'.¹⁰⁴² There is no choice for the FP. It is an all or nothing moment.

Importantly, as this passage ends as a failed search there are no guarantees that the relationship is restored afterwards.¹⁰⁴³ The annoyance or indifference of the woman, and

¹⁰³³ Landy, p. 47; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 191.

¹⁰³⁴ 8.7.1. Fredericks and Estes, pp. 367-368; Duguid, p. 126; Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 61.

¹⁰³⁵ Davidson, p. 601.

¹⁰³⁶ Fredericks and Estes, p. 367.

¹⁰³⁷ Keel, p. 194.

¹⁰³⁸ Keel, p. 186.

¹⁰³⁹ Munro, p. 119.

¹⁰⁴⁰ While having a different model of progression, Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 61 rightly observes that 'such indifference signalled a break in their relationship'.

¹⁰⁴¹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 368.

¹⁰⁴² Keel, p. 194.

¹⁰⁴³ 8.8.3.

impatience of the man, could have resulted in the end of the Song. There is no guarantee that the conflict is going to be resolved.¹⁰⁴⁴ But on the literal level, the devastation of the FP at this disappearance of the ML causes her to search for him. She acts by going after him. Her actions enable the continuation of the development of relationship between the lovers.

8.8.5 The Watchmen as an Additional Obstacle

A brief discussion is necessary to discuss the actions of the watchmen in this passage, particularly because they are so distressing.¹⁰⁴⁵ As readers who tragically live in a world where we are exposed constantly through media to reports of violence committed by men, we are very sensitive to despicable acts of male violence.

However, the text shockingly offers no justification or explanation for this event, and it does not justify or condemn their actions.¹⁰⁴⁶ It has been suggested that the FP might have been perceived as a prostitute, something perhaps that the author did not need to explain to the readers of the time, since it would have been so much part of their presupposition pool.¹⁰⁴⁷

Whatever their reasoning, the text describes 'physical and sexual abuse', particularly the taking of her cloak, as an act of violently exposing her in some way.¹⁰⁴⁸ It may be that this was the only clothing that she was wearing, having rushed out from bed to search for her lover.¹⁰⁴⁹ For contemporary readers, this seems particularly shocking. But her ML does not undergo any such suffering for her sake, demonstrating the different attitudes to male and female behaviour in the Ancient Israelite world.¹⁰⁵⁰

Interestingly, the FP is not portrayed as making a big deal of the violence, instead moving on quickly to her adjuration in 5:8. The fact that she does not make a big deal of it might seem especially shocking for contemporary readers.¹⁰⁵¹ However, the limited emphasis on the consequences of this violence open up three possibilities. Firstly, the violence would be considered 'normal' in the mind of the poet for a woman who behaved in this

¹⁰⁴⁴ Davidson, p. 601.

¹⁰⁴⁵ 5:7.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Duguid, p. 129; Fredericks and Estes, p. 369.

Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 66; Spencer, p. 128. See discussion for 3:1-5 about the FP potentially being mistaken as a prostitute in 8.5.2

¹⁰⁴⁸ The quote is from Longman, *NICOT*, p. 168. As mentioned in the notes of 8.2.2, the noun *rēḏīd* is only used elsewhere in Isaiah 3:23, and so the meaning is uncertain.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Fox, p. 146; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 197; Spencer, p. 120.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁵¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 198.

way, and so does not need any further qualifying. Secondly, the violence really was not that bad. Or thirdly, the FP makes little of the violence because in her mind the necessity of finding the ML, and hence following her desire, was considered more important than focusing on the violence.¹⁰⁵² The first option is possible, and explains the seemingly unjustified behaviour of the watchmen. The second option does not seem likely, since the verbs in v. 7 portray this incident as being violent, and so this should not be underplayed. The third option makes most sense out of these three interpretations, since they are reinforced by the FP's lovesickness of v. 8, as well as what may be expected by a woman being driven by desire to find her lover.¹⁰⁵³

Moreover, if there is no judgement of the watchmen for their violent actions in the text, the question might be asked as to whether there is any judgement in the mind of the writer of the Song portrayed of the FP for her action of going searching in the night.¹⁰⁵⁴ Could it be that the watchmen are the means by which this judgement is dispensed, or are they demonstrating perceptions of the patriarchal culture at the time? The latter seems most likely, since ultimately (after this passage) she is portrayed as finding her lover, and the watchmen of the night do not succeed in putting a stop to her.¹⁰⁵⁵ She is portrayed as being successful, even though she experiences suffering, perhaps being successful through suffering.¹⁰⁵⁶ The watchmen perform a role of providing further obstacles for the lovers to overcome between for their relationship to continue.¹⁰⁵⁷ As Duguid puts it so well, 'her search, which in chapter 3 was an uncomplicated and relatively rapidly successful quest, has now become a much darker and more difficult journey' by the threat of these watchmen of the walls.¹⁰⁵⁸

8.9 Comparative Discussion of Both Passages

Thus far, the two passages have been discussed individually. But comparing them enables some further observations to be made. Firstly, the basic narrative of the two passages is different, as is the nature of the problems portrayed, but there is some similarity in terms of response. In both instances the FP initiates a search for her ML, since in both passages she 'sought him but could not find him' (3:1, 5:6). Thus, in both passages she wishes to be with him. In the earlier passage it is the awareness of his absence at the beginning of the passage that spurs her on to finding him, when in the later

¹⁰⁵² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 198; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 66 similarly implies this.

¹⁰⁵³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Luter, 5:7 interprets this passage as between husband and wife, but he makes the same implication that they are an additional barrier.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Duguid, p. 129.

passage it is his absence after his presence in which he wanted access to her that drives her to search for him.

Secondly, in both texts the EI plays a part in the portrayal of the FP seeking to overcome the gap between her and her lover. In 3:1-5 the three cohortatives are used to describe her intention to find her lover. They demonstrate her making a decision to act, because of her desiring to be with him. Though in 5:2 the EI acts in a different way, since it is her failure to respond in synchronisation in terms of action to the ML's use of the imperative that results in her going to seek for him after he disappears.¹⁰⁵⁹ In both instances the EI is related to overcoming the obstacles in the passages.

8.9.1 The FP Responds to Both Obstacles

Bearing in mind the different obstacles in the two passages (the ML's absence, and being out of synchronisation) one critical point is that in both instances the FP does respond. The necessity of this cannot be overstated.¹⁰⁶⁰ Overcoming the gap of absence that is created in these passages must happen in order for the relationship between the lovers to continue to develop. For first-time readers of the Song, the fact that the lovers would be reunited is not guaranteed. The only way for this to happen was for the FP to be prepared to go searching for her lover.

8.9.2 Vulnerability and Risk in Overcoming Obstacles for the Female Protagonist

This chapter has highlighted the obstacles of the absence of the ML that the FP has to overcome in both passages, which entails putting herself at potentially great risk. But in both passages, she is prepared to take these risks. As Hess observes, 'whatever the risk, she will not be deterred from the object of her desires'.¹⁰⁶¹ That risk includes the additional obstacle of the watchmen, who behave violently towards her in 5:2-8¹⁰⁶². The fact that the FP is portrayed as being attacked, and that she does not let this stop her search, reveals both her vulnerability, but also the preparedness to put herself at risk for the sake of finding her lover. She will not be confined by social convention if it stops her from being with him.¹⁰⁶³

¹⁰⁵⁹ As has been discussed already, the FP responds on both an erotic and literal level to the initiative of the ML. However, the discontinuity between the two levels causes the obstacle in this passage.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Keel, p. 194.

¹⁰⁶¹ Hess, p. 105 is here discussing 3:1-5, but the implication applies to both passages. See also Luter, 3:4.

¹⁰⁶² 8.8.5.

¹⁰⁶³ The discussion for 8.5.2 about the FP's unusual behaviour applies to both passages.

8.10 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the night-time passages in which the FP goes searching for her lover, because of her desire to be with him. In both cases, the EI has a part to play, the former in the form of cohortatives that express the intention of the FP to find her lover, the latter taking the form of the imperative issued by the ML, to which she does not respond in synchronisation to his request. In the second passage, when she notices his absence, she then goes seeking for him.

Both passages present an obstacle for the FP to overcome, the absence of the ML whom she desires. In both instances the text portrays her seeking to overcome that obstacle to be reunited with her lover, and she will not be stopped. For the first-time reader of the Song the results of the searches are not conclusive when they begin. There is no guarantee that the FP will be reunited with her lover again, even though that would be most satisfying for the reader. The end is not guaranteed from the beginning. However, the FP is ultimately successful in overcoming the obstacles, being motivated by her desire for her lover.

Chapter 9: Desire and Consenting: The Erotic Imperative at a Climatic Point

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the EIs at the climatic point of 4:16-5:1 in their wider textual context. The EIs in 4:16-5:1 portray sexual desire as being something wanted, sensual and pleasurable, but also, they are important because of the way that invitation and consent are played out in this passage. Furthermore, this chapter considers this particular passage in the context of the development of the relationship between the lovers.

9.2 Translation and Passage Context

9.2.1 Translation 4:8-5:1

ML

4:8a: Come from¹⁰⁶⁴ Lebanon, my bride!

8b: Come from Lebanon, come!

8c: Descend¹⁰⁶⁵ from the peak of Amana,

8d: from the peak of Senir and Hermon,

8e: from the dens of lions,

8f: from the mountains of leopards.

9a: You infatuate me, my sister, my bride!

9b: You infatuate me with a glance¹⁰⁶⁶ of your eyes,

9c: with one link of your necklace.

10a: How pleasing is your lovemaking,

10b: my sister, my bride!

10c: How much better is your lovemaking than wine,

10d: and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!

11a: Your lips drip honey,¹⁰⁶⁷ O bride.

11b: Honey and milk are under your tongue.

11c: The fragrance of your clothes

11d: is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Here there is a standard emendation from the MT's use of 'ittî (with me), to 'ēti (a feminine singular imperative) supported by the LXX, Vulgate and Syriac Peshitta. This is also the case for 4:8b. This standard emendation is supported by Pope, p. 474, Garrett, p. 186 and Fox, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Tāšû'rî has two identical roots (šwr), one meaning to 'descend' and the other to 'look at'. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 131; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156; Pope, p. 474. Contextually, the former makes most appropriate sense.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Bē'ahad mē'ēnayik (with one of your eyes) is translated as 'glance'. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 149; Hess, p. 143.

¹⁰⁶⁷ nōpet refers to 'flowing honey'. DCH, Vol. 5, p. 734; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156; Psalm 19:11; Psalm 119:129.

12a: You are¹⁰⁶⁸ a locked garden, my sister, my bride,
 12b: a garden¹⁰⁶⁹ locked, a fountain sealed.
 13a Your shoots are a paradise¹⁰⁷⁰ of pomegranates
 13b: with choicest fruits.
 13c: Henna and nard,
 14a: nard and saffron,¹⁰⁷¹
 14b: calamus and cinnamon,
 14c: with every tree of frankincense,
 14d: myrrh and aloes,
 14e: with all the best spices.
 15a: You are¹⁰⁷² a garden¹⁰⁷³ fountain,
 15b: a well of living water,
 15c: streaming down from Lebanon.

FP

16a: Wake¹⁰⁷⁴ up North wind,
 16b: and come South wind!
 16c: Blow on my garden
 16d: and let its spices waft.
 16e: Let my lover enter his garden
 16f: and eat its choicest fruits.

ML

5:1a: I come to my garden, my sister, my bride.
 1b: I pluck my myrrh with my spices.
 1c: I eat my honeycomb with my honey.
 1d: I drink my wine with my milk.

¹⁰⁶⁸ There is a change in person from second person to third person, and then a change back to second person in 13a. The context indicates that the female protagonist is meant to hear this description of her, and so this is presumed in the translation '[you are] are a locked. Other commentators do this, including Hess, p. 146; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁶⁹ A standard emendation is made here, reading *gan* instead of *gal*. This is supported by some Hebrew texts, LXX, Syriac Pershitta, and Vulgate. See also Exum, p. 152; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 155 also translates *pardēs* directly as paradise.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Karkōm* (saffron) is hapax. Murphy, p. 137; DCH, Vol. 4, p. 460.

¹⁰⁷² Bloch and Bloch, p. 79 inserts a second person reference to emphasise that in this text the ML is continuing to address the FP.

¹⁰⁷³ *Gannîm* (garden) is plural, but is read as a plural of generalisation. Murphy, p. 137.

¹⁰⁷⁴ The speaker here may be the ML or FP. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 161 observes this.

DoJ

1e: Eat,¹⁰⁷⁵ friends, drink!

1f: Be intoxicated with lovemaking.

9.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

This passage is an extract from the first of the long speeches of the ML.¹⁰⁷⁶ The extract begins with an invitation (4:8), using Els.¹⁰⁷⁷ This is followed by a description as to the overwhelming effect that the FP has on the ML, and a comparison of *her* lovemaking being better than wine (4:9-11). Next, there is a sensual description of the woman as a garden of delights (4:12-15) before the Els of 4:16-5:1.

Moreover, this passage (4:8-5:1) follows soon after the 'wedding passage' of the Song, which as discussed above, is very unlikely to refer to a wedding of the main characters.¹⁰⁷⁸ 4:8-5:1 also immediately follows a description by the FP's body by the ML, using the language of 'aesthetic appreciation'.¹⁰⁷⁹ This context needs to be kept in mind, as what follows should be seen as responding to these earlier verses.¹⁰⁸⁰ In these earlier verses he begins and ends (4:1, 7) by saying how *yāpā* (beautiful) she is. In vv. 2-6, he describes her body moving down from focusing on her eyes to her breasts.¹⁰⁸¹ After comparing her breasts to twin fawns (v. 5), he makes reference to 'going to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense', being mountains reminiscent of 2:17, and the El of simile, 'to be like a gazelle or young deer on the mountains ...', with her breasts being like mountains.¹⁰⁸² The ML expresses his intention to go to her breasts again, like a gazelle or young deer. This provides the context for the summary of her being altogether beautiful in

¹⁰⁷⁵ Commentators debate who is speaking here, based the upon the uncertain use of masculine plural verbs. This will be discussed more in the commentary. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 58 note that the speaker cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty.

Some scholars read this verse as introducing a new character: Fredericks and Estes, p. 353 suggests God speaks this line; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 238 lists the poet as an option. However, there is no obvious reason to introduce an external speaker not already known about in the text. Options that include the characters which the reader is already aware of include the DoJ addressing the couple, or the couple addressing the DoJ. As the principal audience of the lovers of the Song, the DoJ are regarded as being the speakers here, addressing the couple. Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 182-183; Hess, pp. 157-158.

¹⁰⁷⁶ The passage being discussed in this chapter is 4:8-5:1 and the first long speech is 4:1-5:1. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 151 classifies this passage in this way. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 49 specifically observes the unity of 4:8-5:1 as being a distinct section. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 158 sees vv. 8-9 as different from what precedes and follows in terms of form criticism. However, he makes the point that if vv. 8-9 are read on a metaphorical level, then there is a sense of continuity in this passage.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 49 reads this as being an invitation.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 3:6-11 is the 'wedding passage' of the Song, which is discussed in 2.4.3.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 4:1-7. Walsh, p. 73.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁸¹ Luter, 4:1.

¹⁰⁸² 7.3.4; Duguid, p. 113; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 147; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 167.

v. 7, reinforced by the comment of there being no flaw in her. It is after this comment of 'aesthetic appreciation', directly addressing the FP, that that text introduces the EI of the ML in v. 8.

9.2.3 Overview of the Use of the Erotic Imperative in this passage

The dot plot shows a high concentration of volitional verbs in vv. 4:16 and 5:1¹⁰⁸³. This passage has the highest concentration of imperatives, jussives and cohortatives found anywhere in the Song. It is reasonably regarded as a climatic point in the text as a whole.¹⁰⁸⁴ The passage is another good example of the significance of the EI in conveying sexual desire, and the particularities of how it is used here.

The passage begins (4:8ab) with the two imperatives *ʾēṭī* (come), followed by a jussive *tābô ʾī* (come) to call the FP to come to him.¹⁰⁸⁵ In 4:8c a jussive follows, calling the FP to *tāšû ʾrī* (descend).¹⁰⁸⁶ All of these are EIs of movement, calling the FP to come from where she is to him.

After some verses portraying the FP as a garden (4:12-15) the EI is used again in 4:16. There are three main addressees. Firstly, the FP addresses the winds (4:16), using three imperatives of the following roots: *ʾwr* (awake) to address the North Wind, *bw* (come) to address the South Wind and *pwḥ* (blow). She then uses a jussive of root *nzl* to express that the scent from her garden may flow. Secondly, she uses a jussive of root (*bw*) to indirectly invite her lover (4:16e) to enter his garden, being of the same root as the imperative used to address the South Wind.¹⁰⁸⁷ She then (4:16f) addresses him using another jussive, of root *ʾkl* (to eat) its fruit. The ML then offers his response to this invitation (5:1a). Thirdly, the DoJ use three imperatives addressing the lovers (5:1ef) of the following roots: *ʾkl* (eat), *šth* (drink) and *škr* (be intoxicated).

9.3 Commentary

9.3.1 The Erotic Imperatives of Movement (4:8-9)

The ML uses the EIs in 4:8 to call the FP to come from Lebanon, and to descend from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the den of lions, from the mountains of leopards. As the geographical references make no sense, they should be read on a metaphorical level.¹⁰⁸⁸ The imagery portrays the FP as being inaccessible, like

¹⁰⁸³ Appendix 1. This is shown by the large cluster before the 640 marking on the x axis.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Davidson, p. 591.

¹⁰⁸⁵ See discussion of emendation in notes of 9.2.1. Emendation also used by Pope, p. 474; Garrett, p. 186; Fox, p. 134.

¹⁰⁸⁶ 4:8c.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 159.

the imagery of crags and rocks in 2:14.¹⁰⁸⁹ The presence of leopards and lions similarly make her seem unreachable, being a danger to him.¹⁰⁹⁰ Thus, by using these EIs, the ML is seeking, like with the imperatives in 2:10-14, to encourage her to be accessible to him.

These EIs are followed (4:9) by a dramatic description of the ML verbalising his emotional state directly to her, in response to 'the glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace'. *Libbabtî* (infatuate) is used twice in this verse, doubly expressing the level of emotion of the ML.¹⁰⁹¹ The verb is a denominative form of *lib* or *libab* meaning one's inner life.¹⁰⁹² It can refer to both thought and emotion, but the context suggests that it is read as emotion.¹⁰⁹³ It is here read as a causative use of the pi'el, and the only pi'el form of *libb* in the HS.¹⁰⁹⁴ It has been interpreted as positive 'to take heart', or negative 'to lose heart'.¹⁰⁹⁵ Pope points out that a male sexual arousal reading of this verb is also plausible, based upon the Akkadian.¹⁰⁹⁶ It would be reasonable in this context to imagine the ML as being aroused by the FP.¹⁰⁹⁷ But this rare verb verbalises a subjective emotional experience, and may have a broader meaning.¹⁰⁹⁸ Exum argues that as well as arousal, the passion conveyed by this verb should be extended to euphoria.¹⁰⁹⁹ The translation of the imperative by DCH (you infatuate me) perhaps conveys this well.¹¹⁰⁰ It captures the overpowering way that the ML is affected by the FP. She 'has led him into greater desire'.¹¹⁰¹

As mentioned above, the reason for the ML expressing this is because of a glance of her eyes, a concept used extensively throughout love poetry.¹¹⁰² To add to this, the ML refers to 'one jewel of her necklace', which is found in synonymous parallelism with the reference to eyes.¹¹⁰³ Thus, the beauty, presumably the glistening effect of her eyes is being reinforced.¹¹⁰⁴ He is infatuated because of the beauty of her eyes. This is an

¹⁰⁸⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 160; Hess, p. 139. See 7.3.1.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 160 and Hess, p. 140 note this and that the animals are presumably not a danger to her.

¹⁰⁹¹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 150; DCH, Vol. 2, p. 749.

¹⁰⁹² Pope, p. 478. GKC, 32h, p. 141; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁹³ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁹⁴ BDB, p. 525; C.f. Niph (Job 11:13); Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 131. Exum, p. 170 notes the intensive use of the pi'el, as well as the causative.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Pope, p. 479; Nahum M. Waldman, 'A Note on Canticles 4:9', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 89.2 (1970), 215–17.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Exum, *Song of Song*, p.170.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p.170; Garrett, p. 194; Walsh, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Exum, *Songs of Songs*, p. 171.

¹¹⁰⁰ DCH, Vol. 2, p. 749.

¹¹⁰¹ Hess, p. 142.

¹¹⁰² Pope, p. 480; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156.

¹¹⁰³ Hess, p. 143.

¹¹⁰⁴ Hess, p. 143.

example of Walsh's 'expression of the physical impact of yearning'.¹¹⁰⁵ It is a way of portraying desire that is subjective, 'detailing the condition of being in desire rather than the object of that desire'.¹¹⁰⁶ It is the ML's desire for the FP that results in him being overwhelmed by her eyes.¹¹⁰⁷ What should be observed here is that for the first-time reader, this expression immediately follows 4:8's EIs before references to his perception of the FP's lovemaking in the next verse.

9.3.2 The Effect of the Woman on the Man (4:10-11)

4:10 begins with the ML commenting on his perception of the FP's lovemaking.¹¹⁰⁸ This is the only time that the ML refers to her lovemaking, which he does twice in this verse.¹¹⁰⁹ This is a 'celebration of an action - her lovemaking - rather than to the praise of her physical body', the latter being the more usual way that he expresses his perception and desire of the FP.¹¹¹⁰ Having just verbalised his inner desire (and want) for her in 4:9, he turns to her lovemaking. The recognition of the former reasonably leads to the latter.¹¹¹¹

He describes the FP's lovemaking as being *yāpû* (pleasing), using a denominative verb.¹¹¹² He perceives that her lovemaking gives him pleasure, like her perception of his.¹¹¹³ Importantly, the ML continues to describe his perception of the pleasantness of the FP's lovemaking, making the same comparison that she does in 1:2, that his lovemaking is better than wine.¹¹¹⁴ However, he also takes her language here from 1:2 (your lovemaking is better than wine) and enhances it saying *ma-ṭṭō'bû* ('how much better') it is.¹¹¹⁵ He takes her desirous imagery, owns it for himself, and builds upon it, showing some development in relationality between the lovers.

¹¹⁰⁵ Walsh, p. 56; see discussion in 5.3. Her eyes do not independently have the power to make the ML have such a reaction to them.

¹¹⁰⁶ Walsh, p. 70.

¹¹⁰⁷ In 6:5 the ML similarly portrays his subjective experience when referring to her eyes.

¹¹⁰⁸ See discussion in 2.5.3, where it is noted that *dōdīm* can refer to a whole array of sexual activities, from kissing to sexual intercourse.

¹¹⁰⁹ Other uses of the masculine plural form (but not of the ML speaking) are found in 1:2, 4, 7:12. Interestingly, the FP refers to his lovemaking more than he does of hers.

¹¹¹⁰ Garrett, p. 194.

¹¹¹¹ Walsh, p. 73 makes a similar observation.

¹¹¹² *Yāpû* as a denominative verb used three times by the ML to refer to the FP (4:10, 7:1[EN] and 7:[6EN]). The latter two uses refer to the physical beauty of the FP (11.3.1). In other uses in the HS it is used to describe beautiful things, such as Jerusalem (Ezekiel 16:13), the king (Psalm 45:2) and a cedar tree (Ezekiel 31:7). See discussion in William C. Williams, 'yāpā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 494–96 (p. 495).

As it is here referring to the FP's lovemaking, the translation 'pleasing' has been used to emphasise his perceived subjective appreciation of this action. Exum, p. 152 translates this as pleasing. Hess, p. 152 opts for 'delightful'.

¹¹¹³ The FP has not used the verb to refer to his lovemaking. However, her references to his lovemaking are suggestive that are pleasurable to her (1:2, 4).

¹¹¹⁴ 4:10c. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 156; Hess, p. 144.

¹¹¹⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p.172.

The ML then makes another sensual pleasure comparison, turning from taste to smell.¹¹¹⁶ He describes her oils being more fragrant than any spice, potentially portraying her as being physically close, close enough so that he can appreciate her scent. Yet again what is being conveyed here is the ML's perception of the FP from his desiring perspective, since they are *to him* the best smelling perfumes.¹¹¹⁷

Then in 4:11 he describes her lips and tongue as being pleasant, sensual places, being places of nectar, and honey and milk respectively.¹¹¹⁸ He moves from focusing on her lips, to focusing on her tongue, stressing his desire for the deepening of her kisses.¹¹¹⁹ Here too he swaps around the important HS imagery of milk and honey, the promised land, being 'a place of dreams'.¹¹²⁰ The implied imagery is that he wants to kiss and enjoy the deep, pleasurable taste of her kisses.¹¹²¹ He also makes reference to her clothes smelling like Lebanon, possibly portraying Lebanon as being a 'source of pleasant scents'.¹¹²² In vv. 10-11 the ML takes the FP's desirous imagery of his lovemaking in 1:2-4, and develops it, showing his mutual desirous appreciation of her lovemaking.¹¹²³

9.3.3 The Sensual Imagery of the Garden (4:12-15)

4:12 is an important verse as it introduces new sensual imagery to the Song, that of the *gan* (garden).¹¹²⁴ The FP is described as a garden, a common motif in ANE texts.¹¹²⁵ In particular, she is a 'locked garden', a metaphor that the ML uses twice, followed by her being described as 'a sealed fountain'.¹¹²⁶ A sealed fountain, like a locked garden portrays

¹¹¹⁶ Garrett, p. 194.

¹¹¹⁷ Fredericks and Estes, *Song of Songs*, p. 358; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 122.

¹¹¹⁸ Proverbs 5:3 makes reference to the speech of an adulteress dripping like honey. However, here, as in 5:13, kisses are being referred to. Murphy, p. 11.

¹¹¹⁹ Hess, p. 145; Walsh, p. 91.

¹¹²⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 173; Garrett, p. 145. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 173 notes too the way that milk and honey are used to symbolise 'satisfaction' and 'plenty', based upon Isaiah 7:22, Job 20:17 and Deuteronomy 32:14.

¹¹²¹ Walsh, p. 91; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 172.

¹¹²² Hess, p. 146.

¹¹²³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 172.

¹¹²⁴ References to *gan* are 4:15, 4:16 (twice), 5:1; 6:2 (twice), 6:11, 8:13.

¹¹²⁵ I. Cornelius, 'gan/gannā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 875-878 (p. 877); Fox, pp. 283-87.

¹¹²⁶ *N'* is used in other verses of the HS to refer to a locked door: Judges 3:23-24, 2 Samuel 13:17, 18. Bill T. Arnold, 'nā'al', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 120 (p. 120). *htm* is used in the sense of a sealed letter or access being stopped: E.g., 1 Kings 21:8, Deuteronomy 32:34. Exum, p. 176.

a sense of inaccessibility.¹¹²⁷ Thus, like in 4:8, the ML is again describing the FP as inaccessible.¹¹²⁸

But what does this image of a locked garden mean? Scholars interpret the garden in this passage as referring to the FP, her vagina, or her sexuality more broadly.¹¹²⁹ Her vagina is the reading being used here. Thus, by talking about a locked garden and sealed fountain, the ML is referring to her sexual inaccessibility.¹¹³⁰ Presumably, by drawing attention to this, within this erotic passage, the ML is expressing her desire that she opens to him. The garden is currently locked, but *she* can let him in.¹¹³¹

Next (4:13-14) the ML describes the garden in more detail, which is extremely exotic.¹¹³² The imagery focuses on the 'fruits and exotic perfumes of the garden'.¹¹³³ The mention of aromatic plants makes it a sensual place.¹¹³⁴ An overwhelming variety of plants are mentioned in his description.¹¹³⁵ This variety 'simply accentuates the abundance of exotic and precious fruits and spices, which of course also accentuates the abundance of pleasure to be associated with the woman'.¹¹³⁶ This sensual portrayal of the garden creates an 'erotic atmosphere', but it is not necessary to attach individual metaphors to every individual item in the garden.¹¹³⁷ Of course, with such an abundant garden, readers may be led to imagine another sealed garden, the garden of Eden.¹¹³⁸

After this sensuous imagery, the ML again makes reference to a garden fountain (4:15a). By doing so, he returns to the water imagery of 4:12, mentioning 'a well of living water' and 'flowing streams from Lebanon'.¹¹³⁹ Murphy reads these two images as further

¹¹²⁷ Both images are usually read the same way. See Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 161; Fredericks and Estes, p. 359; Exum, p. 176; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155; Keel, p. 174; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 238.

¹¹²⁸ Hess, p. 147.

¹¹²⁹ Fox, p. 286 notes these three options. Fredericks and Estes, p. 359; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 123; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155; Walsh, p. 110; Joseph C Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1973), p. 81 interpret as a reference to vagina. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 175 reads the image as 'a sexual image for the woman herself and her sexuality in particular'.

¹¹³⁰ Fredericks and Estes, p. 359; Walsh, p. 98; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 54; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, p. 238.

¹¹³¹ The specific significance of a 'locked garden' will be discussed in 9.4.2.

¹¹³² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 161.

¹¹³³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 160.

¹¹³⁴ Exum, *Songs of Songs*, p. 177.

¹¹³⁵ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 161.

¹¹³⁶ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 156.

¹¹³⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 176; Garrett, p. 197.

¹¹³⁸ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 144-65 produced the landmark research into this imagery. It is also one of the key themes of Davidson, pp. 552-553. Landy, p. 19; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 156.

¹¹³⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 137; Hess, p. 151. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 137 notes that "Lebanon" here serves as a kind of superlative expression for the best water'.

defining the garden fountain imagery.¹¹⁴⁰ Thus, the sealed fountain is no longer sealed, as there are waters flowing from it.¹¹⁴¹ The mention of liquid is highly suggestive as a reference to bodily fluids, and bearing in mind this fountain is in the garden, it suggests the FP's sexual arousal.¹¹⁴² This imagery thus provides the context for the high concentration of uses of the EI in the verses that follow.

9.3.4 The Erotic Imperatives of Sensualisation (4:16a-d)

4:16 is the start of the cluster of EIs in this passage, the first four of them addressing the winds. There is some uncertainty over who is speaking in 4:16a.¹¹⁴³ The ML has been the speaker describing the garden imagery.¹¹⁴⁴ The question here is whether he remains as the speaker who addresses the winds or does the speaker change to the FP?

The discussion depends on how the first person possessive pronominal suffix is understood in 4:16c, the reference to '*my* garden'.¹¹⁴⁵ In v. 12 the ML describes the FP as being 'a locked garden is *my* sister, *my* bride, a locked garden, a fountain sealed'. This leads some commentators to read the imperatives addressing the winds as being said by the ML.¹¹⁴⁶ The implication is that because he calls her his sister and his bride that she is his garden. However, that is not the language that v. 12 uses. He does not say 'my locked garden is my sister, my bride'. He says 'a locked sister is my sister, my bride'. The use of the possessive pronoun in v. 12 to refer to the sister and bride does not necessarily mean that the metaphorical garden belongs to the ML.¹¹⁴⁷

Instead, it is better to read the FP as the one who addresses the wind for two good reasons.¹¹⁴⁸ Firstly, by definition, if the garden refers to her vagina (or her sexuality more generally), it is hers to give.¹¹⁴⁹ The exotic garden is the woman's. Secondly, the ownership of the garden as belonging to the FP makes most sense of the jussive of root *bw'* (4:16e) in which the FP implies an invitation to the ML to enter into his garden.¹¹⁵⁰ For her to invite, the FP must have ownership.

¹¹⁴⁰ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 161.

¹¹⁴¹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 360, Hess, p. 151.

¹¹⁴² Fredericks and Estes, p. 360; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180; Walsh, p. 98.

¹¹⁴³ Murphy, p. 161.

¹¹⁴⁴ 4:12-15.

¹¹⁴⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180; Goulder, p.39; Pope, p. 498.

¹¹⁴⁶ E.g., Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with a Commentary, Historical and Critical* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1857), p. 162; Keel, p. 181; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 57, Garrett, p. 201.

¹¹⁴⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180.

¹¹⁴⁸ Numerous commentators read the FP as speaker including Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180; Spencer, p. 101; Hess, p. 152; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 153; Fredericks and Estes, p. 361; Davidson, p. 572; Duguid, p. 119; Bloch and Bloch, p. 178; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 139.

¹¹⁴⁹ Spencer, p. 107; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180.

¹¹⁵⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180, Hess, p. 152.

By interrupting the ML, the FP is seemingly responding to the portrayal of the ML's desire at this extremely erotic point in the text, but presumably also the way that she responds demonstrates her desire for him.¹¹⁵¹ The use of volitional verbs here in this erotic context are certainly erotic. And this calling upon the wind, before calling upon the man, builds up the atmosphere. For the first time reader, the imagery of commanding the winds is dramatic.¹¹⁵²

In terms of the EIs addressing the winds, the FP uses the imperatives of roots 'wr (awake), bw' (enter) and pwh (blow) to address the North and South winds together.¹¹⁵³ This is an example of personification, since winds do not usually listen to humans!¹¹⁵⁴ But in the poetic world of the Song, the FP has power to call upon them to perform her wishes.

What is also noteworthy is that the use of the verb 'wr is the same verb that the FP has used in the adjurations passages so far.¹¹⁵⁵ By that choice of word, associations are made with the way that 'ahăbâ is aroused, and its association with sexual desire.¹¹⁵⁶ The linking of 'wr strongly supports the idea that the FP is being portrayed as experiencing sexual desire herself.¹¹⁵⁷ Also, by using this verb in 4:16, the FP is potentially implying the timeliness of what she is doing, since, as will be discussed below, the FP is emphasising that 'ahăbâ should only be 'wr at the right time.¹¹⁵⁸ Through this verb, Munro suggests that the FP is emphasising that this is the right time.¹¹⁵⁹

But what is the purpose of the FP calling upon the winds? The final imperative addressing them calls them to pwh (blow) upon the FP's garden. The reason, expressed by a jussive, is so that the garden's spices may nzl (waft). This wafting enables the ML to enjoy the sensual experience of the spices of the garden. It is a metaphorical 'open[ing] of the

¹¹⁵¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181. Exum notes too that on a literary level, the FP speaking here turns this passage into a dialogue.

¹¹⁵² Bloch and Bloch, p. 178 describe this as 'high drama' and note Isaiah 5:6 where the clouds are commanded.

¹¹⁵³ Pope, p. 498 is correct to note that 'the change in winds is merely for poetic parallelism and has no special significance'. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 57 observes a merism here, implying that the all of the imperatives apply to all winds in general; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158 also argues for a merism.

¹¹⁵⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158.

¹¹⁵⁵ 2:7, 3:5. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157. See discussion in 13.2.2.

¹¹⁵⁶ 13.2.2. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 184; Davidson, p. 614; Hess, p. 153.

¹¹⁵⁷ Walsh, p. 98; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 184; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181.

¹¹⁵⁸ 13.3.1.

¹¹⁵⁹ Munro, p. 123.

garden] to the outside world' and particularly, the man.¹¹⁶⁰ It is an indirect way to prepare for the invitation to lovemaking that is to come.¹¹⁶¹

9.3.5 The Erotic Imperatives of Consent (4:16ef)

With this sensual opening up of the garden, the ML is invited by the FP through the use of the jussive of root *bw* 'to enter into the garden'.¹¹⁶² This is followed by an imperative, calling the lover to '*kl* (eat) 'its choicest fruits'.¹¹⁶³

Using a jussive here as a third person invitation to the ML into the garden expresses the FP's desire in an indirect way, in a similar way to the use of the jussive in 1:2¹¹⁶⁴. Exum suggests that by comparison with these verses, the FP is verbalising 'an impatient outburst of desire'.¹¹⁶⁵ The main significance of the jussive is that it affirms that the ML now has access to the garden that was locked.¹¹⁶⁶ He is invited to enter. Furthermore, the use of the verb of root *bw* 'is used elsewhere in the HS in a sexual sense, reinforcing the imagery of what is happening by coming into the garden'.¹¹⁶⁷ However, the use of the third person also portrays something important. Even though the garden belongs to the FP, she here says 'let my lover enter *his* garden' (4:16e). The FP thus invites him, not just to have access, but to be identified with her garden.¹¹⁶⁸ This will be discussed more in the interpretation section below.¹¹⁶⁹

Immediately after the invitation to enter the garden, the FP invites him by an imperative to 'eat its choicest fruits'.¹¹⁷⁰ 'Choicest fruits' were referred to earlier in the passage, a term used for the delights of the garden.¹¹⁷¹ It is a deeply sensual image, a calling for the man to experience pleasure (in the erotic world of the garden).¹¹⁷² Exum emphasises that 'fruit

¹¹⁶⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158.

¹¹⁶¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181.

¹¹⁶² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158. The same verb is used in the imperative addressing the South Wind in 4:16b.

¹¹⁶³ This can also be read as 'his choice fruits'. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181. Contra Fredericks and Estes, p. 355, these two lines are read as jussives, not imperatives.

¹¹⁶⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 57 notes that 'the jussive form itself places the verb somewhere between a wish and a command'; Walsh, p. 100 recognises the jussive as an invitation.

¹¹⁶⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181.

¹¹⁶⁶ Fox, p. 286 notes that the jussive 'indicates that the garden is something that can be entered'.

¹¹⁶⁷ C.f. Genesis 16:2, 38:2. Pope, p. 498; Fredericks and Estes, p. 361; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155. Walsh, p. 119.

¹¹⁶⁸ Discussions centre around what ownership of the garden is being expressed here. Spencer, p. 107; Hess, p. 153;

¹¹⁶⁹ 9.4.3.

¹¹⁷⁰ Keel, p. 181 noted the metaphorical imagery here.

¹¹⁷¹ 4:13b. Keel, p. 181. Here it is taken as referring generically to the plants of the garden. Some scholars (Longman, *NICOT*, p. 156; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 177) read this as being a more specific reference to the pomegranate. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 55 notes that the pomegranate was used as an aphrodisiac.

¹¹⁷² Walsh, pp. 117-118.

is a luxury food, pleasing to taste and sensual in its appearance, and very often needing to be peeled or burst open to reveal its exquisiteness'.¹¹⁷³ It is also imagery that is used in 2:3 for erotic pleasure, where the FP says 'with great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste'.¹¹⁷⁴ Eating itself also has erotic connotations in the HS, reinforcing what is happening here.¹¹⁷⁵ Since *bw* and *kl* are also here found in parallel, the erotic meaning is further emphasised.¹¹⁷⁶ The imperative is clearly erotic in this context.

9.3.6 The Male Lover's Response (5:1ad)

The ML responds verbally (5:1a) immediately to the FP's invitation.¹¹⁷⁷ The response includes four verbs in perfect aspect, which can be read as both as 'an action ... in process of accomplishment' or 'suggesting action begun in the past and continuing into the present'.¹¹⁷⁸ Both are possible readings and both are represented amongst commentators.¹¹⁷⁹ The former is the reading used here, as it best indicates the direct response to the EIs given by the FP.

The verbs used are *'wr* (enter), *'rh* (pluck) *'kl* (eat), and *šth* (drink). Two of the verbs used by the ML, the first (*'wr*) and third (*'kl*), echo the jussive and imperative given to the ML immediately before.¹¹⁸⁰ By responding specifically to these invitations, the ML is portrayed as specifically fulfilling the desires of the FP.¹¹⁸¹ He 'follows up her invitation for sexual union'.¹¹⁸² He responds to her *erotic* call to love.¹¹⁸³

The other two verbs also need some attention. Firstly, *'rh* is only found here and in Psalm 80:2, where the meaning is to pluck fruit.¹¹⁸⁴ As such, the meaning is disputed, and there is discussion to what extent there is synonymous parallelism with *'kl* (to eat), bearing in mind that *'kl* (to eat) is found in parallel with *'rh* both here and in the Psalm.¹¹⁸⁵ Thus,

¹¹⁷³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 177.

¹¹⁷⁴ Walsh, pp. 117-118; Keel, p. 181.

¹¹⁷⁵ Proverbs 9:16-17; 30:20. Fredericks and Estes, p. 361; Keel, p. 181; Murphy, *Proverbs*, p. 235.

¹¹⁷⁶ Fredericks and Estes, p. 361.

¹¹⁷⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181.

¹¹⁷⁸ GKC, §106, g, p. 321; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 139.

¹¹⁷⁹ E.g., Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 152; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 57; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 139. C.f. e.g., Bloch and Bloch, p. 178, Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 113. Pope, p. 504 notes the variety of ways the perfect has been understood by commentators and translations.

¹¹⁸⁰ 4:16ef.

¹¹⁸¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 57.

¹¹⁸² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158.

¹¹⁸³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157 notes how the honeycomb and milk refer back to before the garden description, to verse 11. However, the imagery of eating from the female still is implied by using this imagery of v.11.

¹¹⁸⁴ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 140; DCH, Vol. 1, p. 371; Pope, p. 504.

¹¹⁸⁵ Hess, p. 155.

there is an argument that *'rh* means to eat. However, these arguments are not proven, and the versions retain the traditional reading (as do many contemporary translations).¹¹⁸⁶ Thus, the traditional reading is retained here. In 5:1b myrrh and spices are plucked, two of the sensual delights of the garden. And plucking is an activity that involves the physical sight and touch of whatever is being plucked, also potentially being a sensual activity.¹¹⁸⁷

Secondly, the reference to *šth*, portrays the enjoyment of the taste from drinking.¹¹⁸⁸ The ML recalls the imagery of 'honey and milk' being under her tongue.¹¹⁸⁹ And he refers again (5:1d) to the wine of lovemaking being a 'ruling metaphor for sexual pleasure in the Song'.¹¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, in his response, the ML says in the first person that he enters his garden, calling her two of the terms of endearment that he has previously (my sister, my bride) used in this passage.¹¹⁹¹ What is particularly important to observe is the way that the ML uses first person possessive pronouns to 'take ownership' of the garden.¹¹⁹² And this he continues in his succeeding lines: I pluck *my* myrrh with *my* spices, I eat *my* honeycomb with *my* honey, I drink *my* wine with *my* milk.¹¹⁹³ In response to the FP declaring the garden as his (through her jussive), he declares these various delicacies of the garden to be his own.

9.3.7 The Daughters call the lovers to Sexual Pleasure (5:1ef)

After the response of the ML to the FP's use of the EIs, the DoJ engage with the lovers again, by issuing three imperatives to them of the following roots: *'kl* (eat), *šth* (drink) and *škr* (be intoxicated). The reason why the DoJ are regarded as speaking here is discussed briefly above, noting too that they are the only characters to speak in the Song beside the lovers.¹¹⁹⁴ And this reading is also supported by the use of *rē'im* for friends (being a

¹¹⁸⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157; Hess, p. 155. LXX, Syriac Peshitta and Vulgate.

¹¹⁸⁷ Walsh, p. 118 makes this observation about fruit. As plucking is a verb that relates to fruit, some sensuality is observable by the use of this verb.

¹¹⁸⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 158.

¹¹⁸⁹ 4:11b.

¹¹⁹⁰ The previous reference was 4:10. Walsh, p. 118. Carr, p. 72 provides a more detailed discussion about the relationship between sex and wine, which are well recognised.

¹¹⁹¹ 4:9.

¹¹⁹² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 159.

¹¹⁹³ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 162.

¹¹⁹⁴ For discussion about the speaker, see notes of 9.2.1; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 182 also argues that the DoJ are the only audience in the Song.

masculine plural noun).¹¹⁹⁵ *Rē'im* (friends) is read as referring to the couple, since the singular forms are only used to refer to the lovers.¹¹⁹⁶

In their address to the lovers, the DoJ call them to participate in lovemaking.¹¹⁹⁷ They use roots of the first two verbs that just been used as imperatives (5:1cd) by the ML in response to the FP's invitation. What is more, the DoJ add the final imperative *škr*, which is the only time this verbal root is used in the Song.¹¹⁹⁸ The introduction of this third command means that special attention should be given to it.¹¹⁹⁹ Its uses in the HS refer to various level of drunkenness.¹²⁰⁰ DCH translates is as to 'have one's fill'.¹²⁰¹ But the special emphasis placed upon this imperative by its introduction suggests that the sentiment of the command is that of 'be intoxicated' with lovemaking.¹²⁰² It is a calling for excess, for total indulgence.¹²⁰³ The lovers are not to hold back. Hess says that 'they command indulgence in the fullness of these pleasures'.¹²⁰⁴

9.4 Interpretation

9.4.1 The Erotic Imperative and the Development of Desire in this Passage

The EI plays a vital role in the development of desire in this passage, primarily from the ML's perspective.¹²⁰⁵ This subsection will summarise and expand on the observations about its use from the commentary subsections. It will demonstrate how the use of the EI operates as a response to each particular context, as well as the role that it itself plays in driving forward the portrayal of desire in the passage as a whole.

Firstly, the EIs of movement (v. 8) are given by the ML to the FP in response to what happens beforehand – the ML 'appreciates' her body, from eyes to breast, with him recalling to her implicitly her invitation to be a gazelle or young deer on her mountains

¹¹⁹⁵ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 162 notes that this could extend to addressing a larger group than just the couple (e.g., DoJ), but if so, who is addressing the group?

¹¹⁹⁶ Davidson, p. 591; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 182. The feminine singular noun (*ra'yāt*) is used in 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4 to refer to the FP; the masculine singular noun (*rē'i*) to refer to the ML in 5:16.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Dôdîm*. See also Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 141; Hess, p. 151. Hess, p. 157 notes the possibility of reading this as lovers, but it is more consistent with the other uses, and perfectly appropriate with the context, to read it as lovemaking. The *dôdî* word group is discussed in 2.5.3.

¹¹⁹⁸ BDB, p. 1016.

¹¹⁹⁹ Hess, p. 157.

¹²⁰⁰ James Swanson, 'šākar', in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

¹²⁰¹ DCH, Vol. 8; p. 362. This is based upon a comparable use in Haggai 1:6.

¹²⁰² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 153; Hess, p. 156.

¹²⁰³ Walsh, p. 119.

¹²⁰⁴ Hess, p. 157.

¹²⁰⁵ 4:8-5:1.

(breasts), and his intention to go there.¹²⁰⁶ He expresses his desire (v. 6) by expressing his intention. That provides the context for him calling her to movement in v. 8.¹²⁰⁷

Secondly, the EIs of movement occur in response to the perceived inaccessibility of the FP from the ML's perspective, verbalised by the mountain imagery and the references to the leopards and den of lions.¹²⁰⁸ There is thus strong similarity with her inaccessibility in 2:13-14.¹²⁰⁹ The reader will recall the way that this is resolved, with the FP realising the significance of the relationship that she has with her lover, then verbalising that he is hers (and she is his) with the refrain of mutual possession, after which she uses the EI of simile to call him to herself.¹²¹⁰ Now the ML is using the EIs of movement to verbalise his desire for her to be accessible and to come to him.¹²¹¹ It is this key use of EIs that results in the erotic action developing as it does in this passage.¹²¹² While the destination is not explicitly stated, the EIs open up a trajectory towards the garden of delights.¹²¹³

Thirdly, the EIs of movement are immediately followed by the ML (4:9) using the language of 'physical impact of yearning' to express his desire, as the ML tells the FP directly how she 'infatuates' him, by the beauty of her eyes (and glistening of her necklace).¹²¹⁴ By Walsh's reading, this is a high level of expression of desire.¹²¹⁵

Fourthly, the ML reiterates his want for the FP by specifically making a comparison with her lovemaking being much better than wine.¹²¹⁶ In doing so, he implicitly communicates his desire for sexual activity. He comments too on the experience of smelling her scents. He develops the imagery of her lips and mouth being a place of sensual pleasure.

¹²⁰⁶ 9.2.2 discusses the connection between v. 6 and v. 8. Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, pp. 183-184 also connects v. 8 to what comes before. Walsh, p. 73 has classified the bodily description (4:1-7) as the language of 'aesthetic appreciation'.

¹²⁰⁷ Verse 7 is between the expression of the intention of the ML to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense, and the ML's use of the EI of movement. The ML telling the FP that she is altogether beautiful, and that 'there is no flaw' in her in terms of her beauty is from his perspective. While this is not as erotic as specifically focusing on her breasts, it does not negate the value of his description of her in v.7.

¹²⁰⁸ 9.3.1.

¹²⁰⁹ 7.3.1.

¹²¹⁰ 2:15; 7.3.3-7.3.4.

¹²¹¹ 4:8.

¹²¹² Hess, pp. 147, 158; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 148 both also observe the inaccessibility of the FP, reiterated by the garden locked imagery, but they do not observe the importance of the role of the imperatives in the subsequent development of desire in this passage.

¹²¹³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 168.

¹²¹⁴ 9.3.1, Walsh, pp. 56, 69.

¹²¹⁵ 5.3.

¹²¹⁶ 4:10; 9.3.2.

Fifthly, the ML tells the FP (4:12) that she is a garden locked (her vagina), the implication being that he wants to gain access.¹²¹⁷ The garden has a sealed garden fountain. He builds on the garden imagery as it being an Edenic place of great sensual pleasure, having the sensual delights of the very best fruit and exotic scents. Sixthly, the ML describes the garden fountain flowing, portraying his perception of, or desire for, the moisture of arousal of the FP.¹²¹⁸

Seventhly, at this point the FP responds to the ML's sexual desire with the EI of sensualisation (4:16).¹²¹⁹ She calls upon the winds to make the fragrance from her garden waft. This metaphorically portrays the erotic world of the garden being opened up to the ML.

Eighthly, the FP uses the EI of consent to invite the ML into his garden, and to enjoys the overwhelming pleasures of the garden (eating, plucking and drinking).¹²²⁰ Ninthly, the ML responds (5:1) to the FP's invitation by implying that this is exactly what he is going to do.¹²²¹ Tenthly, the DoJ engage with the couple using imperatives, and encourage them to together enjoy the sensual deep delights of lovemaking, calling them to excess.¹²²²

To conclude, this discussion shows the way that desire is portrayed and how it starts with the verbalisation of 'aesthetic appreciation', resulting in the EIs of movement of v. 8, the language of the 'affective depiction of want' of v. 9 and the succeeding action.¹²²³ The EI plays such a key role in the verbalisation and development of desire in this passage, at the end (4:16-5:1), as well as at the beginning (4:8). This discussion will now examine in some more detail some other implicit roles of the EI in this passage.

9.4.2 A Garden Locked, a Fountain Sealed (4:12)

One interpretive question to consider about this passage is what is meant by the description of the FP by the ML as 'a garden locked, a fountain sealed'. As was noted above, the ML uses this image to refer to the sexual inaccessibility of the FP.¹²²⁴ It is an important image for the development of desire in this passage, since its use by the ML implies that he wants to get access, particularly through describing his perception of the

¹²¹⁷ Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 22, argues that by using this imagery he is implying his wish to gain access; similarly, Spencer, p. 107.

¹²¹⁸ 9.3.3.

¹²¹⁹ 9.3.4.

¹²²⁰ 9.3.5.

¹²²¹ 9.3.6.

¹²²² 9.3.7.

¹²²³ Walsh, p. 73 makes a similar observation, but unlike Walsh, this thesis observes the use of language in light of the EIs.

¹²²⁴ 9.3.3.

garden to which he does not yet have access. But how should this contextual image be understood?

Some scholars read this as referring to the chastity of the FP.¹²²⁵ This reading sometimes is based upon reading this passage in light of the marriage passage, as well as assumptions as to the way that the relationship between the lovers has been portrayed so far in the Song.¹²²⁶ From their hermeneutical spiral, they read the *potential* descriptions of sexual intercourse before 4:16, and choose to believe that such a suggestion would be untenable.¹²²⁷ However, an alternative, and potentially more contextually appropriate reading, is to observe that the emphasis of this passage is upon the ML's 'exclusive access'.¹²²⁸

What evidence is there to read 'a garden locked, a fountain sealed' as a reference to chastity? No other passage in the HS uses the verb of root *n'l* to refer to the locking of gardens, nor is it used elsewhere in a non-literal sense.¹²²⁹ Similarly, there are no other references to *ḥtm* to refer to fountains.¹²³⁰ Moreover, it is the case that *ḥtm* is used in a metaphorical sense elsewhere (Daniel 9:24, Deuteronomy 32:34), but while the latter metaphor is about preventing access, there are no examples from the HS to semantically confirm that it refers to chastity.¹²³¹

A single semantic argument has been offered to support the case for *n'l* as referring to chastity. Pope suggests the colloquial Arabic use of *maftūḥat* 'opened' as referring to a 'deflowered virgin' as being a metaphor that supports his reading as a reference to

¹²²⁵ Davidson, p. 593; Fredericks and Estes, p. 359; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 135; Pope, p. 488; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155.

¹²²⁶ 3:6-11.

¹²²⁷ Fredericks and Estes, p. 294 is an example of the marriage-based reading, the hermeneutic of which affects the way he handles other passages.

Longman, p. 155 observes the issue of previous potential references to sexual intercourse for interpretation. At least Longman has the courage to note the suggestiveness of earlier passages, instead of choosing to interpret them away. His interpretative approach is to read the poems as being an anthology, which should not be read in any particular order, but as has been discussed, there are interpretative problems with this approach.

¹²²⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 175; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 54. Contra Keel, p. 174, this image has got some associations with exclusivity.

¹²²⁹ Arnold, 'nā'al', p. 120 notes the other uses of *n'l* as found in Judges 3:23, 2 Samuel 13:17, 18 as being other references to the sense of lock. These other examples are 'literal' examples of lock.

¹²³⁰ DCH, Vol. 3, p. 355.

¹²³¹ Pope, p. 489; Alan Millard, 'ḥātam', in *New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 324-25. The image of the seal as a noun is also used in 8:6, but as will be discussed, the imagery there is about inseparability, as opposed to being closed. The use of *ḥtm* in a metaphorical sense is discussed more in 12.3.2.

chastity.¹²³² But this argument is limited in its usefulness.¹²³³ Also, some scholars chose to interpret previous examples of the imagery of inaccessibility of the FP (e.g. 2:8-17) to support their argument for the virginity of the FP.¹²³⁴ But the EIs of 2:17 suggest that this is not necessarily the case.¹²³⁵ It is better, instead, to consider the sexual inaccessibility aspect of this imagery in terms of this particular textual context, instead of projecting the assumption of virginity onto this image.

Thus, instead of reading as chastity, it could be read as the 'man's exclusive access to the garden.'¹²³⁶ By using this powerful image, the ML is expressing his desire for the privilege of restricted access at this point. There is not open admission to everyone.

9.4.3 The Language of Ownership of the Garden

One important observation to note is the way that language changes about the ownership of the garden.¹²³⁷ The FP first describes the garden as 'my garden'.¹²³⁸ Then in the context of two jussives she invites the ML to enter *his* garden and eat its choicest fruit. Thus, she refers firstly to 'my garden' and then to '*his* garden'. This the ML responds to by saying the ways that he takes possession of it.¹²³⁹ But what does this change in possession mean, and how does it relate to what comes before or what comes after?

One suggestion is that the change in possessive pronouns means that 'he has possessed her completely, a fitting image of sexual intercourse'.¹²⁴⁰ However, Longman here misses the huge importance that it is only by the FPs wording of invitation that gives him any possession whatsoever. It is her invitation using EIs, her jussives, that identify the garden with him. It is the FP who is portrayed as being the key player in this exchange.¹²⁴¹

Hess has suggested that this change in person shows 'a desire to fully share herself with her lover', which seems a fitting reading as to what is being portrayed here.¹²⁴² Sharing implies that she retains ownership, while offering ownership to him. Spencer has suggested, from a feminist perspective, that offering possession to the man does not

¹²³² Pope, 488.

¹²³³ Other scholars, such as Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157, do not add to this argument.

¹²³⁴ Davidson, p. 593.

¹²³⁵ 7.3.4.

¹²³⁶ The quote is from Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 175. See also Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 54; Bloch and Bloch, p. 176.

¹²³⁷ 4:16ef; 9.3.5-9.3.6.

¹²³⁸ She does this in the context of the EIs addressing the winds.

¹²³⁹ 9.3.6.

¹²⁴⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 159.

¹²⁴¹ C.f. Exum, *Song of Song*, p. 181.

¹²⁴² Hess, p. 153; similarly, Spencer, p. 107 reads this as sharing.

mean that she loses possession of her garden, since it is always still hers to give.¹²⁴³ He says that the ML 'is not given a permanent passkey entitling him to barge in any time he desires'.¹²⁴⁴ She still retains ownership of the garden, even though she offers herself to him in each act of intercourse.

Moreover, this reference to the language of possession also needs to be seen in the light of other references to possession so far in the Song. In 1:6 the FP makes reference in the first person to 'my ... own vineyard'.¹²⁴⁵ This is double entendre, referring to female sexuality in some way.¹²⁴⁶ The main point though is that she claims total possession of the vineyard in 1:6. Nobody else is invited at that point to have any sense of ownership of her vineyard. It has already been argued that an important change in language occurs around the 'catch for us' imperative, followed by the first refrain of mutual possession, 'my lover is mine and I am his'.¹²⁴⁷ With the references to ownership made by the jussive inviting the ML to enter his garden, there is a definite development in the use of language of possession in the Song, demonstrating a greater sense of mutuality and security in the relationship. It is another example of the ongoing development of the relationship of the lovers in the Song.

Furthermore, the language of possession is important here in the Song because of its relationship with the language of desire and love. As Exum observes, the language of desire here epitomises a 'cultural version of love as something a woman gives and a man takes'.¹²⁴⁸ Here the FP has something beautiful and exotic (her garden) that she offers, while meeting her desires as an expression of female sexuality, and the ML responds by taking up the invitation and coming into his garden, where he can eat, pluck and drink, as an expression of male sexuality.¹²⁴⁹ By offering this sexual sharing of herself in 4:16, she is fulfilling her desires and having her desires fulfilled. And this desire is something expressed through the EIs of the invitation of the woman and the response of the man.

¹²⁴³ Spencer, p. 107. Jonneke Bekkenhamp, 'Into Another Scene of Choices: The Theological Value of the Song of Songs', in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Athalya Brenner and Carole R Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 55–89 (p. 80) suggests that reading from a particular approach could mean reading this as '*her garden is his* garden as long as she loves him'.

¹²⁴⁴ Spencer, p. 107.

¹²⁴⁵ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 139; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180.

¹²⁴⁶ Munro, p. 99.

¹²⁴⁷ 7.3.2-7.3.3; 2:15-16.

¹²⁴⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 182.

¹²⁴⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 182.

9.4.4 Invitation and Consent

Glickman describes the interaction between the lovers in 4:16 and 5:1 as being an ‘almost formal request and acceptance in the imagery of the garden’.¹²⁵⁰ His particularly argument is based upon the idea of this passage being the consummation of marriage.¹²⁵¹ While he underplays the ways that sexual desire is being expressed by the lovers in this exchange, his observation of there being some significance of what is being portrayed here is worthy of note. Teram observes correctly that what is being portrayed here is the FP giving the ML ‘consent’.¹²⁵² He does not force his way into the exotic garden, but is invited in, and he responds desirously to that invitation. As has been argued, this happens within the context of her response to the way that desire has been expressed by the ML in the build-up to 4:16.¹²⁵³

9.4.5 The Significance of the Passage in the Portrayal of the Development of the Relationship

These verses are also significant because the Song makes more of them than other potential references to sexual activity prior to this.¹²⁵⁴ This is evident by the large number of verses that build up the portrayal of desire up to 4:16, including the ‘sustained’ erotic metaphor of the garden.¹²⁵⁵ It is highlighted by the high concentration of uses of the EI around this offering and accepting of consent.¹²⁵⁶ It is demonstrated by the way that the ML verbally responds to the specifics of this invitation using the EI.¹²⁵⁷ And it is shown by the language of invitation of possession of the garden.¹²⁵⁸ The first-time reader is simply exposed to more of this deeply erotic passage than potential portrayals of sexual activity that precede it. It is as if the lovers want to make more of this intimate passage of the expression of their sexual desire and fulfilment than anything that has come so far.

Thus, the significance of this passage needs to be considered in light of the developing relationship between the lovers as portrayed in the text. By making more of the portrayal of sexual activity, the lovers are emphasising that this particular encounter matters especially to them. It is recognising that sexual intimacy at this point in their developing relationship has particular significance for them. This is not to dismiss the importance of sexual desire and expression before this point in the Song. Far from it! But it is instead to

¹²⁵⁰ Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 85.

¹²⁵¹ Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 85; Duguid, p. 120; Davidson, p. 611.

¹²⁵² Jonathan Teram, *Illuminating Counsel: How the Least Holy Books of the Hebrew Bible Explore Life's Most Important Issues* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), p. 166.

¹²⁵³ 9.4.1.

¹²⁵⁴ C.f. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 155; Teram, p. 166.

¹²⁵⁵ Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 184; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 54.

¹²⁵⁶ 4:16-5:1. 9.4.4 and as shown in the dot plot in Appendix 1.

¹²⁵⁷ 9.3.6; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 181.

¹²⁵⁸ 9.3.5.

recognise that at this point in their developing relationship, sexual activity takes on new meaning in light of the portrayal of their relationship thus far. Previous expressions of sexual activity have been more ambiguous in their description.¹²⁵⁹ But the intimate portrayal of this sexual activity at this midpoint of the Song gives it particular significance both for the lovers and for the readers. It is a 'middle climax' in the text of the Song, and a key point in the development of the relationship of the lovers.¹²⁶⁰

9.4.6 Pleasure as the Context for the Erotic Imperative in this Passage

As previously discussed, one of the reasons why the Song is regarded as conveying sexual desire is because of its communication of the want for pleasurable experiences associated with lovemaking. This is definitely something that is conveyed in this erotic passage. Hess has described this passage powerfully in this way:

More than any text in the Bible, these verses reject the suppression of physical pleasures as though in themselves somehow evil or unworthy of God. The poet masters all of the physical senses and their indulgence in magnifying the experiences of physical lovemaking.¹²⁶¹

The significant point is that lovemaking is being associated in this passage with deep sensual pleasure. This is found in the comparison that the ML makes with the lovemaking of the FP, a comparison with the delights of smell and taste.¹²⁶² It is found too in the exotic and sensual description of the FP's garden.¹²⁶³ And it is most importantly found in the EIs in 4:16 and 5:1: the FP calls upon the winds, sensualising the atmosphere; the FP invites the ML to enter, eat and drink; and the DoJ call upon the lovers to eat, drink and get intoxicated in their lovemaking. Here, the EI is associated with the calling for pleasure, as part of the 'call to love'.¹²⁶⁴ It demonstrates the implied desire of the FP for pleasure and the want of the ML in his response to her. Sexual want, including the pleasure linked to it, is being expressed through this volitional use of language.

9.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the role of the EI in the way that the desire of the ML is portrayed in 4:8-16 and in the response of the FP. It has discussed how the EI is used in terms of invitation and consent. It has re-iterated how the EI truly is erotic, because of its communication of the want of sexual pleasure. And it has discussed how significance is

¹²⁵⁹ E.g., 1:2; 6.4.2.

¹²⁶⁰ Wendland, p. 41; Davidson, p. 623.

¹²⁶¹ Hess, p. 158.

¹²⁶² 4:10; Garrett, p. 194.

¹²⁶³ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 156.

¹²⁶⁴ 5.2.1.

attached to this particular portrayal of sexual activity, at this point in the development of the relationship of the lovers. There is some sense of progression in the relationship.

Chapter 10: Reviewing Perspectives of Preference

10.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the passage (5:9-6:3) immediately following the second night-time passage.¹²⁶⁵ At the end of this second night-time passage, the first-time reader was left observing the situation that the ML has gone, because of a lack of synchronisation between the lovers.¹²⁶⁶ In 5:9-6:3 the FP is asked by the DoJ to consider how the ML compares with other lovers. Here the FP reiterates, and in effect, reviews, how her preference is still for the ML (even though he has gone). She uses 'aesthetic appreciation' of his body as the way of expressing her ongoing desire for him. The passage also demonstrates the developing relationship between the lovers.

10.2 Translation and passage context

10.2.1 Translation (5:9-6:3)

DoJ

5:9a: How is your lover different from any other lover,¹²⁶⁷

9b: most beautiful among women?

9c: How is your lover different from any other lover

9d: that you adjure us to do this?

FP

10a: My lover is all radiant and ruddy,

10b: outstanding¹²⁶⁸ among ten thousand.

11a: His head is the purest gold;

11b: his locks are wavy,¹²⁶⁹

11c: black like a raven.

12a: His eyes are like doves

12b: by springs of water,

12b: his teeth¹²⁷⁰ washed in milk,

¹²⁶⁵ The second night-time passage is 5:2-8.

¹²⁶⁶ 8.8.4.

¹²⁶⁷ The use of *mi* with *dôd* could be read as partitive or comparative. Here it is read as partitive. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 151. For comparative partitive examples, see Genesis 3:1, 3:14, 37:3; Deuteronomy 7:7; Psalm 45:3. For comparative readings see NIV and JS.

¹²⁶⁸ The qal passive participle masculine singular (*dāgûl*) here is of uncertain meaning (Murphy, p. 166). The meaning 'outstanding' which is used here is supported by LXX, Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta, which emphasise choosiness. Murphy, p. 166; Pope, p. 532.

¹²⁶⁹ *Taltallim* is hapax legomenon in the HS, though it is used in the sense of 'curly' in rabbinic texts. Pope, p. 534.

¹²⁷⁰ Some translators insert 'his teeth' to this verse, though there is no textual evidence to support. This is because the description in 12b best suits teeth, and there is no mention of them otherwise. In the MT, if it is not inserted, there is twice as many lines given to the description of eyes than

12c: fitly set.¹²⁷¹
 13a: His cheeks are like beds¹²⁷² of spices,
 13b: that put forth¹²⁷³ fragrance.¹²⁷⁴
 13c: His lips are lilies,
 13d: dripping liquid myrrh.
 14a: His arms¹²⁷⁵ are gold rods,¹²⁷⁶
 14b: set with jewels.¹²⁷⁷
 14c: His belly¹²⁷⁸ is ivory work,¹²⁷⁹
 14d: decorated with sapphires.
 15a: His legs are alabaster pillars
 15b: set upon pedestals of gold.
 15c: His looks¹²⁸⁰ are like Lebanon,
 15d: choice as cedars.
 16a: His mouth is most sweet,
 16b: and all of him is desirable.
 16c: This is my lover, and this is my friend,
 16d: O Daughters of Jerusalem.

DoJ

6:1a: Where has your lover gone?
 1b: most beautiful among women?
 1c: Which way has your lover turned,
 1d: That we may seek him with you?

other parts of the body. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 166 adds 'his teeth' and notes how the description is a good one for teeth.

¹²⁷¹ The meaning of *yōšēbōt* 'almillē' is not clear. Pope, p. 538; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 166.

¹²⁷² 'ārūgat is only used elsewhere in Ezekiel 17:7, 10 where it is used for a planting bed.

¹²⁷³ Emendation from *migdēlōt* (towers) in MT to *mēgaddēlōt* (put forth). See Pope, p. 540. LXX reads this as *phuoussai* (dropping).

¹²⁷⁴ *Merqāhīm* ('fragrance') is hapax. See Pope, p. 540; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 166; C.f. Psalm 144:12. Context suggests fragrance.

¹²⁷⁵ *Yādāy* is read here as arms, as supported by Ugaritic and Genesis 25:30, 47; Jeremiah 38:12. See discussion in Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 166.

¹²⁷⁶ *Gēlīlē* refer to a cylindrical or rounded shape. DCH, Vol. 2, p. 354 translates it as rods.

¹²⁷⁷ DCH, Vol. 8, p. 680 reads *taršīš* as topaz. However, as Pope, p. 543 and Hess, p. 164 observe the variety of ways that the jewels have been interpreted in the interpretive history of the Song, it is more appropriate to go for a more general

¹²⁷⁸ *Mē'āy* is translated as belly. DCH, Vol. 5, p. 382. However, it is possible that this is an allusion to male genitals. Davidson, p. 599; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173; Goulder, p. 6.

¹²⁷⁹ 'ešet (work) is hapax and there is no certainty about it. Ideas are divided between a 'solid mass' or 'something polished and shiny'. Pope, p. 543; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 166.

¹²⁸⁰ *Mar'ē* refers 'to sight'. BDB, p. 909 sees as 'appearance. Hess, p. 185 translates as 'looks'.

FP

2a: My lover has gone down to his garden,

2b: To the bed of spices

2c: To feast¹²⁸¹ in the gardens

2d: and gather lilies.

3a: I am my lover's and my lover is mine;

3b: He feasts among the lilies.

10.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

The passage is part of a wider section of the Song, which also includes the second night-time passage discussed in Chapter 8¹²⁸². The ending of this larger section is recognised by the use of the refrain of mutual possession.¹²⁸³ The reason why 5:9-6:3 is being examined is because of the key question asked by the DoJ in 5:9. In 5:8, the FP involves the DoJ (using an adjuration) in a search for the ML, since he has disappeared.¹²⁸⁴ She went out to search for him, but failed to find him, and she told the DoJ in the adjuration that she was 'faint with love' for him.¹²⁸⁵ In response, at the start of this passage, the DoJ ask the FP a key question to which the FP provides a description of her lover.¹²⁸⁶ Her description is then followed by another question from the DoJ, asking where her lover has gone.¹²⁸⁷ This results in her stating where her lover is (his garden).¹²⁸⁸ After which the section is then closed by the second refrain of mutual possession.¹²⁸⁹

10.2.3 Overview of the Use of the Erotic Imperative and the Recognition of Relationality in this Passage

Neither the ML nor the FP in this passage call each other to love by the EI, simply because the ML is absent. The last use of the EI by the ML was in 5:2, to which on a literal level the FP did not respond. It is her failure to respond, and his failure to wait for a response, that results in him leaving and her going out in search of him. However, this passage still conveys desire of the FP for the ML by her use of the language of 'aesthetic appreciation'. This passage is important as it shows her ongoing desire for him, even though for most part he is not present.

What this passage does contain is a significant statement of recognition of relationality,

¹²⁸¹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 157.

¹²⁸² Hess, p. 165; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 185 also both split their sections in this way.

¹²⁸³ 6:3.

¹²⁸⁴ Fredericks and Estes, p. 369; Hess, pp. 178-179.

¹²⁸⁵ 5:6-5:8.

¹²⁸⁶ 5:9. Fox, p. 273 regards this description of the FP as being of the wasf genre.

¹²⁸⁷ 6:1.

¹²⁸⁸ 6:2.

¹²⁸⁹ 6:3.

even though the ML is absent.¹²⁹⁰ This is followed shortly by the second refrain of mutual possession, another point at which the FP describes the developing relationship between the lovers.¹²⁹¹ Together, they show how the portrayal of the perception of the relationship continues to develop.

10.3 Commentary

10.3.1 A Key Question About the Male Lover (5:9)

5:9 immediately follows an adjuration to the DoJ, since the ML has gone and no one knows where, or if he will return.¹²⁹² In the adjuration (different from the others in the Song), the FP has called upon the DoJ to tell the ML that she is ‘sick with love’ if they find him, her using adjuration language to emphasise how important this is to her that they give him this message if they find him.¹²⁹³ She has invited the DoJ to be involved in the search for him, and so the key question they ask in 5:9 immediately follows.¹²⁹⁴

The question of 5:9 (*ma-ddôdêk middôd*, repeated twice) has puzzled commentators.¹²⁹⁵ It literally translates as ‘What is your lover from a lover?’¹²⁹⁶ Here *mi* with *dôd* could be read as a partitive or comparative.¹²⁹⁷ As there are good indications that the Song is a late text, Bloch and Bloch reasonably see the form ‘mah X mi(y) Y’ as a ‘stylistic hallmark of post biblical phraseology’ that could reasonably be read in a partitive way.¹²⁹⁸ This reading means that the question is asking ‘What’s so special about your lover, what makes him different from others?’¹²⁹⁹ Or to put it more colloquially, ‘what’s so hot about this guy of yours?’¹³⁰⁰

By asking this question, as the DoJ already know what the male lover is like in terms of characteristics – they desire him too in 1:4 – it seems likely that they are asking this

¹²⁹⁰ 5:16.

¹²⁹¹ 6:3.

¹²⁹² 5:8.

¹²⁹³ Unlike the previous two uses of adjuration language (2:7, 3:5), this is a conditional adjuration, only applying *if* they find him. Her use of adjuration language is her conventional way of stressing the importance of what she is saying (see discussion in 13.3.3).

¹²⁹⁴ Fredericks and Estes, p. 369; Hess, pp. 178-179.

¹²⁹⁵ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 151; Pope, p. 530; Bloch and Bloch, p. 184 notes that this is ‘syntactic hapax’.

¹²⁹⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 151; Bloch and Bloch, p. 184.

¹²⁹⁷ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 151. Reading as partitive means seeing the question as a differentiating one – ‘What is your love more than another lover?’. Examples of partitive readings include choosiness Genesis 3:1; 14; 37:3; Deuteronomy 7:7 and Psalm 45:3.

Comparative readings imply seeing the question as ‘how is your lover better than another lover?’. For examples, see NIV, ‘How is your beloved better than others?’, JB, ‘What makes your Beloved better than other lovers?’, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 184; Pope, p. 530.

¹²⁹⁸ Bloch and Bloch, p. 184.

¹²⁹⁹ Bloch and Bloch, p. 184; Exum, p. 202.

¹³⁰⁰ Spencer, p. 138.

question as a means of challenging the FP to convince them of his uniqueness.¹³⁰¹ As she is reporting to be faint with love for him, what is it that is actually so special about him?¹³⁰² Whatever the purpose of the question, the FP gives her response, focusing on how desirable the ML's body is.¹³⁰³

10.3.2 The Answer Given to the Key question (5:10-16b)

The FP responds to the DoJ's by describing the ML's body and its desirability, using the language of 'aesthetic appreciation'.¹³⁰⁴ She intimately describes his body from his head to his legs, followed by his mouth.¹³⁰⁵ She praises 'the color, the sweetness, and the strength of the man's body'.¹³⁰⁶ Interestingly, the description is very unusual in the context of ANE writing, since it is rare to have poetic passages in which a female describes a male.¹³⁰⁷

The FP starts her answer to the question by stressing -- from her perception -- his uniqueness amongst men.¹³⁰⁸ She talks about his body as a whole, that he is 'radiant' and 'ruddy'.¹³⁰⁹ He is *dāgûl* (outstanding).¹³¹⁰ And he is outstanding 'among ten thousand', which means 'he's one in a million'.¹³¹¹ This line emphasises both his visual distinctiveness and how he stands out from others.¹³¹² The FP's description substantiates her definite admiration for him, and her perception of his uniqueness.¹³¹³

Verses 11-16b then describe in detail how his appearance is so outstanding.¹³¹⁴ The description will not be discussed in detail, since it would not add much to the overall

¹³⁰¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 68 notes the discussion amongst commentators about the meaning of this question. Keel, p. 198; Spencer, p. 138 also interpret the question in this way.

¹³⁰² Hess, p. 179.

¹³⁰³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 202.

¹³⁰⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 202; Walsh, p. 65. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 203 observes that the third-person use of language emphasises that he is not there.

¹³⁰⁵ Luter, 5:9; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 152; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 69; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 202; Hess, p. 180; Walsh, p. 65.

¹³⁰⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 153; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 69;

¹³⁰⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 68 notes that the rare passages that do tend to focus upon a man's strength or military achievements. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 169; Fox, p. 142 also note the rarity having a male poetic description.

¹³⁰⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 202-203; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 153; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 166; Spencer, p. 138.

¹³⁰⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 170 notes that this is a description of his body as a whole. *Adom* 'ruddy', is read here as a reference to being the colour of his skin, which could have the breadth to include 'brown'. See also Robert L. Alden, 'ādēm', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, p. 262.

¹³¹⁰ HALOT, p. 213; NIV; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 164.

¹³¹¹ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 153 notes the non-literal reading here. Exum, p. 203 suggests the contemporary idiom used here.

¹³¹² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 203.

¹³¹³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 203.

¹³¹⁴ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 153

argument of the thesis. In summary this language of ‘aesthetic appreciation’ conveys her desire for him, even if he is not present.¹³¹⁵ Longman puts the description well as an ‘extravagant’ desirous description of his body.¹³¹⁶

Of particular potential significance is her reference (5:14) to his *mē'āy* (translated as belly).¹³¹⁷ As DCH notes, *the* ‘exact anatomical reference [of *mē'āy* is] often uncertain’.¹³¹⁸ As she is describing the outside of his body in this passage as a whole, then his belly, as a visible place, is a sensible reading.¹³¹⁹ Referring to his belly as being like ivory in some way is plausible.¹³²⁰ Such a reading would imply that she imagines him naked, or at least half-naked.¹³²¹ However, there is a possibility, and this suggestion is used with caution, that the reference to *mē'āy* is an allusion to his genitals.¹³²² This is based upon the reference to ivory, being like a tusk (with its potential erotic connotations), and being covered with sapphires, emphasising its significance.¹³²³ This reading is also supportable by the way that the noun refers to genitals elsewhere in the HS, including potentially in the reference to the FP’s genitals in 5:4¹³²⁴. As the Song is such an erotic text, and the context of this passage is one in which the FP is desirously lovesick for her lover, such an allusion fits the context.¹³²⁵

After reaching the bottom of his body, she returns to his mouth (v. 16), a place with a special fascination for her.¹³²⁶ *Hikkô* refers to the mouth, especially the inside of the mouth (the palate).¹³²⁷ And *mamētaqqîm* refers to its sweetness.¹³²⁸ *Mtqtm* in Ugaritic is used to describe the ‘sweetness of lips when kissed’ which is the main emphasis of what

¹³¹⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173 says that ‘her vision is the vision of love’. Pope, p. 547 notes the way that the male lover’s ‘sexual appeal’ is portrayed in this section; Walsh, p. 65.

¹³¹⁶ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 174. There is an argument of some scholars (e.g., Landy, p. 13) that the ML is portrayed as a god. However, it is not necessary to read the imagery this way, but simply as a dramatic portrayal of the FP’s poetic perception of the ML.

¹³¹⁷ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 382.

¹³¹⁸ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 382.

¹³¹⁹ This is, instead of reading it as referring to internal organs. DCH, Vol. 5, p. 382 notes that the use of the translation ‘belly’ is based upon looking at the male lover ‘externally’; Davidson, p. 599; Garrett, p. 222.

¹³²⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173.

¹³²¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 72; Spencer, p. 143.

¹³²² Davidson, p. 599; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173 notes that he is ‘being more adventurous than usual in ... [his] translation and interpretation’; Goulder, p. 6.

¹³²³ 5:14cd. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173; Goulder, p. 6.

¹³²⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173; Garrett, p. 382; DCH, Vol. 5, p. 382; C.f. Genesis 15:4; 25:23; 2 Samuel 7:12. These examples demonstrate the way that the nouns refer to both female and male genitals.

¹³²⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 173.

¹³²⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 209.

¹³²⁷ Pope, p. 549; Hess, p. 165; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 174; ESV and NIV both translate as mouth.

¹³²⁸ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 336; BDB, p. 609. The plural ‘sweetness’ is likely to be an example of an intensive plural, as asserted by Waltke and O’Connor, p.122.

is being expressed here.¹³²⁹ As Longman notes, 'her comments anticipate a deep kiss'.¹³³⁰ The audience (including the DoJ) know already about the kisses that come from his mouth (1:2) and her perception about the desirability of his lovemaking attached to them.¹³³¹ His lips are at this point 'the most sensuous part of the male's body that is described. [This is the place where] the lovemaking would begin'.¹³³² As he is not present, this is not possible, but the image is one with all its desirous connotations.¹³³³

Having reached this especially sensuous part of her description, the FP says that *kūlōw maḥāammadīm* (he is altogether desirable).¹³³⁴ Talley notes that all nominatives of *ḥmd* refer to 'outward appearance', which can emphasise both 'attractiveness' and 'value'.¹³³⁵ The description she has painted stresses his attractiveness and incomprehensible value amongst men.¹³³⁶ He is, as a whole, an extremely desirable object. He is altogether desirable, 'every bit of him'.¹³³⁷

And yet the FP makes this comment describing the whole of her ML in the context of returning to his mouth. As the locus of the start of lovemaking, it is no surprise that she should express his total desirability within this context. As he is totally desirable, desirability includes his sexual desirability, bearing in mind that she describes him from her erotic imagination his (naked) body from top to bottom, including perhaps his genitals, followed by his mouth (and kisses).¹³³⁸ The FP passionately answers the question of the DoJ, about why he is so special.

¹³²⁹ Pope, p. 549 and Hess, p. 165 refer to the Ugaritic reference. BDB, p.609; Keel, p. 206; Luter, 5:16; Exum, p. 209.

¹³³⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 175. Fredericks and Estes, p. 376 suggests reading *ḥikkō* as referring to speech. However, *matōq* (sweet) has been previously used 2:3 to describe the sweetness of the taste of ML's fruit (see Duguid, p. 133). It is consistent with the physicality (Exum, p. 209) of this description to see the reference to be one about taste.

Later in the Song (7:9), the ML desires to experience the FP's *ḥikkē*, described as being like the best wine, which goes over lips and teeth, where *ḥikkē* is read as kisses. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 209. See discussion in 11.3.2.

¹³³¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 209.

¹³³² Hess, p. 180; sensuality is here focused on taste.

¹³³³ Griffiths, p. 127 suggests the implication that desire of the ML is portrayed by focus on this part of the body, though, as his reading is based upon the LXX.

¹³³⁴ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 221 translates this literally as 'all of him is desirable things, i.e., he is altogether desirable'.

¹³³⁵ David Talley, 'Hamad', in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 167–69 (p. 168).

¹³³⁶ His value is emphasised by the imagery of gold (vv. 11, 14, 15) and jewels (v. 14 twice) used to describe him. Walsh, p. 65; Hess, p. 184.

¹³³⁷ Quote from CEB; Spencer, p. 139; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 202; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 73.

¹³³⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 208 argues that this is an example of an 'erotic look' not a 'voyeuristic gaze'. As the lover is not present, this is not voyeuristic.

10.3.3 A Statement of Relationality (5:16cd)

After describing the overwhelming desirability of the ML, the FP makes a declaration (5:16cd), using two demonstratives: *ze dōdī wēze rē'ī* (this is my lover and this is my friend).¹³³⁹ The use of 'near demonstratives' is unusual in the Song, and so their use here is perhaps suggestive that something to be noted is being said.¹³⁴⁰ She calls him 'my lover', the main epithet that she uses for the ML throughout the song. But she also calls him 'my friend', being highly significant as the only time that FP calls him so. The use of this word comes as a real surprise for the first-time reader of the Song and so its particular contextual importance will be discussed more below.¹³⁴¹

10.3.4 The Second Question and Response (6:1-3)

Immediately following the statement of relationality, the DoJ respond (6:1) by asking a second question, expressing their wish to join in the search for him.¹³⁴² Since the earlier question (5:9) was asked by the DoJ to see how the ML is distinct from the FP's perspective, the use of this second question probably portrays their willingness to be involved in the search, being convinced that he is the man for her.¹³⁴³ However, their involvement is not necessary, since the FP now knows where her lover is. In coherence with the presence-absence motif of the Song, the ML dramatically is present again.¹³⁴⁴ In a poetic sense it would be fair to say that 'he was never really lost to her', even though the text very much portrays his absence, and her experience of that (5:6-8) from his point of his turning and going in 5:6¹³⁴⁵.

In telling the audience about his presence, the FP says that 'he has gone down (*yārad*) to his garden'.¹³⁴⁶ While this could refer to a literal garden, it is more likely to refer to the FP herself, in an erotic sense, as this imagery has been previously used.¹³⁴⁷ Using other

¹³³⁹ The demonstratives can either be read as 'such is my lover, such is my friend' or as 'this is my lover, this is my friend'. Abraham Mariaselvam, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems: Poetry and Symbolism*, Analecta Biblica, 118 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), p. 169; HALOT, p. 264.

¹³⁴⁰ Waltke and O'Connor, p. 307; *zeh* is only used in the Song elsewhere in 2:8, 9. Contra Mariaselvam, p. 264.

¹³⁴¹ 10.4.3.

¹³⁴² Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 158; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 166-167. Cf. Garrett, p. 224; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 73.

¹³⁴³ Spencer, p. 144 sees this question as a response to the female protagonist answering the implied question of 5:9, 'what's so special about your lover?', and their acknowledgement that her description meets the mark.

However, where Spencer and this thesis differ is the suggestion of Spencer that this question is simply ironic, emphasising that if he is so special, why did he leave? C.f. Bergant, p. 73.

¹³⁴⁴ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 74; Hess, p. 189; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 175.

¹³⁴⁵ Provan, p. 337; Duguid, p. 133; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 173; Fredericks and Estes, p. 378; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 210; Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁴⁶ 6:2.

¹³⁴⁷ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 159; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 175; Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Exum,

previously used imagery, she says that he has gone to ‘the bed of *bōšēm* (spices)’.¹³⁴⁸ Spices were the smell of the garden was that wafted by the winds (under the instruction of the FP) in 4:16, and they were what the ML plucked in the garden, in the portrayal of the erotic garden of lovemaking.¹³⁴⁹ She also says that he has gone to feast (*rē‘ôt*) there, and to gather (*lěqōṭ*) lilies.¹³⁵⁰ Thus, ‘he partakes of the love of her body’.¹³⁵¹

At this important moment, where the FP verbalises the ways that the recently absent ML now is with her meeting her desires, the section is ended by her use of the second refrain of mutual possession: ‘I am my lover’s, and my lover is mine’.¹³⁵² Several scholars observe the importance of the swapping around of the two clauses in the refrain of mutual possession, compared to its first use in 2:16.¹³⁵³ The significance of this will be discussed more in the interpretation section. Finally, the passage closes with the same line used to end the refrain of mutual possession in 2:16.¹³⁵⁴

10.4 Interpretation

10.4.1 Why Does the Female Protagonist adjure the Daughters of Jerusalem (5:8-9)?

Why in 5:8 does the FP adjure the DoJ using a unique conditional adjuration? Maybe the adjuration simply expresses her desperation.¹³⁵⁵ But while the DoJ are the FP’s companions, they do not personally gain anything by telling the ML that the FP is lovesick for him. Perhaps their help is a sign of their friendship with the FP. But the language of adjuration is strong language. Why does she use such strong language towards them here?

It is worth noting here the vulnerability of the relationship at this point between the FP and the ML, because of the lack of synchronisation.¹³⁵⁶ The ML has gone, and so the lovers being reunited is not certain. It is within this context of the vulnerability of their relationship that the FP adjures the DoJ. What also needs to be noted is that in 1:4 the DoJ are described as also desiring the ML.¹³⁵⁷ The FP is not alone in desiring him. One possible way of reading this adjuration is as a means of reinforcing the nature of the relationships between the DoJ and the ML in a particular way. By adjuring them to tell the ML that the

Song of Songs, p. 209; Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁴⁸ *Bōšēm* has been used so far in 4:10; 14; 16; 5:1. It will be used in 8:14.

¹³⁴⁹ Spencer, p. 145; Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁵⁰ *Rē‘ôt* is used in 1:7, 1:8, 2:16, 4:5; 6:2. This is the only use of *lěqōṭ* in the Song.

¹³⁵¹ Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁵² 6:3.

¹³⁵³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Davidson, p. 600; Duguid, p. 135; Luter, 6:3.

¹³⁵⁴ Hess, p. 191; Luter, 6:3.

¹³⁵⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 169.

¹³⁵⁶ 8.8.4.

¹³⁵⁷ 6.4.4.

FP is lovesick for him, the DoJ are being required to be agents on behalf of the FP. As agents, the DoJ are not at liberty to be able to take advantage of any opportunity with the ML.

What may be happening here is similar to the way that the FP uses the EI (1:4), as a means of making herself distinct from the DoJ.¹³⁵⁸ By using the language of adjuration, the FP is reinforcing to the DoJ that the relationship of the Song is about her and her lover, not about them. Of course, the DoJ have seen the development of the relationship between the two principal characters. However, this is the first (and only time) that the DoJ are given an opportunity to be able to meet with the ML independently of the FP. The way that language is used in this passage by the FP portrays her overcoming an implicit threat from the DoJ.¹³⁵⁹ Thus, by using an adjuration and making the DoJ her agents, the DoJ are not free to get any ideas of their own.

10.4.2 The Key Question (5:9) as a Form of Reviewing and Discriminating

The key question asked the DoJ to the FP is of central importance, as it challenges the FP to tell them why her lover is unique amongst lovers.¹³⁶⁰ To put it another way, the FP is being asked to review her lover in light of the existence of other men, other lovers. Their question draws attention to the fact that there are other men 'out there'.¹³⁶¹ This question may be hypothetical in that it may refer to the idea of the existence of other men. Or it could be read in a more concrete way, in that the FP is asked to compare with other lovers that she has had (or even has).¹³⁶² Either way, she is being asked to review her lover, to emphasise what is so special about him. And she is being asked to discriminate how other lovers (hypothetical or more concrete) are not as special as him. The question that the DoJ ask is a key question of *reviewing* and *discriminating* in her relationship with her lover.

This is the first time in the Song that the FP has been challenged to *review* and *discriminate*. And at only one point previously does the FP make any form of comparison of her lover with other men. In 2:3 she compares him to an apple tree: 'as an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my lover among young men'. The apple tree is known as a tree in the ANE context with *erotic connotations*, so this is likely to be an *erotic* metaphor, bearing in mind that the FP continues the metaphor by saying 'with great

¹³⁵⁸ 6.4.5.

¹³⁵⁹ Hess, pp. 185-186 interprets 5:16 in a way that the FP uses language to reinforce her position in reference to the DoJ.

¹³⁶⁰ 5:9. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 68.

¹³⁶¹ Spencer, p. 138.

¹³⁶² Reading that as her presently having other lovers seems unlikely, bearing in mind in 2:15 her for the daughters to catch the foxes (other men) that are around.

delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste'.¹³⁶³ But in 5:9's context the ML is not there (and the reader does not know if he will return). The FP is asked to review and discriminate in this situation. The context in which she now reviews the ML is different.

The context is different because the relationship has continued to develop, but it is also different because this reviewing happens in the context of her being lovesick after his disappearance. And it happens within the context of her experience of their lack of synchronisation.¹³⁶⁴ The FP is being asked to review her lover, within the context of everything not being seemingly perfect with their relationship right now. His absence, and the situation, enables the DoJ to be able to ask this question of challenge. It might be considered an appropriate time for a review.

Furthermore, there is one additional aspect about the DoJ's key question that could be suggested, and that is that it could imply some freedom of the FP's, that the ML does not *have* to be the man for her. In their questioning, the DoJ refer to the FP as 'the most beautiful amongst women', a positive description of her beauty. Spencer suggests that this phrase implies that such a desirable woman could have any man that she wanted.¹³⁶⁵ Spencer's empowering reading turns conventions of men trying to gain more status by the desirability of their women on its head.¹³⁶⁶ In the HS men used the beauty of women for their own gain. Abram (Genesis 12:11-13), tells Sarai (who is described as being *yěpat-mar'e* beautiful in appearance) not to tell the Egyptians that she is his wife, 'so that it might go well with me, because of you'. The reason for Abram going to Egypt was because of a famine, and one reading of the text is that he persuaded Sarai to do this 'for his own skin and financial gain, a beautiful woman being perceived as being a desirable commodity within a patriarchal culture'.¹³⁶⁷ However, Spencer is saying here that the FP is given the power of choice because of her desirability. From this reading, the FP is being led to consider 'is she settling too fast?' and 'is this the best she can do?'.¹³⁶⁸

10.4.3 Contextual Significance of the Noun *rē'î* (5:16)

Numerous scholars observe the importance of the single use of the word *rē'î* in 5:16.¹³⁶⁹ The significance of the ML's regular use of the feminine equivalent of this word has been

¹³⁶³ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 97; Pope, p. 371.

¹³⁶⁴ 8.8.4.

¹³⁶⁵ Spencer, p. 138; Hess, p. 179.

¹³⁶⁶ Spencer, p. 138.

¹³⁶⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 288; Westermann, p. 164.

¹³⁶⁸ Spencer, p. 138.

¹³⁶⁹ Duguid, p. 133; Hess, p. 188. Fredericks and Estes, p. 376; Davidson, p. 570; Luter, 5:16; S. Craig Glickman, *Solomon's Song of Love* (West Monroe, LA: Howard, 2004), p. 102.

discussed above.¹³⁷⁰ But her use of the word is unique and should be noted. And there are four other points that highlight its significance.

Firstly, the only time that she refers to him as *rē'î* is within this context of the ML being absent, alongside the 'prospect of losing him'.¹³⁷¹ It takes separation for her to describe him in this way. Secondly, this noun for him is used immediately after the description of 'aesthetic appreciation', in which she emphasises her desire for the ML. She stresses at the beginning of the description how he is outstanding. Then at the end of her description, she focuses on his delicious lips (the place of lovemaking) and that he is altogether desirable. Thus, not only is she verbalising what she desires about him, but she is also, in the process, desiring him. The statement affirming that he is her *rē'î* comes out of that desiring context. Thirdly, she addresses the DoJ with her conditional adjuration to tell the ML that she is lovesick for him, and in doing so an implicit meaning of him being her *dôdî* and *rē'î* is that he cannot be open to alternative offers.¹³⁷² Fourthly, by using the word that the ML uses for her, she is taking on his use of language, and by doing so shows a growing sense of mutuality.¹³⁷³ Thus, the word *rē'î* has important contextual significance.

A range of meanings are potentially implied by this poetic description of the ML as *rē'î* of the FP, many of which hold true at the same time. What can be implied by making this statement is her asserting something important about her relationship, but also potentially realising something about her lover. The whole passage of 'aesthetic appreciation' enables the FP to realise in her lovesickness and in his absence how outstanding and desirable her ML is. The use of *rē'î* is an assertion of her realisation.¹³⁷⁴ It is thus another key point in the development of the relationship with her lover. Duguid observes correctly that the potential of losing him means that she 'truly discovers what he meant to her'.¹³⁷⁵ It is a realisation (out of the context of desire) that she deeply wants to be with him.¹³⁷⁶

10.4.4 The Second Refrain of Mutual Possession (6:3)

The passage ends with the second refrain of mutual possession.¹³⁷⁷ What is highly significant here is that this second refrain is opposite in form to the previous one in

¹³⁷⁰ 2.5.4.

¹³⁷¹ Duguid, p. 133.

¹³⁷² See discussion in 10.4.1. While Hess, p. 188 and Garrett, p. 224 read in a different way, their observation is similar in that it amounts to making her relationship with the lover distinct from the DoJ.

¹³⁷³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 376; Davidson, p. 570 marks this example of one lover 'echoing' the other.

¹³⁷⁴ Duguid, p. 133.

¹³⁷⁵ Duguid, p. 133.

¹³⁷⁶ Hess, p. 188; Luter, 5:16 put this differently, but with a similar interpretation in terms of the significance of the use of the word in that they see her asserting that she is his partner.

¹³⁷⁷ 6:3.

2:16.¹³⁷⁸ This subtle change in ordering at this point is potentially profound.¹³⁷⁹ It may be a subtle difference, but it should not be played down.¹³⁸⁰ Davidson is correct to argue that it demonstrates the continuing development of the sense of ‘developing security’ between the lovers.¹³⁸¹ To highlight the significance of this change in order, it is necessary to compare the context of the 2:16 refrain with the context of the 6:3 refrain.¹³⁸² The former refrain is ‘my lover is mine and I am his’, while in the latter refrain the clauses have been swapped around, so that the refrain is ‘I am my lover’s and he is mine’. In both cases, the line that follows is ‘he feasts among the lilies’.¹³⁸³

As discussed above the immediate context of the 2:16 refrain follows the imperative of 2:15.¹³⁸⁴ It was argued that a plausible reading is that the DoJ are being called to capture young men for themselves.¹³⁸⁵ This came from the verbalised realisation that the FP had caught one.¹³⁸⁶ And it was argued that the text portrays the FP giving the first refrain of mutual possession in light of the portrayal of her realisation.¹³⁸⁷ She verbalises that ‘my lover is mine’ first there since she sees it that she has caught him.

In comparison, in 6:3, the immediate context is very different. The refrain immediately follows the revelation (and realisation) that the lover is now back with her, after her having experienced his departure in 5:6, not knowing if he would return.¹³⁸⁸ Thus, it comes out of the context of separation and being reunited.¹³⁸⁹ It also comes out of the context of being lovesick for him, and her desire for his body verbalised through ‘aesthetic appreciation’.¹³⁹⁰ And it comes out of her verbalised realisation that he is her *רֵעַ* ‘*friend*’.¹³⁹¹ It ultimately comes out of the conviction that he is the one for her.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the fact that he is there, in his garden, with all of the associated imagery associated with 6:2 indicates her realisation that he ‘was never really lost to her’.¹³⁹² Thus, this use of the refrain of mutual possession verbalises that

¹³⁷⁸ Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Davidson, p. 600; Luter, 6:3; Duguid, p. 134; Spencer, p. 145.

¹³⁷⁹ Contra Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 379. Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Luter, 6:3.

¹³⁸⁰ Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Luter, 6:3.

¹³⁸¹ Davidson, p. 600.

¹³⁸² 7.4.2.

¹³⁸³ Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁸⁴ 7.3.2.

¹³⁸⁵ Spencer, p. 53.

¹³⁸⁶ Spencer, p. 53.

¹³⁸⁷ 7.4.2.

¹³⁸⁸ 6:2. Garrett, p. 224 notes that she realises by his presence ‘how much he loves her’.

¹³⁸⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 176.

¹³⁹⁰ 5:8 expresses the lovesickness of the FP and 5:10-16 describes her aesthetic appreciation of his body.

¹³⁹¹ 10.4.3.

¹³⁹² Provan, p. 337; Duguid, p. 133; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 173; Fredericks and Estes, pp.

realisation from the FP's perspective that 'I am my lover's and my lover is mine'. From her realisation, she prioritises him, acknowledging that he wants her, and that she belongs to him, over her own desire for possession of him.¹³⁹³ 'She sees herself as belonging to' him first.¹³⁹⁴ This is not to say here that the FP has become any less strong, or any less wanting of him, by prioritising the ML before herself in this refrain. The refrain speaks of mutual possession after all, and the passage before demonstrates that she deeply sexually desires him. But this swapping around of the clauses indicates a development of the relationship gained through her experience. Her desire (and presumably her love) has developed.

Also, the swapping around of the clauses in the refrain is not the only evidence that the relationship between the lovers has developed. The language of ownership has also developed in terms of the reference to the ML having gone down to 'his garden'.¹³⁹⁵ In the discussion surrounding the EIs in 4:16, the change in language between the FP referring to 'my garden' and 'his garden' was discussed.¹³⁹⁶ Comparing this to 6:2, immediately before the refrain of mutual possession, the FP refers simply to 'his garden'. There is no reference to 'my garden' from her perspective. This could just be because the garden imagery is used in a more general sense for the woman here, instead of specifically her vagina, as in 4:16-5:1. However, when this is seen alongside the use of the refrain of mutual possession in the next verse, it suggests that she wishes to prioritise him.

Taken together, this change in language demonstrates part of portrayal of the way that the relationship has developed between the lovers.

10.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the significance of the FP being asked by the DoJ to review her lover in his absence, and to convince them why he is the man for her, after he has left without any certainty of his return. She primarily reviews him in terms of describing his body using 'aesthetic appreciation', a language of desire, noting how he is outstanding to her. She realises through desire that though he is absent, he is the man for here.

378-379; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 210; Hess, p. 190.

¹³⁹³ Spencer, p. 145; Fredericks and Estes, p. 379.

¹³⁹⁴ Luter, 6:3.

¹³⁹⁵ 6:2. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 74; Munro, p. 109 suggests reading this image in terms of the inaccessibility of 4:12, i.e., that the ML has 'made himself inaccessible to her'. However, the first time that the FP refers to 'his garden' is in 4:16. Since 4:16 is the first usage of this language, how it is interpreted in 6:2 better relates to this than its use in 4:12.

¹³⁹⁶ 9.4.3.

Chapter 11: A Unity in terms of Desire

11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses a critical passage of text (7:1[EN]-8:4) in which the ML expresses his desire for the FP's body and to which the FP responds. As the last passage in the Song which includes an extensive description of one of the lovers, there are key textual features that mark this passage as being unique, and in a sense, climatic. It demonstrates the extent to which the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers has developed in comparison with earlier passages.

The discussion shows how both lovers use the EI in a distinct way, creating the impression of a sense of unity in terms of desire between them. This chapter also discusses the FP's final use of the refrain of mutual possession, as a distinct one, including how it (and the passage more generally) demonstrates how the lovers have attained a deeper sense of unity and security in their relationship.

11.2 Translation and passage context

11.2.1 Translation (7:1[EN]-8:4)

ML

7:1a: How beautiful are your feet in sandals

1b: noble daughter!

1c: Your curved¹³⁹⁷ thighs are like jewels

1d: the work of a skilled artist.

2a: Your vulva is a rounded¹³⁹⁸ bowl,

2b: may it never lack mixed wine!¹³⁹⁹

2c: Your belly is a heap of wheat

2d: encircled with lilies.

3a: Your breasts are like two fawns,

3b: twins of a gazelle.¹⁴⁰⁰

4a: Your neck is like a tower of ivory.

4b: Your eyes are pools in Heshbon,

4c: by the gate of Bath-rabbim.

¹³⁹⁷ *Ḥammûqê* is hapax (Murphy, p. 182). DCH, Vol. 4, p. 299 and Hess, p. 211 translates as 'curved'.

¹³⁹⁸ *Sahar* has an article and is hapax. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182.

¹³⁹⁹ *Māzeg* is hapax. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182; DCH, Vol. 5, p. 206.

¹⁴⁰⁰ 7:3ab is the same as 4:5, without the reference to 'feasting' among the lilies'. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182.

4d: Your nose¹⁴⁰¹ is like a tower of Lebanon,
 4e: looking towards Damascus.
 5a: Your head crowns you like Carmel,
 5b: and your flowing locks¹⁴⁰² are like purple,
 5c: a king is held captive in the tresses.¹⁴⁰³
 6a: How beautiful and pleasant you are,
 6b: O loved one, daughter of delights!¹⁴⁰⁴
 7a: Your¹⁴⁰⁵ very stature is like a palm tree,
 7b: and your breasts are like its clusters.
 8a: Methinks I will climb the palm tree,
 8b: and I will grasp its panicles.¹⁴⁰⁶
 8c: Let your breasts be like the clusters of the grapevine!
 8d: and the scent of your breathe¹⁴⁰⁷ be like apples!
 9a: And your kisses¹⁴⁰⁸ like the best¹⁴⁰⁹ wine

FP

9b: that flows¹⁴¹⁰ down for my lover smoothly,¹⁴¹¹

¹⁴⁰¹ 'appēk is singular and so is read as nose. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182. Cf. BDB, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰² This is a unique usage of *dallat*. *Dallā* is used to refer to a thrum in Isaiah 38:12; DCH, Vol. 2, p. 439.

¹⁴⁰³ *Rēhāṭīm* is unique in its use in the HS and causes difficulties for translators, but here, as is common, it is translated as 'tresses'. DCH, Vol. 7, p. 425. In Aramaic and Syriac the root *rht* means 'to run' (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183; Pope, 190). And in Genesis 30:38, 41 *rōhāṭīm* is used to refer to 'water troughs' (DCH, Vol. 7, p. 425). As Pope, p. 630, what seems to be being conveyed is a relationship with 'the action of moving water'. For this translation see Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 190; Duguid, p. 67; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 212; Pope, p. 630; NRSV; ESV.

¹⁴⁰⁴ *Bat ta'ānūgīm* is read as 'daughter of delights' since other uses portray 'construct relationship[s]'. Pope, p. 632; Hess, p. 219; Duguid, p. 67. Cf. Micah 1:16; 2:9; Ecclesiastes 2:8. A very simple emendation is required from *batta'ānūgīm* to *bat ta'ānūgīm*.

¹⁴⁰⁵ *Zō't qōmāṭēk* literally translates as 'this your 'stature'. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Sansinnā* (panicles) is hapax (Pope, p. 635). A similar word, *salsillôt* is used in Jeremiah 6:9 to refer to the branches of the vine (Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238; Pope, p. 635). It here refers to the 'branching cluster of flowers, of the date palm'. DCH, Vol. 6, p. 173.

¹⁴⁰⁷ 'appē is read here as 'breathe' (Longman, *NICOT*, p. 198; NRSV; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238, Hess, p. 198). Though this cannot be attested from elsewhere, it makes the most contextual sense (Longman, p. 198). Usually, 'ap is used to refer to a nose or nostril (DCH, Vol. 1, p. 355), but as Longman, p. 198 observes, "'the 'scent of your nose' makes no sense'. Treating the reading to refer generally to an aperture, such as the vulva seems unjustified (c.f. Pope, p. 636).

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Hikkē* (kisses) literally means palate, but is used in 5:16 as well to convey kisses (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 177).

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Kēyēn haṭṭōb* is read in the superlative sense. Pope, p. 639; GKC, §133h, p. 431; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 177. C.f. Song 1:2.

¹⁴¹⁰ *Hôlēk* is literally 'to walk', but conveys movement.

¹⁴¹¹ Smoothly is a possible reading from Proverbs 23:31. See DCH, Vol. 5, p. 264 and Murphy, p. 183.

9c: gliding¹⁴¹² over my lips and my teeth.¹⁴¹³
 10a: I am my lover's
 10b: and his desire is for me.
 11a: Come, my lover!
 11b: Let us go out into the countryside!
 11c: Let us spend the night among the henna bushes!¹⁴¹⁴
 12a: Let us go out early to the vineyards!
 12b: Let us see if the vines have budded!
 12c: If the grape blossoms have opened,
 12d: and if the pomegranates are in bloom,
 12e: there I will make love to you.
 13a: The love fruits¹⁴¹⁵ give out their fragrance,
 13b: and over our openings are all choice fruits,
 13c: new as well as old,
 13d: which I have saved for you, my lover.
 8:1a: If only you were like a brother to me,
 1b: who nursed me at my mother's breasts!
 1c: If I met you in public I would kiss you,
 1d: and no one would despise me.
 2a: I would lead you and take you
 2b: to my mother's house,
 2c: into the chamber of the one who bore me.¹⁴¹⁶
 2d: I would give you spiced wine to drink,

¹⁴¹² *Dôbēb* (gliding) is hapax. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183; BDB, p.179.

¹⁴¹³ MT reads *šiptē yěsnīm*, which literally translates as 'the lips of sleepers' (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Hess, p. 223). Emendation to 'my lips and my teeth' requires only a consonantal change from a y to w in front of *snīm*, and treating the *m* as enclitic. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 191; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 210; Pope, p. 641 also use this standard emendation.

¹⁴¹⁴ *Kôper* can be read as 'henna bushes' or 'villages'. The other use in the Song (1:14, 4:13) refers to 'henna', so this is the reading being used here (Fredericks and Estes, p. 399; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241; NEB, Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180).

Furthermore, this reading makes the most sense of the plural noun. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91 notes that 'the reference to 'villages', by its plural nature, is less contextually likely than henna bushes.

Also, Duguid, p. 148 and Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 240 observe that there would be little privacy in villages, in comparison with henna bushes in the open countryside.

¹⁴¹⁵ HALOT, p. 215; Hess, p. 227 translate *dûda'im* as love fruits. This observes its similarity with *dôdî*; see discussion in 2.5.3.

¹⁴¹⁶ This line is not in the MT, but is supported by the versions, and numerous commentators (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 247; NRSV). It is supported by its use in 3:4 (Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 247, Pope, 658). Furthermore, the MT also strangely uses the verb *tēlammēdnî* (of root *lmd*, to teach me). This is likely to be evidence of the missing line, and emendation of it by removing the *m* reads *tld* (to bear). Pope, p. 658; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 247.

2e: the wine of my pomegranates.¹⁴¹⁷

3a: His left hand is under my head,

3d: and his right hand embraces me!¹⁴¹⁸

4a: I adjure you, O Daughters of Jerusalem,

4b: Do not¹⁴¹⁹ incite or excite love

4c: until it is ready!

11.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

The passage of the Song (7:1[EN]-8:4) being discussed is part of a larger section.¹⁴²⁰ The ending of this passage is recognised by the final adjuration passage, addressing the DoJ.¹⁴²¹

In the passage the language of 'aesthetic appreciation' is used by the ML (7:1-5), describing the FP from her feet to her head.¹⁴²² The description of her body then develops into him using Els to express his intention for sexual contact with her. She answers him, using the Els to invite him to have his desires met.

The passage under discussion follows another description of the FP by the ML (6:4-9), though there is a particularly strange section (6:10-12), immediately preceding, of something being portrayed in a 'nut orchard'.¹⁴²³ There is fairly universal agreement by commentators on the confusion that v. 12 causes.¹⁴²⁴ As Longman observes,

no one can speak with much certainty about its rendition or its interpretation. The most definite point we can make about this verse is that it expresses strong passion, most likely of the woman for the man. Her passion has so overwhelmed her that she is "caught up" and discovers herself transported into the man's chariot.¹⁴²⁵

¹⁴¹⁷ *Rimmōnî* (pomegranate) is singular in the MT and is preserved as such, in contrast to the versions (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Pope, p. 659). The possessive suffix is here applied to the pomegranate (Pope, p. 659).

¹⁴¹⁸ This is read as an indicative.

¹⁴¹⁹ The usual adjuration formula (*'im-ta 'îrû wě 'im*) is replaced with the negative *ma-ttā 'îrû ūma* (Pope, p. 661; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206, C.f. GKC, §137b, p. 443).

¹⁴²⁰ 6:4-8:4. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 74; Hess, p. 193 similarly see this section as being part of a larger section.

¹⁴²¹ 8:4. The use of the adjuration of a usual ending is implied by readings such as Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 180; Hess, p. 199.

¹⁴²² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 215.

¹⁴²³ The description of what happens in the 'nut orchard' includes the DoJ's use of four imperatives (*šûbî* (return)) and a cohortative (*nehēze* (we may look)) in which they address the FP.

¹⁴²⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 185 provides a detailed discussion of the problems.

¹⁴²⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 187.

The main point to be made here is that a high level of the portrayal of desire of the FP provides the setting for the ML's response in 7:1. The passage being discussed includes the ML's most explicit erotic description of the FP's body so far.¹⁴²⁶

11.2.3 Overview of the use of the Erotic Imperative in this Passage.

This large section (7:1-8:4) of the Song where the ML is the main speaker has a large number (nine) of EIs, but significantly eight of these centre around the final refrain of mutual possession (7:10). This can be observed both in the table and dot plot in the appendices.¹⁴²⁷ The dot plot also shows a singular use of the EI (7:2) in the form of a cohortative '*al-yeḥsar*' (may it never lack), a negative use of the EI in the passage, found within the context of the description of aesthetic appreciation (7:1-5).¹⁴²⁸

Then, to return to the cluster, just before the final refrain of mutual possession, the intention of the ML is expressed by two cohortatives (EIs of sensual experience) and a jussive (an EI of simile): 7:8 '*e'ēle*' (I will climb); 7:8 '*ōhăzâ*' (I will grasp); 7:8 '*yihēyû*' (let ... be).

Next, in 7:9b the FP interrupts the ML, and shortly after makes the third refrain of mutual possession. Then the FP responds to the refrain with five uses of the EI in close succession, the first being an imperative and the other four being cohortatives: *lěkâ* (come), *nēṣē*' (let us go), *nālînâ* (spend the night), *naškimāh* (let us go out) and *nir'e* (let us see). The first two are examples of EIs of movement, the third is an EI calling to stay, the fourth is another example of the EI of movement, and the final is an EI calling for the use of sight.

11.3 Commentary

11.3.1 'Aesthetic Appreciation' of the FP and an Erotic Imperative of Intention (7:1-6)

In 7:1-6 the ML describes the FP from her feet to her head.¹⁴²⁹ He describes her, addressing her directly, using the language of 'aesthetic appreciation'.¹⁴³⁰ He starts with her feet (7:1a), describing them as *yāpû* (beautiful), the same word that he will use to describe her in 7:6a, and that he has used to describe her lovemaking 4:10.¹⁴³¹ He says

¹⁴²⁶ Fredericks and Estes, p. 393. This is implied for 7:8-9 by Karl Budde, *Das Hohelied*, Kurzer Hand-Kommentar Zum Alten Testament (Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr, 1898), xvii (p. 39); Walsh, p. 124 makes a similar comment about the breast imagery.

¹⁴²⁷ Appendices 1 and 2.

¹⁴²⁸ Appendix 1.

¹⁴²⁹ Luter, 4:1, chart 19.

¹⁴³⁰ Walsh, p. 66.

¹⁴³¹ DCH, Vol. 4, p. 250. Interestingly, it is only the ML who uses this word to describe some aspect of the FP, as she does not use this word for him.

too that her feet are in sandals, and that she is a noble daughter.¹⁴³² As the description of the FP's body develops, it becomes clearer that this seems to be the only clothes that she is wearing.¹⁴³³

Having described her feet, and her thighs (7:1c) the ML uses a metaphor for her *šārrē* (7:2a), which he says is a 'aggan *hassahar* (rounded bowl), and for which there is good reason to read as a euphemism for her vulva.¹⁴³⁴ The noun is used in Ezekiel 16:4 to refer to an 'umbilical cord'.¹⁴³⁵ And it is used in Proverbs 3:8 to refer to a navel.¹⁴³⁶ As the reference to *šārrē* is above her thighs and is before a description of her *beṭen* (7:2c belly), this would include both the navel and her genital area.¹⁴³⁷ This strongly suggests that it refers to the vulva, and this is supported by the way an EI is used in reference to it.

In 7:2b the ML uses a jussive of the root *ḥsr*, meaning something lacking.¹⁴³⁸ The verb also has the particle 'al, which may be read as meaning 'emphatic negation', in the sense of it representing something that the speaker wishes should *never* x.¹⁴³⁹ The jussive is used to refer to *māzeg* (mixed wine) as object.¹⁴⁴⁰ Thus, the imagery is of a bowl that is full of (or can be filled up with) mixed precious liquid.¹⁴⁴¹ By using a jussive the ML is expressing his want, his wish that the FP's rounded bowl would 'never lack mixed wine'.¹⁴⁴² Reading *šārrē* as vulva makes sense in this context, since 'navels are not notable for their capacity to store or dispense liquid'.¹⁴⁴³

In further support of this imagery, it is probable that 'mixed-wine' refers in this case to bodily fluids.¹⁴⁴⁴ It thus may be that the mixing of them alludes to the mingling of this

¹⁴³² The reference to her being like a *batnādīb* (noble daughter) is an example of the royal fiction that permeates the Song (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 178, 181).

¹⁴³³ Duguid, p. 143; Spencer, p. 180.

¹⁴³⁴ Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 171; Pope, p. 617; Davidson, p. 599; Longman, p. 194; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233; Goulder, p. 56. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182 alludes to the erotic meaning, though constructs his argument in a different way.

¹⁴³⁵ DCH, Vol. 8, p. 599; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233.

¹⁴³⁶ DCH, Vol. 8, p. 599, unless an emendation is used to read it as 'flesh'. Cf. NRSV; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233.

¹⁴³⁷ Davidson, p. 599 n. 205; Pope, p. 617; Goulder, p. 56.

¹⁴³⁸ DCH, Vol. 3, p. 284. It is read as a jussive, rather an imperfect, and commentators who read as a jussive include Goulder, p. 56; Duguid, p. 66; Pope, p. 593; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 212; Bloch and Bloch, p. 201; Keel, p. 234.

¹⁴³⁹ Pope, p. 619 takes this as 'emphatic negation' and this is also found in NRSV, NIV and ESV. Keel, p. 230 also translates in this way.

¹⁴⁴⁰ DCH, Vol. 3, p. 284. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 182 points out that mixed is supported by Isaiah 19:14 and Psalm 102:10.

¹⁴⁴¹ Pope, p. 619.

¹⁴⁴² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233.

¹⁴⁴³ Pope, p. 617; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 194.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 233.

liquid, hence through lovemaking.¹⁴⁴⁵ Taken altogether, the metaphor attached to this EI is strongly sexually suggestive. The ML expresses his wish that the FP's vulva would never lack the mixing of liquids of lovemaking. It is a wish, expressing a desire, that he could potentially meet in the act of lovemaking.¹⁴⁴⁶ Furthermore, if the particle *al* is of a form of emphatic negation, what is being called for is for her vulva never to be lacking with mixed wines. Perhaps it should be read as a wish that he wants her to be continually 'topped up'. If this is the case, then this use of the EI could also be the first EI in effect calling for some sense of permanency, in the form of this desire for a repeated action.

Next, the ML describes the FP's belly as a heap of wheat, which many commentators interpret as referring to 'both shape and colour'.¹⁴⁴⁷ It is possible it refers to fertility, but this is not an emphasis found in the Song elsewhere.¹⁴⁴⁸ The description of the belly is further complexed by the reference to the wheat being 'encircled by lilies'. One common observation is the way that piles of wheat were protected in the ANE world by hedges of thorns.¹⁴⁴⁹ Thus, this image may allude to the exchange of thorns with lilies.¹⁴⁵⁰ This interpretation to what the image may refer still allows a potential variety of interpretations. One appropriate suggestion is that it could refer to the previous references that the ML feasts among the lilies, meaning that the ML has access to her body, as he is not prevented by thorns.¹⁴⁵¹ Bearing in mind that the FP is being described in the presence of the ML, this is a fitting reading, since she is open to him, and which he aesthetically appreciates.

In the next line (7:3a), the FP's breasts are described as being 'like two fawns, twins of a gazelle'.¹⁴⁵² It is an image of her breasts that have ongoing significance for the ML.¹⁴⁵³ This is followed by a reference (7:4a) to her 'neck is like an ivory tower'. This may refer to its length as a beautiful thing, but the imagery might also refer to its 'colo[u]r and

¹⁴⁴⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234; Goulder, p. 56.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Goulder, p. 56 implies this in his commentary.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234. Duguid, p. 144; Fredericks and Estes, p. 394; Keel, p. 235; Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 172.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 84; Fox, p. 159.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234.

¹⁴⁵¹ Previous references to lilies are 2:16, 6:2-3. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 84; Fox, p. 159.

¹⁴⁵² They are also described like in in 4:5. The difference between this verse and 4:5 is that in 4:5 there is an additional reference to the gazelles 'grazing among the lilies'. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 234.

¹⁴⁵³ Hess, p. 215.

smoothness'.¹⁴⁵⁴ Or alternatively, it may refer to its preciousness, ivory being a valuable commodity.¹⁴⁵⁵

The next few images (7:4b-c) are not of great importance to the overall argument of this thesis, and so will not be discussed in much detail. The main point is that they continue to emphasise the beauty of the FP from the ML's perspective, verbalising through 'aesthetic appreciation' of his desire for her. The ML refers to her eyes, a 'captivating' feature for both lovers.¹⁴⁵⁶ The next image is an unusual comparison, as the ML likens the FP's nose to 'a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus'.¹⁴⁵⁷ Some scholars suggest that this is a strange comparison to make.¹⁴⁵⁸ But this does not account for different cultural perceptions of attractiveness.¹⁴⁵⁹ Nor that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.¹⁴⁶⁰ By saying it, it is something that the ML finds attractive and something that he desires.¹⁴⁶¹

In the next image (7:5a), the FP is directly addressed, being told that 'your head crowns you like Carmel'. Carmel is a prominent mountain that really stands out in its context, and was covered in trees and vegetation.¹⁴⁶² Then her hair is described as *argaman*, which can mean from 'violet to deep blue-black'.¹⁴⁶³ Her flowing hair becomes a highly significant image in the next line (7:5c), being an example of the expression of 'the physical impact of yearning', verbalising the affect that she has on him.¹⁴⁶⁴ The language changes here from a description simply of her body to a description of how it affects the man.¹⁴⁶⁵ He says that a 'king is held captive in the tresses', being another example of the king fiction of the Song.¹⁴⁶⁶ *Rēhātīm* is generally understood as a reference to her hair, suggesting that the ML is 'held captive' (and seduced) by its beauty.¹⁴⁶⁷ The beauty of a

¹⁴⁵⁴ Exum, p. 234.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Exum, *Songs of Songs*, p. 234; Fredericks and Estes, p. 395; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 195.

¹⁴⁵⁶ 7:4b. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 235; 1:15-17; 4:1, 9; 5:12; 6:5.

¹⁴⁵⁷ 7:4d. DCH, Vol. 1, p. 355. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183 notes that as *appe* is singular, it should be read as nose, not face.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 86 observes that modern readers might find this a strange comparison; Fiona Black, 'Beauty or the Beast? The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs', *Biblical Interpretation*, 8.3 (2000), 302-23 (p.311) is an example of one scholar who reads in a very literal way.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 395.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Spencer, pp. 169, 171.

¹⁴⁶¹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 196.

¹⁴⁶² Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 87; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 196; Fredericks and Estes, p. 395.

¹⁴⁶³ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁶⁴ 5.3.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 88. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 187 notes the different form this takes, as a 'personal note' from the speaker; Duguid, p. 146; Fredericks and Estes, p. 395; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 237; Hess, p. 218.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Spencer, p. 184; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p.88; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 174; Longman, p. 196 notes the 'royal imagery'.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 88. See also Longman, *NICOT*, p. 196; Hess, p. 218 all specific comment on the hair as tresses.

women's hair is often described in love poetry, demonstrating its power to captivate.¹⁴⁶⁸ As Estes puts it, 'her love and beauty have a powerful control over him, but he considers this a good and desirable predicament into which to fall'.¹⁴⁶⁹ Her hair is different from the description of her body so far, as it has the subjective power to 'pursue and trap the man'.¹⁴⁷⁰

Building upon the experience of the ML describing how he is affected by the FP in terms of desire, in the next line (7:6a), the ML makes a statement almost identical to 7:1.¹⁴⁷¹ Throughout the Song, the ML has referred to the FP as 'beautiful'.¹⁴⁷² Here there is a difference though, since from a first-time reader's perspective this is the first time that a second person feminine singular verb form is used.¹⁴⁷³ This makes it particularly stand out, bringing attention to the reader that something different is being portrayed here. It has the effect of 'as though to emphasise at last that the FP herself is beautiful'.¹⁴⁷⁴ By who she is, from his perspective, she is beautiful. It is a climatic use in its own way, and this is supported by that this is the final time that any form of the root *yph* is used in the Song.¹⁴⁷⁵

This climatic use of *yāpīt* is also found in parallel with *nā'amt* (pleasant), which is the only time that this word is used in the Song.¹⁴⁷⁶ Meier suggests that the use in this verse refers to the FP being pleasant in terms of sight from the perspective of the viewer.¹⁴⁷⁷ A similar form, *nō'am* is used to describe the 'beauty of the Lord' in Psalm 27:4.¹⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, this single use in parallel with the single use of the second person verbal form of *yph* makes

¹⁴⁶⁸ Hess, p. 218 and Fox, p. 73 note the way that hair is described as ensnaring in Egyptian love poetry.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 395.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Hess, p. 218.

¹⁴⁷¹ Hess, p. 219. In 7:1a he says *ma-yyāpū* (third person plural), when in 7:6 he says *ma-yyapīt* (second person feminine singular).

¹⁴⁷² 1:8 (feminine singular adjective); 1:15 (twice: both feminine singular adjectives); 2:10 (feminine singular noun); 2:13 (feminine singular noun); 4:1 (twice: both feminine singular adjectives); 4:7 (feminine singular adjectives); 4:10 (feminine third person verb, describing the lovemaking of the FP); 6:4 (feminine singular adjective); 6:10 (feminine singular adjective); 7:1 (third person masculine verb, describing feet). The DoJ address the FP using this word in 5:9 (feminine singular adjective) and 6:1 (feminine singular adjective). The FP uses this word in 1:16 (masculine singular adjective).

¹⁴⁷³ Hess, p. 219; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 197.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Hess, p. 219.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Hess, p. 219.

¹⁴⁷⁶ DCH, Vol. 5, p. 705 lists uses as 'pleasant, delightful, lovely'. BDB, p. 653.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Samuel A. Meier, 'nā'em', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 121–23 (p. 121) also notes that this verb is used in other ways to refer to other senses.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Hess, p. 219; BDB, p. 653.

this a significant description.¹⁴⁷⁹ It recognises the unique beauty of the FP from the ML's perspective, a beauty that by using these words, he recognises is only found in her.¹⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, this verse is also significant because immediately following the FP's description as *yāpīt* and *nā'amt*, the ML uses the feminine singular noun *'ahābā*. This is the first and only time that the ML uses the feminine singular noun in the Song.¹⁴⁸¹ It follows that in the context of referring to the FP, this use of the noun is of particular significance. Conventionally, the noun is used to refer to love/desire itself, and so some commentators choose to read it in this way.¹⁴⁸² But here it is seen in the vocative sense.¹⁴⁸³ Reading as a vocative emphasises that she is the one who is the cause of his experience of *'ahābā*.¹⁴⁸⁴ This marks her out as singly as his love.¹⁴⁸⁵ Such a reading is consistent with the exceptionalness of this verse as a whole.

Lastly, 7:6 is completed by the vocative (7:6b) *bat ta'ānūgīm* (daughter with delights), as discussed above.¹⁴⁸⁶ Keel suggests reading this as a vocative, understanding it as meaning 'a woman who provides all delights and pleasures of love'.¹⁴⁸⁷ Such a reading is based upon the ML's perceptions, gained through experience. He knows that she can bring him delights beyond compare, and here he tells her so.

7:6 as a whole is a key verse in terms of its use of language. Estes is correct to observe that 'many of the terms ... [the ML] uses in this verse ... have been used since the first chapter of the Song, but have become increasingly rich in their meaning as the relationship between the couple has progressed in intensity and erotic expression'.¹⁴⁸⁸

This commentary section has shown how the 'aesthetic appreciation' of the FP develops into 'affective description', showing the passionate development of the ML's desire. From

¹⁴⁷⁹ Hess, p. 219.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Hess, p. 219.

¹⁴⁸¹ Feminine singular nouns forms are used in 2:4, 2:5, 2:7; 3:5; 5:8, 7:6{EN}; 8:4; 8:6; 8:7. Here it is not read as a 'personification of love'. For discussion, see Exum, p. 237. C.f. LXX, Vg. And Syriac.

¹⁴⁸² Exum, p.237 does so, and she consequently translates this line 'love with delights'. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 88; Carr, p. 175.

¹⁴⁸³ Hess, p. 218; Pope, p. 632; Fredericks and Estes, p. 391.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Exum, p. 237. Hess, p. 219 observes 'she is his love'.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Hess, p. 219.

¹⁴⁸⁶ See notes of 11.2.1. Fredericks and Estes, p. 396; Keel, p. 242; Hess, p. 219 reads as a vocative.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Hess, p. 219; Keel, p. 242. Keel, p. 242 argues that a son or daughter of something is used in the HS 'to express the relationship between a person and all kinds of things', e.g. 'A "son of rebellion" is a "rebellious man" (Numbers 17:10). Thus, it is possible to have a daughter of delights.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Fredericks and Estes, p. 395-396.

this, using distinct language that emphasises its importance, the ML uses language that marks out the distinctiveness of his relationship with her at this late stage in the Song.

11.3.2 The Erotic Imperatives of Intention (7:7-9a)

The significance of the next seven lines (7:7-9a) centres around the use of three EIs by the ML and the intensity of the passion being expressed. These lines should naturally be seen as being causatively linked with the description of the FP by the ML in the previous verses.¹⁴⁸⁹ His appreciation of the FP provides the context (and reason) for the three uses of the EI that follow, in which he expresses his sexual intention.¹⁴⁹⁰

In 7:7a the ML introduces new imagery to describe the FP. He addresses her as *qômot* (stately), making a comparison with *tāmār* (a palm tree).¹⁴⁹¹ Readers might also make the link with women named Tamar in the HS, both of them being described as attractive and being found in 'sexually explicit stories'.¹⁴⁹² The metaphor is extended in 7:7b, the ML saying that her *šāday* (breasts) are like '*aškōlōt* (clusters).¹⁴⁹³ The context of her as a palm tree suggests that he is referring to the large date clusters that are found on date-palms, and that are similar in appearance to breasts.¹⁴⁹⁴ The date-palm comparison with beautiful women is also a well-established idea in the ANE context.¹⁴⁹⁵

The next line (7:8a) is fascinating as the text portrays the ML verbalising his personal sexual thoughts in the context of the imagery of her breasts. The text uses a verb of root '*mr*'.¹⁴⁹⁶ '*mr*' is sometimes used in the context of thinking or verbalising a thought, and here seems to suggest the 'intensity of passion'.¹⁴⁹⁷ Seen in the light of the words that follow,

¹⁴⁸⁹ 7:1-6. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 18; Fredericks and Estes, p. 396. Exum, p. 237 indirectly makes the causative connection between these sections.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 188 directly comments on the link between 7:1-6 and the 'desire for sexual union'.

¹⁴⁹¹ DCH, Vol. 7, p. 236. Exum, p. 238 notes that this poetic imagery is clearly exaggeration.

¹⁴⁹² Hess, p. 220; Larry L. Walker, 'tāmār', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), IV, 308–9 (p. 308). C.f. the description of Judah's daughter in law (Genesis 38:6-30) and David's daughter (2 Samuel 13:1-22, 14:27). Walker, 'tāmār', p. 308 suggests that the female name Tamar has its roots in the 'idea of be'[ing] tall, statuesque'.

¹⁴⁹³ The word is generally used in reference to grapevines. Cf. e.g., Genesis 40:10; Numbers 13:23. This has led some scholars to suggest that there is a change of imagery here to focus on grapes (see Eugene E. Carpenter, 'ēškōl', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 551–52 (p. 551), Pope, p. 634). However, the word can also be used to refer to other clusters of fruit C.f. Song 1:14. Keel, p. 242; Bloch and Bloch, p. 205.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 89; Hess, p. 220; Keel, p. 242.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Keel, pp. 240-248; Hess, p. 220; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238.

¹⁴⁹⁶ This verb has only been previously used in 2:10. Hess, p. 221.

¹⁴⁹⁷ For examples of verbalising a thought, see Genesis 20:11, Genesis 44:28, Exodus 2:14, Ruth 4:4, 1 Samuel 20:4. Discussion in Pope, p. 635, Charles L. Feinberg, 'āmar', in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce Waltke

it draws attention to the fact that the ML is verbalising his desiring in this line. By expressing his sexual want aloud, presumably there is some intention that this would have an effect on the FP too.

Next comes the first two EIs, the cohortative *ʿe ʿēle* (7:8a), emphasising the ML's intention and desire to 'climb' the *tāmār* (palm tree), followed by (7:8b) the cohortative *ʿōhāzā* (grasp), expressing their intention to grasp the *sansinnā* (panicles).¹⁴⁹⁸ The first EI conveys the climbing of the FP's body, that is, 'mounting her'.¹⁴⁹⁹ The second portrays fantasising about the experience of holding the FP's breasts.¹⁵⁰⁰ Walsh observes 'his expressed hope that her breasts be like grape clusters is the most direct [in comparison with other breast imagery] that he gets'.¹⁵⁰¹ Verbs of the root *ʿhʒ* have been used in the Song so far in reference to catching the foxes, as well as the FP holding the ML after finding him in the first night-time passage.¹⁵⁰² As with these other uses in the Song 'a certain vivacity or forcefulness is implied'.¹⁵⁰³ Furthermore, the verb's first-person use in 3:4 reinforces the erotic connotation of this verb here, since in that passage the FP said that she held him until she had brought him to her mother's chamber, the place of intimacy.¹⁵⁰⁴ Now he is using the cohortative form of the verb with similarly 'erotic goals in mind'.¹⁵⁰⁵

A third EI (7:8c) is then used, continuing to build up the sense of urgency and intention. This is a jussive *yihēyū* with breasts (*šādayik*) as its subject (let your breasts be like).¹⁵⁰⁶ The emphatic use of *n'a* here emphasises even more the desire of the ML.¹⁵⁰⁷ Importantly, the imagery changes here from comparing her breasts date-palm panicles to *ʿeškēlôt haggepen* (clusters of the grapevine).¹⁵⁰⁸ Numerous interpretations are given as

(Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), pp. 54–55 (p. 54); Longman, *NICOT*, p. 190; Fredericks and Estes, p. 396; Bloch and Bloch, p. 205. The translation *methinks* has been adopted from Pope, p. 635. While this is perhaps archaic language, it summarises well the verbalisation of the thought of the male lover. The quote is from Pope, p. 635.

¹⁴⁹⁸ As mentioned in the textual notes, *sansinnā* is taken here to mean panicles of the date palm, which is consistent with the use of the imagery so far. See DCH, Vol. 6, p. 173.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 197.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Hess, pp. 221–222; Walsh, pp. 122–123 Bloch and Bloch, p. 205 note that fantasising is taking place in this verse as a whole.

¹⁵⁰¹ Walsh, p. 124.

¹⁵⁰² 2:15, 3:4.

¹⁵⁰³ Konkel, p. 354.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Hess, p. 221.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Hess, p. 221; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238.

¹⁵⁰⁶ DCH, Vol. 2, p. 520. Out of its use in the Song, this is the only time that this particular verb is used as a volitional form.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 177; Pope, p. 636.

¹⁵⁰⁸ DCH, Vol. 1, p. 414.

to the meaning of this change, and as it is metaphorical, many readings are possible.¹⁵⁰⁹ But the reference to grapevines means there is good reason to see this as being a reference to the sensual experience of taste.¹⁵¹⁰ Grapevines brings up the familiar and whole sensual experience of wine motif, which will be explicitly built upon in 7:9a.¹⁵¹¹ Thus, bringing up this motif suggests that the ML wishes her breasts, within the context of lovemaking, to taste like the clusters of the grapevine.

Next in 7:8d, the ML continues to express his wish for the sensual experience of the FP in the next line, calling for 'the scent of your breath to be like apples'.¹⁵¹² *Tappûhîm* (apples) are already known to the first-time reader as having an erotic significance.¹⁵¹³ By making reference to the smell of her breath as apples, the ML is drawing upon the imagery of desire of the FP and making it his own.¹⁵¹⁴ It is another example of the way that portrayal of the relationship between the lovers has developed to this point.

In verse 9a, the ML uses the repeated image of *yayin* (wine) to describe the FP's kisses (*hikkē*), focusing on the pleasurable and sensual experience of taste.¹⁵¹⁵ The lips and mouth are again a particular locus of desire.¹⁵¹⁶ It is after the FP refers to this especially sensuous part of the ML's body in 5:16 that she refers to him as 'altogether desirable'. Kisses will again be associated in this passage as being a culmination of desire, and deeply sensual. These lines as a whole are deeply sensual, demonstrating the extent to which the ML is intentionally seeking a sexually pleasurable encounter with the woman.

11.3.3 An interruption of Unity (7:9b)

7:9b is a fascinating line in the text, because of a dramatic change of speaker.

Immediately after the ML introduces the comparison with the FP's kisses with the best wine (7:9a), the FP interrupts him, continuing his thought.¹⁵¹⁷ There is some debate

¹⁵⁰⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238 suggests that grape clusters are more accessible than date palm panicles. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 177 suggests that it is the 'delicate sweetness of the grape contrasted with the heavy sweetness of the date-honey' that is the substance of this change in imagery. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 198 suggests that it is a wish that the woman be 'well endowed'.

¹⁵¹⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 177; Hess, p. 221; Goulder, p. 57.

¹⁵¹¹ Hess, p. 222.

¹⁵¹² Exum, p. 238.

¹⁵¹³ The ML is described as an apple tree in 2:3 and she calls to be sustained with *tappûhîm* in 2:5 when she is faint with love. Hess, p. 222, Longman, *NICOT*, p. 198.

¹⁵¹⁴ Hess, p. 222.

¹⁵¹⁵ References to wine are found in 1:2, 4, 2:4, 4:10, 5:1. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 239, Fredericks and Estes, p. 396 observe the sensual aspect. The *hikkē* of the ML have previously been described as sweet by the FP (5:16).

¹⁵¹⁶ Spencer, p. 196.

¹⁵¹⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90; Fox, p. 162; Hess, p. 223; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 183; Fredericks and Estes, p. 392; Bloch and Bloch, p. 206; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 178; Spencer, p. 196 all affirm the interruption reading.

amongst scholars as to whether there is a change in the speaker here or later.¹⁵¹⁸

However, as mentioned in the textual notes, only the FP can say *lēdôdî* (addressing him by the epithet that she always uses for him), and so a change in speaker is faithful to the MT, and versions, and should be recognised here.¹⁵¹⁹ This is a strong textual reason to observe the change in the speaker, and in the context of the ML calling out his desires for the woman, her response perhaps comes as no surprise.¹⁵²⁰

It is, however, totally different in comparison with the dialogical way that the lovers have communicated in the Song till now.¹⁵²¹ But its unusualness is emblematic of its importance, and the importance of this passage in this late section of the Song. Fox is correct to observe that 'his desire and hers are in such harmony that they can be uttered in a single sentence'.¹⁵²² Similarly, Estes observes 'the sexual and psychological unity they are experiencing'.¹⁵²³ Carr comments on the wonderful mutuality being expressed by the FP completing his words.¹⁵²⁴ The interruption is a very important point in the portrayal of desire in this passage. The FP cannot hold back wanting to respond.¹⁵²⁵ It is strong evidence as to how the desires of the lovers are combining in this passage to create perhaps the greatest sense of mutuality expressed so far in the Song.

This unity in terms of the desire of the lovers is demonstrated by the theme of this line (the focus on sensual kisses) and how the two lovers are connected in a sense of desire based upon their mutual experience.¹⁵²⁶ The FP continues the ML's thought (7:9bc) by describing the action of *hikkē* that 'goes down for my lover smoothly, gliding over my lips and my teeth'. The first-time reader knows well how much the FP has desired (and has appreciated) the kisses of the ML. In 1:2 she expresses her desire to be kissed by the ML. And as mentioned above, the FP has already been portrayed as knowing about *hikkē* (kisses) having previously commented specifically on the experience of the ML's sweet *hik* in 5:16a.¹⁵²⁷ The FP interrupts, verbalising her mutual experience of desire. It is a language that they both know and share.

¹⁵¹⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 239 judges a change here as being odd, since this interruption mid-sentence does not happen elsewhere. See also Longman, *NICOT*, p. 191.

¹⁵¹⁹ Contra Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 239 *lēdôdî* does not need to be seen as 'an apocopated plural for *lēdôdîm*'. Murphy, p. 187.

¹⁵²⁰ Spencer, p. 191.

¹⁵²¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 239. C.f. 1:15-16; 2:1-3; 4:16.

¹⁵²² Fox, p. 163.

¹⁵²³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 396. Luter, 7:10 supports this observation too.

¹⁵²⁴ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 132.

¹⁵²⁵ Duguid, p. 146.

¹⁵²⁶ Garrett, p. 245 observes that the activity is 'equally delightful for both the man and the woman'.

¹⁵²⁷ In 5:16 his kisses are described as *mamētaqqîm* (sweet).

Furthermore, the unity between the lovers is also implied directly by the words describing the ‘oral intercourse’ taking place here.¹⁵²⁸ The ML speaks of his perception of her smooth kisses, saying ‘*your* kisses are like the best wine’. The FP responds with that ‘goes down for *my* lover, gliding over my lips and my teeth’. He has to kiss her deeply to drink her ‘wine-laced saliva’ that glides over her lips and teeth.¹⁵²⁹ The interruption by the FP demonstrates the unity of this moment by corresponding with the fact that both are involved in the expression of this way of lovemaking.

11.3.4 The Realisation of the Final Refrain of Mutual Possession (7:10)

Having responded by interrupting the ML’s description of her kisses (7:9), and having then lusciously described her perception as to how her kisses are sensually enjoyed by him, the FP then utters the (7:10) the final refrain of mutual possession, which takes a different form from the previous two.¹⁵³⁰ She is verbalised as saying ‘*ānī lēdôdī wē ‘ālay tēšûqātô* (I am my lover’s and his desire is for me).¹⁵³¹ In the first refrain of mutual possession, the ordering of the two clauses was ‘My lover is mine and I am his’.¹⁵³² 10.4.4 then discussed how the FP swapped these clauses around in 6:3 (I am my lover’s and he is mine), demonstrating the way that the relationship has developed between the lovers.¹⁵³³ This third (and final) refrain of mutual possession again verbalises how the relationship between the lovers has further developed.¹⁵³⁴

In the second clause, the FP verbalises that ‘his desire is for me’. *Tēšûqâ* has caused difficulty for commentators. The only two other uses are in Genesis 3:16 (‘*elîšēk tēšûqātēk*: your desire shall be for your man), as well as Genesis 4:7 (‘*ēlēkā tēšûqātô*: its desire is for you).¹⁵³⁵ Both passages are complex and have a significant interpretive history.¹⁵³⁶ However, if the context of Song 7:10 is primarily considered, its use in the MT

¹⁵²⁸ Spencer, p. 196.

¹⁵²⁹ Spencer, p. 196.

¹⁵³⁰ For a summary, see Spencer, p. 197.

¹⁵³¹ The form is sufficiently similar to enable the first-time reader to make links with the previous refrains, and it thus should be considered to be a refrain of the same type. In particular, this is the case because the first clause of 6:3 is exactly the same in meaning as 7:10 (‘*ānī lēdôdī*).

¹⁵³² 2:16.

¹⁵³³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 379; Davidson, p. 600; Luter, 6:3, Duguid, p. 134; Spencer, p. 145.

¹⁵³⁴ Davidson, p. 600; Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 87.

¹⁵³⁵ DCH, Vol. 8, p.684.

¹⁵³⁶ Genesis 4:7 has a range of textual corruptions with that it, that alongside its obscurity, make it extremely difficult to interpret. See Irvin A Busenitz, ‘Woman’s Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered’, *Grace Theological Journal*, 7.2 (1986), 203–12 (p. 209), Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, pp. 104, 106.

It should be noted that the reading of *tēšûqâ* as sexual desire in Genesis 3:16 is well established amongst the scholarly community. For a comprehensive list of scholars, see Janson C Condren, ‘Toward a Purge of The Battle of the Sexes and “Return” for the Original Meaning of Genesis 3:16b’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 60.2 (2017), 227–45 (p. 229). See also Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90.

strongly indicates that it should be read as sexual desire.¹⁵³⁷ There are two strong reasons for this. Firstly, 'it is the woman's body that is the domain of their love in this passage'.¹⁵³⁸ Secondly, the EI is repeatedly used by the ML in 7:7-9a to verbalise his intention, his sexual want for her body.¹⁵³⁹ Thus for these two reasons, it makes most contextual sense to read *těšûqâ* in Song 7:10 as referring to sexual desire.¹⁵⁴⁰

But how does the use of *těšûqâ* here relate to Genesis 3:16?¹⁵⁴¹ Jacobs provides this most helpful suggestion: 'She [the woman addressed in Genesis] will find her husband irresistible to the point of being dominated by, that longing desire (*těšûqâ*) for him. A similar desire is depicted between the lovers in Song 7:11[Hebrew].'¹⁵⁴² Jacobs is making an important observation here. By the FP stating that 'his desire is for me' (Song 7:10[EN]), she is verbalising her recognition that her lover finds her similarly 'irresistible'. The text verbalises a hugely important recognition for the FP.¹⁵⁴³ The importance of 7:10 lies in the verbalisation that 'his desire is *for me*'. If there is significance to the way that 7:10 is a reversal of Genesis 3:16, it is the FP's realisation that *this* man desires her.

11.3.5 The FP Responds by Means of the Erotic Imperative (7:11-13)

The verbalisation that 'his desire is for me' (7:10b) should be seen as being directly linked to the two verses that follow.¹⁵⁴⁴ In 7:11-12 the FP responds to the ML's desire, expressing her own desire for him using the EI.¹⁵⁴⁵ By the means of an initial imperative

¹⁵³⁷ Hess, p. 224; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Davidson, pp. 73, 619; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90 all explicitly name *těšûqâ* as being sexual desire. One of the reasons for this conclusion is the similarity between *těšûqâ* and the Arabic *šāqa* (Busenitz, p. 204) since *šāqa* can be used to mean sexual desire.

¹⁵³⁸ Garrett, p. 245. 11.3.1; 11.3.2; 11.3.3.

¹⁵³⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241 points out that 'his desire for her is evident', although the reason that she gives is different.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Contra A. A. Macintosh, 'The Meaning of the Hebrew *tšwqh*', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, LXI/2, Autumn 2016, p. 365, who has argued that it should be read as 'concern, preoccupation and (single-minded) devotion', based upon consideration of the three different uses (Genesis 3:16; 4:7 and Song 7:10). However, the portrayal of desire here, alongside the way it has been portrayed in the Song till now, better suggests that it should here be read as sexual desire.

¹⁵⁴¹ Some commentators observe the way that Yahweh's address of the woman in Genesis 3:16 (your desire shall be for your husband/man) is reversed, since it is the ML that here is described as desiring the FP. e.g., Keel, pp. 251-252; Bloch and Bloch, p. 207; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90; Davidson, pp. 576-577.

¹⁵⁴² Mignon R. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion: The Genesis Narratives and Contemporary Portraits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 68.

¹⁵⁴³ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90 describes this verse as part of a sub-section of the Song that she entitles 'Desire recognised'. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241 notes that the FP 'acknowledges her lover's desire for her'.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Commentators who explicitly make a link between these verses include Spencer, p. 198; Fredericks and Estes, p. 399; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 179; Robert W Jenson, *Song of Songs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), p. 79; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 244.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Spencer, p. 193 recognises the importance of the EI here.

verb, followed by four cohortatives, she insistently calls the ML to respond to her (and her desire).¹⁵⁴⁶ The urgency portrayed by the repeated use of the EI here is stark. These verses build upon the vineyard imagery introduced by the ML in 7:8c.¹⁵⁴⁷ Through this imagery, the erotic connotation of these verses is evident, since it is in this place that the FP tells the ML that ‘there I will make love to you’ (7:12e).¹⁵⁴⁸

She begins by calling him to *lēkā* (come) using an imperative verb.¹⁵⁴⁹ This was used previously in the springtime passage as part of the repeated call by the ML to encourage the FP to leave her dwelling and be accessible to him.¹⁵⁵⁰ For the most part, this earlier passage portrays the inaccessibility of the FP.¹⁵⁵¹ Now, within very much a context of accessibility, the FP commands the ML to come.¹⁵⁵² This supports the argument of the way that unity between the lovers is observable at this point of the Song.¹⁵⁵³ She calls him to come from her perspective of desire, following the words of the refrain of mutual possession, recognising the mutual desire between them.¹⁵⁵⁴ This call to come is a call of unity in terms of desire. Hess makes this elucidating comment: ‘With this command, “Come, my lover,” she summarises the whole of her message and her heart, that the two be united in this journey and all journeys of life’.¹⁵⁵⁵

The cohortative verbs that follow continue to portray the volition of the FP.¹⁵⁵⁶ She calls him to *nēṣē* (let us go out), *nālînâ* (let us spend the night), *naškimāh* (let us go early) and *nir’e* (let us see).¹⁵⁵⁷ Importantly, the four consecutive cohortative verbs are first person plural.¹⁵⁵⁸ This is the only time (after the initial first person plural cohortative in 1:4) that the FP uses plural cohortatives, here using a string of them. A likely reason for this is the way that unity in desire is being created in this scene. The FP recognises that his desire is for her, and recognises her own desire. As she responds using EIs, so she uses cohortatives as a means of calling him to be with her, and to share the experience of what she calls him too. Fishbane accurately describes this section as ‘a charged evocation that

¹⁵⁴⁶ Hess, pp. 224-225; Spencer, p. 199.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Spencer, p. 199.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Hess, p. 226 translates in this way.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁵⁰ 2:10, 13; 7.3.1. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 179 observes the resonances with 2:10-14.

¹⁵⁵¹ Munro, p. 118.

¹⁵⁵² Hess, p. 225; Munro, p. 118.

¹⁵⁵³ Hess, p. 225 makes a similar observation.

¹⁵⁵⁴ As mentioned above, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90 sees this as ‘desire realised’.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Hess, p. 225.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Hess, p. 224-225, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90 note the existence of four cohortatives.

¹⁵⁵⁷ BDB, p. 422; DCH, Vol. 4, p. 543; DCH, Vol. 8, p. 353; BDB, p. 906.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Spencer, p. 199; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90.

initiates a series of verbs denoting shared activity', and also as 'a rapid-fire series of invitations for shared behaviour'.¹⁵⁵⁹

The first cohortative (7:11b) invites him into the *šāde* (open countryside).¹⁵⁶⁰ Keel reads this as being an inclusive term in the Song, meaning 'open countryside outside the settlements, whether cultivated land (gardens, vineyards) or wilderness'.¹⁵⁶¹ They are places portrayed in the HS as potentially where one could be alone with another, including around the matters of love.¹⁵⁶² They are far from the city walls with their watchmen.¹⁵⁶³

Next (7:11b), comes the second cohortative, inviting him to 'spend the night' among the 'henna blossoms'. Spend the night has the obvious erotic connotations.¹⁵⁶⁴ The use of henna recalls the sensual fragrant garden imagery of 4:13.¹⁵⁶⁵ Carr also observes how 'this shrub, which grows wild in Palestine, is covered in spring with fragrant whitish flowers growing in clusters like grapes'.¹⁵⁶⁶ The imagery is indicative of a place of lovemaking.¹⁵⁶⁷

In the next line (7:11c) the FP invites him to 'go out early', having the desirous tone of 'eager expectation'.¹⁵⁶⁸ The desired location is the vineyard, a double-entendre for both a literal vineyard as a place of lovemaking, and the woman's body.¹⁵⁶⁹

This is then followed by the final cohortative (7:12a), 'let us see', being different from the previous three that were verbs that 'invite[d] movement towards a place'.¹⁵⁷⁰ This final cohortative is followed by three things to see if 'the vines have budded', if 'the grapes blossoms have opened', and if 'the pomegranates are in bloom'.¹⁵⁷¹ The reason she gives for going to the vineyard is to 'explore the progress of the vineyard'.¹⁵⁷² But this is a

¹⁵⁵⁹ Michael Fishbane, *Song of Songs*, JPS Bible Commentary (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), p. 195; Spencer, p. 199.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Michael A. Grisanti, 'šādeh/šāday', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 1217–19 (p. 1217); Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180; NIV.

¹⁵⁶¹ Keel, p. 254; Spencer, p. 199; Fredericks and Estes, p. 400.

¹⁵⁶² Spencer, p. 199; Keel, p. 254; Fredericks and Estes, p. 400. Jonathon and David (1 Samuel 20:5-11), and Ruth and Boaz (3:1-18) were together in *šāde*. For a negative use of such a place, Cain met Abel there (Genesis 4:8).

¹⁵⁶³ Hess, p. 225.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Robert L. Hubbard, 'līn', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), II, 796-797. (796); Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91; Fredericks and Estes, p. 400.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Hess, p. 226; Longman, p. 200.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁷¹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁷² Longman, *NICOT*, p. 201; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91.

rhetorical device to build up the abundant imagery.¹⁵⁷³ She imagines it as a place of fruitfulness, not dissimilar to the springtime imagery in 2:13.¹⁵⁷⁴ The text then uses *šām* (there) as an emphatic to emphasise this place.¹⁵⁷⁵ She then changes from first person plural to first person to singular, to emphasise from her perspective how 'I will make love to you'.¹⁵⁷⁶ In saying she is explicitly emphasising the place where his desires, the physical experience of lovemaking, will be met.¹⁵⁷⁷

The next verse (7:13) is best seen as linked to this idea of the previous verse, as it continues the plant imagery.¹⁵⁷⁸ The mandrake was believed to be an aphrodisiac in the ANE world.¹⁵⁷⁹ This was not required by the lovers, but simply adds to the 'lore of love-making'.¹⁵⁸⁰ Their fragrance adds to the sensual experience and erotic connotation of the scene.¹⁵⁸¹ Exum suggests that 'the mandrakes, in giving their fragrance for the lovers' pleasure, mirror and participate in the woman's gift of love'.¹⁵⁸²

7:13b makes reference to 'choice fruit' being over 'our openings'.¹⁵⁸³ This cannot refer to the door of a building, since this passage has described the outdoors.¹⁵⁸⁴ The first-time reader of the Song has heard of the 'beams of our house as cedars, our rafters are pine' in 1:17, and so is familiar with the outdoor environment being described in this way, so it is plausible that this is how the imagery is being used here.¹⁵⁸⁵ The important point is that a comprehensive selection of 'all choice fruit', meaning sexual pleasures, are available.¹⁵⁸⁶ The reference to 'new as well as old' is a merism indicative in some sense of the sexual experiences that the lovers have had so far, and the ones they are yet to have.¹⁵⁸⁷ It supports the argument that the sexual nature of the relationship between the lovers is

¹⁵⁷³ Hess, p. 226.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Hess, p. 226, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Spencer, p. 199.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Spencer, p. 200.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Spencer, p. 199; Hess, p. 227.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 199; as Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241 notes, 'henna, pomegranates and choice fruits all grow in the pleasure garden of 4:13'.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 201; Spencer, p. 202.

Longman, *NICOT*, p. 201; Duguid, p. 149; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241 and Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91 note the similarity between the Hebrew word for mandrake (*dûda'im*) is similar to *dôdî*, which may suggest the reason for its perception as an aphrodisiac, and its inclusion in the Song.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁸¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁸² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 242; similarly, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 91. Fredericks and Estes, p. 401.

¹⁵⁸³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 242.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 242.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Fredericks and Estes, p. 401.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Fredericks and Estes, p. 401; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 202.

developed here, in comparison with earlier in the text.¹⁵⁸⁸ It emphasises how the relationship is at a more developed stage more generally.

11.3.6 The Final Adjuration Passage (8:1-8:4)

These last verses in this section involve a change of location, but it continues to verbalise 'fervent yearning'.¹⁵⁸⁹ 8:1 portrays the way that the cultural world would not allow the public kissing of lovers, though this is something that she agonisingly wishes for.¹⁵⁹⁰ Had he been a brother, and been relationally connected from birth, this would have been possible.¹⁵⁹¹ But as this is not, it cannot be so. From her perception, if she was to kiss him, people would *yābûzû* (despise) her.¹⁵⁹² The first-time reader perhaps remembers vividly the way she was attacked by the watchmen of the walls in 5:7, emphasising the risks of being potentially despised.¹⁵⁹³ Some scholars suggest that it would have been inappropriate for husband and wife to kiss in public, but this is not well substantiated.¹⁵⁹⁴ It is more likely that this strange line supports the idea that this couple are unmarried at this late stage of the Song.¹⁵⁹⁵ However, as the commentary of this passage has shown, they are unified in terms of desire, and their relationship is highly developed at this point in the text. Furthermore, the FP is still verbalising desire here. The reference to her mother's breast (8:1b), while attached to familial relationship, is still erotic, particularly in the context of a verse about kissing.¹⁵⁹⁶ Thus, this verse continues the portrayal of desire from the previous verse.

In 8:2a, the FP makes reference, like in 3:4, to her mother's house.¹⁵⁹⁷ This is a place known already as a place of intimacies. She tells the lover that here she would give him spiced wine to drink, 'the wine of my pomegranate'. Goulder observes the similarity between the mixed wine of 7:2 (with its erotic connotations) and the 'spiced wine' here.¹⁵⁹⁸ Furthermore, as mentioned above, pomegranates have erotic connotations, both in the

¹⁵⁸⁸ Duguid, p. 149; Fredericks and Estes, p. 410; Keel, p. 260 make similar suggestions.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 248 observes the 'longing'; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 188; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 203.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 181; Keel, p. 261; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 248 notes a sense of agony here of a not quite yet married couple; Michael A. Grisanti, 'bûz', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 618–19 (p. 619).

¹⁵⁹¹ Keel, p. 261; Spencer, p. 203.

¹⁵⁹² DCH, Vol. 2, p. 127; Spencer, p. 203.

¹⁵⁹³ Hess, p. 228; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 246.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 181; Duguid, p. 149.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 248; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 93; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Hess, p. 229; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 204; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Walsh, p. 123.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁹⁸ This is the only reference to *reqah* (spiced, describing wine) in the Song. Goulder, p. 62; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 182 observes the similarity between these passages also.

ANE context and the Song itself.¹⁵⁹⁹ The imagery here could have several sexual meanings including 'straightforward sexual union', with the reference in 5:1 of the ML saying that he drinks his wine with his milk'.¹⁶⁰⁰ However, other scholars have interpreted to 'my pomegranate' to be a reference to breasts, and spiced wine as referring to kisses.¹⁶⁰¹ The range of possibilities demand that it is best understood as her giving of 'her body to her lover' in an erotic sense.¹⁶⁰² By referring to pomegranates, the imagery and desire of the end of Chapter 7 is being fulfilled here.¹⁶⁰³ This is affirmed by the description of the physicality of touch that 'his left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me'.¹⁶⁰⁴

Finally, at this end of this section in which a sense of unity has been expressed in terms of desire, and at this point of sexual union, the FP issues an adjuration to the DoJ for the final time. As mentioned above, this is different from the previous two, because of an omission of a reference to gazelles and wild does, and the use of *ma* instead of '*im*'.¹⁶⁰⁵ These changes might well be noticeable from a first-time reader's perspective. The difference makes this adjuration particularly stand out, and so must be noted, which makes sense being the final adjuration of the Song. But is there any significance to this difference? The *ma* form could be read here as either as an interrogative or as a form of negation.¹⁶⁰⁶ The stronger form of negation reading makes particular sense of the omission of the reference to gazelles and wild does, since in comparison with the earlier adjuration passages, this one becomes more abrupt.¹⁶⁰⁷ This abruptness, alongside the change of negation word, really emphasises that the DoJ should take on board what she is saying. It is fitting that this is the final adjuration passage, with its stronger adjuration, is just before the extremely significant verses of 8:6-7¹⁶⁰⁸.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Pope, p. 559; C.f. 4:13.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Goulder, p. 62.

¹⁶⁰¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248; Fox, p. 166. Spencer, p. 204.

¹⁶⁰² Hess, p. 230; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248.

¹⁶⁰³ Hess, p. 230.

¹⁶⁰⁴ 8:3, Hess, pp. 230-231.

¹⁶⁰⁵ The previous two adjuration passages are 2:7 and 3:5. See notes of 11.2.1. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 184; Pope, p. 661; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Spencer, p. 206 reads this as interrogative, and Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248 offers this as a suggestion. This is supported by DCH, Vol. 5, p. 150. Pope, p. 661; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206; Murphy, p. 184 read this as a stronger form of negation, and they use GKC, §144hb, n1, p. to support this argument.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Pope, p. 661; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206 note the omission as being a contributing factor to their reading.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248 notes the nearness of this adjuration to 8:6-7 as being of potential significance.

11.4 Interpretation

11.4.1 The Erotic Imperative and the Development of Desire in this Passage

The commentary has shown how the use of the EI in this passage is especially important, both because of the way that it shows that desire develops in this very erotic passage, and also because of the way that it portrays a sense of unity in terms of desire. This sense of unity at this late stage of the Song demonstrates the extent to which the relationship between the lovers has developed, leading up to this point. This subsection thus discusses how the use of the EI operates as a response to each particular context, as well as the role that it itself plays in driving forward the portrayal of desire in the passage as a whole.

Firstly, an EI of intention (7:2a) is found early on in the description of the nude FP (7:1-6), which was read as the ML calling for the FP's vulva to continually be filled up with mixed wine (bodily fluids).¹⁶⁰⁹ This is very much sexual imagery, with the ML implicitly expressing his wish and intention to ensure that she is never lacking his bodily fluid. And the imagery may also imply some sense of calling for permanency in their relationship, since the required sexual access for this wish to be fulfilled would not be possible otherwise.¹⁶¹⁰ To be able to make such a suggestive wish, indicates that he perceives her, right now, and in the future, as being sexually accessible to him. There is no perceived ending to his access. His EI prepares the way for the way that desire develops in this passage as a whole.

Secondly, the cluster of three EIs of intention of the ML in 7:8 as part of the palm tree and grape imagery of 7:7-8 should be seen as responding to the language of 'aesthetic appreciation' (7:1-5b), the 'physical impact of yearning' (7:5c) and exclamation of 7:6¹⁶¹¹. The language of the 'impact of yearning', being held in the FP's tresses of hair, portraying her hair as having the power to trap him, importantly can only happen because of the expression of desire in terms of aesthetic appreciation of her hair in 7:5ab. Furthermore, the overwhelming exclamation of her beauty (7:6a), being the climatic second person feminine singular verb that is used, along with the powerful vocatives that are used to describe her in 7:6bc, should be naturally seen as developing out of the language of being held captive (7:5c). This building up of the portrayal of desire of the FP results in the ML verbalising his sexual want for her in terms of action, by means of his use of the EI.

¹⁶⁰⁹ 11.3.1.

¹⁶¹⁰ 11.3.1.

¹⁶¹¹ 5.3; 11.3.1; Walsh, p. 56.

Thirdly, the three EIs themselves form part of a very sensual and erotic verbalised fantasy by the ML, that Budde suggests is even more ‘passionate and sensual’ than 4:12-5:1.¹⁶¹² What is noticeable is that in one sense the imagery of 7:7-9 is more explicit than the garden imagery of 4:12-5:1, in that here the ML makes clear the referents of the simile are her as the palm tree and her breasts as its clusters (7:7ab).¹⁶¹³ This imagery is then extended in the description, but no other EIs in the Song have breasts explicitly as their subject.¹⁶¹⁴ The imagery of the palm tree itself has been discussed above, but what is most significant in terms of the development of desire is that it explicitly portrays the desires of the ML (7:7-9a), ultimately resulting in him being interrupted (7:9b) by the FP, and her realisation that ‘his desire is for me’ (7:10b).¹⁶¹⁵ It is the EIs, portraying his sexual intention, alongside his reference to her kisses (7:9) – which itself stems from the imagery of the grapevine as breasts as the subject of the EI in 7:8c – that results in her realisation verbalised in the final refrain of mutual possession.

Fourthly, the FP responds to the refrain (7:10) by verbalising her own desire by means of five EIs (7:11-12), building upon the vineyard imagery introduced by the ML (in 7:8 and 7:9a) and extended by her in 7:9b.¹⁶¹⁶ Importantly, the emphasis of these verses in terms of desire are the telos that she states that ‘there I will make love to you’ (7:12e).¹⁶¹⁷ All of her uses of the EI (7:11-12) portray her volition towards that aim.

Fifthly, immediately after building up to the telos of the place where she will make love to the ML, the FP enhances her description of this (7:13), by telling him of the fruits (meaning sexual delights) that she has saved up for him.¹⁶¹⁸ Sixthly the text continues to express the desire of the FP, firstly to kiss the ML in public (8:1), then to return to the action of lovemaking at her mother’s house.¹⁶¹⁹ Within the context of this, the FP issues the final adjuration to the DoJ, having through the whole section that follows her interruption, shown the sway that desire has had on her.¹⁶²⁰

Overall, it can be seen that the role of the EI is particularly significant in this passage for several reasons: its use suggests a development of a sense of permanency in the

¹⁶¹² 7:7-10. Budde, p. 39; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 238.

¹⁶¹³ The garden imagery of 4:12-5:1 is metaphorical and its referent is not explicitly stated.

¹⁶¹⁴ *šad* (breasts) are referred to in 1:13, 4:5; 7:4; 7:8; 7:9. 8:8; 8:10 in the Song.

¹⁶¹⁵ 11.3.2-11.3.4.

¹⁶¹⁶ 11.3.5.

¹⁶¹⁷ 11.3.5.

¹⁶¹⁸ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 92; Fredericks and Estes, p. 401.

¹⁶¹⁹ 11.3.6.

¹⁶²⁰ 11.3.6.

relationship; it demonstrates the level of synchronisation there is between the lovers; and it demonstrates the level of sexual intimacy at this point in the text.

11.4.2 His desire is for Me

11.3.4 discussed that the final refrain of mutual possession (7:10) is importantly situated immediately following the FP's interruption of the ML's fantasising through the EIs, and immediately before expressing her own EIs. 7:10 is thus a realisation moment for the FP that his desire is for her, which causes her to respond in the way that she does. She realises, through the way that desire is portrayed, that he desires *her*.¹⁶²¹

But what specifically is the realisation for the FP? 11.3.4 noted the relationship of the use of *těšûqâ* with Genesis 3:16, that she realises that her lover finds her 'irresistible'.¹⁶²² As Genesis 3:16 specifically focuses on a woman's desire for her 'îšē (man), him being dominated by a 'similar desire' implies that *she* is his woman.¹⁶²³ That is, significantly, in line with sentiment of the first line of this final refrain of mutual possession, 'I am my lover's' (7:10a). Read in this way, the second line (7:10b) reinforces the first (7:10a): 'I am my lover's and his desire is for me'.¹⁶²⁴ The FP is verbalising her realisation that from his perspective she is totally his, to the extent that she knows that his *těšûqâ* is for her, and her alone. It is not just the case from her perspective that 'I am my lover's'. It is that 'his desire is for *me*'.

Notice too that since the FP does not stress in this refrain, unlike 2:16 and 6:3, that her lover is hers.¹⁶²⁵ However, it is definitely the case that he still belongs to her as well.¹⁶²⁶ As Garrett puts it 'the ownership has not become a one-way street'.¹⁶²⁷ The fact that she responds to the refrain by using the EI (7:11) telling him to 'come, my lover', as well as the EIs that follow, demonstrates her passion for him, and asserts that she does still belong to him. The unity of the passage as a whole demonstrates the mutuality between the lovers, and must not be discounted. The text is not portraying some skewing of the consistent and magnificent egalitarian ideal of the Song, since the female freely and assertively interrupts the ML out of her own deep desire for him.¹⁶²⁸

¹⁶²¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 90 calls 7:9b-13 as 'desire realized' in her study of the Song. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 241 also observes that 'the woman acknowledges her lover's desire for her', and the link with the following verses.

¹⁶²² Jacobs, p. 68.

¹⁶²³ Jacobs, p. 68.

¹⁶²⁴ Davidson, p. 600 too notes how the second line 'underscores' the first line.

¹⁶²⁵ My lover is mine. Garrett, p. 245; Davidson, p. 600.

¹⁶²⁶ Garrett, p. 245.

¹⁶²⁷ Garrett, p. 245.

¹⁶²⁸ The egalitarianism of the relationship of the lovers of the Song is well recognised amongst scholars. For a detailed discussion, see Davidson, pp. 569-577.

But here the text portrays the FP being so positively overwhelmed by the realisation that ‘I am my lover’s and his desire is for me’ that she does not verbalise her possession of him. Instead, ‘she has really lost herself in him and thereby found herself’.¹⁶²⁹ Such a thing could only happen within the grounds of the assured security of this relationship, a security that has been reinforced by the powerful imagery of this wider passage, including the imagery (7:2) suggestive of the ML wishing for permanency using erotic language.

Thus, Davidson is correct to observe the way that the three refrains of mutual possession demonstrate a progression in terms of the security in the relationship between the lovers.¹⁶³⁰ For the first refrain (2:16), it was argued that the FP verbalises the security in the relationship affirmed by the imperative of 2:15.¹⁶³¹ In 6:3 it was argued that the swapping around of the two clauses comes out of the context of having been reunited with her lover after he disappeared in the second night-time passage.¹⁶³² Now, the FP verbalises this realisation that ‘I am my lover’s and his desire is for me’ with the relationship being portrayed as having continued to develop to the point of a sense of unity in terms of desire, as well as a sense of security asserted by the use of language from the ML which is suggestive of permanency. A sense of progression is consistent with the use of each refrain within its particular textual context.

11.4.3 The Unity in Terms of Desire and How it Demonstrates Progression

11.3.3 stated that this passage demonstrates a unity in terms of desire, a unity that by its existence further demonstrates the nature of the developed relationship between the lovers.¹⁶³³ But what is the evidence for this? The evidence is found in verses 7:8-12 and discussed in the third and fourth sections of the stages of development in 11.4.1. The critical elements are: a) the interruption of the ML by the FP (7:9b) when he is verbalising his pleasure of her kisses; b) the recognition of the ML’s desire for her in the refrain of mutual possession (7:10). The commentary has emphasised how the interruption provides significant evidence for a sense of unity amongst the lovers, since the FP recognises his desire for her kisses, and verbalises implicitly her same desire. They are in synchronisation. The refrain of mutual possession then further demonstrates unity in terms of desire, since she is overwhelmed by his desire for her, resulting in her use of the EIs that follow. What is most important to observe is that the two critical elements (the

¹⁶²⁹ The quotation is from Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 87; Davidson, p. 600.

¹⁶³⁰ Davidson, p. 600.

¹⁶³¹ 7.4.2.

¹⁶³² 11.3.4, Longman, *NICOT*, p. 176.

¹⁶³³ 11.4.1 summarised the development of desire in the passage and discussed how this relates to the EI.

interruption and the recognition of the level of desire) are bookended on either side by uses of the EI, the verses before expressing the desire of the ML (7:9a), and the verses after expressing the desire of the FP (7:11-12). Thus, there is a form of reflection around the critical elements, showing how the desire between the lover is in a form of tandem. There is a sense of unity in terms of desire. Murphy too recognises that this section represents 'the union of lovers'.¹⁶³⁴

Moreover, this 'unity in terms of desire', demonstrated by the interruption and the refrain, is distinct from anything that has come before, showing the progression in terms of the relationship that has developed to this point between the lovers. At no previous point has one of the lovers interrupted the other mid-thought, let alone continued their thought.¹⁶³⁵ And while in the previous interruption in the Song (4:16) the FP uses EIs to create the sensual context to invite the ML into her garden (and invites him in), in 7:9b the FP understands exactly his desire (which is also her own desire) for kisses, and responds in the synchronisation of 'oral intercourse'.¹⁶³⁶ Furthermore, this is also very different from the time when the ML interrupted the FP by calling upon her in the second night-time passage, and they were out of synchronisation, as they clearly are now in synchronisation.¹⁶³⁷ Thus, the unity in terms of desire demonstrates how the relationship between the lovers has developed.

11.4.4 The Portrayal of a Developed Relationship

The unity in terms of desire shows one of the ways that the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers has progressed in the Song. But the commentary has also highlighted other ways that the portrayal of the relationship is more developed than in previous passages. In particular, the language used in 7:6 highlights how the portrayal of the relationship has developed for the reader.¹⁶³⁸ Another way is the EI potentially calling for permanency in 7:2¹⁶³⁹.

Furthermore, Davidson makes a pertinent observation about this passage and the passages that precede it in the second half of the Song that further demonstrates the way that the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers has developed.¹⁶⁴⁰ He observes

¹⁶³⁴ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 180.

¹⁶³⁵ 11.3.3; Exum, *The Song of Songs*, p. 239.

¹⁶³⁶ The quotation is from Spencer, p. 196. 9.3.4.

¹⁶³⁷ 5:2-8.

¹⁶³⁸ See 11.4.1 for discussion

¹⁶³⁹ See 11.4.1 for discussion.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Davidson, p. 596 treats the Song as a 'three-part historical progression ... which is at the same time intersected by a symmetrical literary structure'.

Moreover, it is not necessary to read the Song in the same way to make similar observations about

how there is an 'intensification of sexual imagery' in the second half of the Song compared to the first.¹⁶⁴¹ While Davidson probably overstates his case by playing down too much passages in which sexual activity of some sort is probably portrayed early on in the text (e.g. 1:4), choosing to read passages before the description of Solomon's marriage (3:6-11) as not 'sexual intercourse' and 'a desire or wish (but probably not the actual experience) of ... kissing (1:2), embracing (2:6), and the man's lying between her breasts (1:12)', he correctly observes how passages that are further on in the book are more explicit in their description.¹⁶⁴² As discussed in the commentary for 5:14 and 7:1-6, the descriptions made of the ML and FP respectively are both likely to be descriptions (by the other) of their naked bodies.¹⁶⁴³ It is also likely that these descriptions portrays explicit descriptions of the genitals, whereas this is not the case earlier on in the Song.¹⁶⁴⁴ Davidson observes that the text portrays the ML in 7:2-3 'lingering around the area of the genitals'.¹⁶⁴⁵ And the study of the EI in this passage (7:7-9b) has observed the focus around the breasts and the ML's extensive description of his fantasy about the intensity with which he grasps the FP's breasts and desires their taste to be like the cluster of the grapevine.¹⁶⁴⁶ It is fair to say that the imagery in this passage is more explicit than passages in the first half of the Song, particularly with its focus on the 'whole body'.¹⁶⁴⁷

Similarly, the portrayal of gaining sexual access by use of the EI shows a sense of progression when the second half of the Song is compared to the first. As discussed in Chapter 7, the springtime imagery of 2:8-14 includes references to the FP's inaccessibility, including in a sexual sense.¹⁶⁴⁸ The use of the EIs in these verses centre around the ML getting the FP to come and join him outside, and to make herself accessible to him, based on the reasoning that the time is right.¹⁶⁴⁹ When this is compared to the later significant clusters of EIs on the dot plot, the imagery, and sexual accessibility portrayed is less explicit, and in the case of 2:8-14, more reticent than the extended sexual imagery portrayed by the EIs of 4:12-5:1 and 7:8-12.¹⁶⁵⁰ This is particularly the case with the ML expressing his desire that the FP's vulva is never lacking

the way that the sexual imagery is more explicit further on in the Song. Davidson's approach depends on an unnecessary chiasmic structure. C.f. Fredericks and Estes, p. 292.

¹⁶⁴¹ Davidson, p. 596.

¹⁶⁴² Davidson, p. 597. C.f. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁴³ 10.3.2; 11.3.1; 11.3.2.

¹⁶⁴⁴ 5:14 (10.3.2) is more cautiously read as reference to genitals than 7:2 (11.3.1).

¹⁶⁴⁵ Davidson, p. 599.

¹⁶⁴⁶ 11.3.2, Davidson, p. 597 notes the significance of the development here.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Davidson, p. 599.

¹⁶⁴⁸ 7.3.1.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Munro, p. 118; 7.3.1.

¹⁶⁵⁰ The dot plot is in Appendix 1. 4:12-5:1(9.3.3-9.3.6), 7:8-12(11.3.3-11.3.5).

the mixing of his and her bodily fluid (7:2).¹⁶⁵¹ In other words, observing the EIs in the text helps to convey where volition is being expressed, and in doing so it can be seen that there is a sense of progression in the portrayed relationship by the way sexuality is conveyed in each of these contexts.¹⁶⁵²

Taking together the unity in terms of desire, the possible calling for permanency in the relationship from the ML, the development of the use of existing language in 7:6, the more explicit content of this later passages, the way that the EI shows how sexual accessibility has developed, alongside the way that the refrain of mutual possession has developed, there is strong evidence of a sense of progression in the relationship between the lovers of the Song.

11.4.5 The Contextual Use of the Final Adjuration Passage

As discussed in 11.3.6, there is good reason to consider the final adjuration passage as having a stronger level of insistent adjuration than the previous two, and it was suggested that this makes a great deal of sense at this late point in the Song as a whole.¹⁶⁵³ But bearing in mind the expression of unity in terms of desire, as well as her realisation that his *těšûqâ* is for her, does this have any bearing on this stronger adjuration?¹⁶⁵⁴

As the relationship has developed to this point, it is appropriate to see this adjuration passage in the light of this. A probable reason why the FP makes this adjuration is that the consequences of inciting or exciting *ʾahăbâ* has the potential of ultimately forming an inseparable bond with another. The FP has experienced the overwhelming power of *ʾahăbâ*. It is something that can be overwhelmingly powerful, and can ultimately change the course of your life. Having this stronger adjuration passage alongside the suggestive imagery of permanency is thus a warning, that the consequence of inciting or exciting desire could lead to inseparability from someone. As the first-time reader will encounter soon, there is a link between this adjuration in 8:4 and the consequences, as expressed by an EI of *ʾahăbâ* in 8:6¹⁶⁵⁵. Of course, the FP delights in her lover, and so this permanency in her positive situation is not seen in a negative light. But by giving this stronger adjuration, the FP is emphasising to the DoJ the power of *ʾahăbâ* and the consequences that it can have.

¹⁶⁵¹ Also in 7:2 the perceived openness of the FP is portrayed by the lilies encircling her belly imagery. See 11.3.1.

¹⁶⁵² This, of course, acknowledges that with the second night-time passage, this is not a smooth progression.

¹⁶⁵³ 8:4.

¹⁶⁵⁴ 7:10.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Walsh, p. 184, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248.

Chapter 12: The Calling for Inseparability (8:5-7)

12.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the most significant verses in the Song, 8:6-7 in their wider immediate context of 8:5, and in particular, the great significance of the use of the EI in 8:6 as a means of the FP calling for inseparability from the ML. The use of the EI is exceptional because of its immensely powerful imagery, including the imagery associated with the reason given by the FP for using this imperative. This chapter will also discuss how this use of the EI at this late point of the Song is climatic as part of the larger sense of progression in the relationship portrayed in the text.

12.2 Translation and Passage Context

12.2.1 Translation (8:5-7)

DoJ

8:5a: Who is that coming out of the desert,

5b: leaning¹⁶⁵⁶ upon her lover?

FP

5c: Underneath the apple tree I aroused you,¹⁶⁵⁷

5d: there your mother conceived you,

5e: there she conceived you.

6a: Place me as a seal upon your heart,

6b: as a seal upon your arm,

6c: for my love is as strong as death,

6d: my passion fierce as Sheol!¹⁶⁵⁸

6e: Its flames¹⁶⁵⁹ are flames of fire,

¹⁶⁵⁶ *Mitrappeqet* (leaning) is hapax. However, it is a root that is used in post-biblical Hebrew, Ethiopian, Arabic and Aramaic, the emphasis upon providing 'support' in some way. BDB p. 952; Pope, p. 662; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191. DCH, Vol. 7, p. 540.

¹⁶⁵⁷ The MT uses second person masculine singular pronominal suffixes in this line and in 8:5d-e, thereby associating the female voice as expressing these lines. The other versions are in line with this, the exemption being the Syriac Pershitta (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191). Exum, p. 250 notes the problems of the FP speaking these lines for Jewish allegorical interpretations.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Keel, p. 270 also adds first-person possessive pronouns to his translation (my) that are not in the Hebrew, since *'ahăbâ* (love) and *qin'â* (passion) are both feminine singular nouns, to emphasise that what is being conveyed here is the experience of the FP. See 12.3.1 for a more detailed discussion.

¹⁶⁵⁹ LXX (*phloges autēs*) reads as 'its flames' and Vulgate (*atque flammarum*) reads as 'and of the flames'. Hess, p. 240.

6f: the¹⁶⁶⁰ flame of Yah!¹⁶⁶¹

7a: Mighty waters cannot extinguish love,

7b: nor can rivers drown it.

7c: If one offered all one's wealth for love,¹⁶⁶²

7d: it would be utterly scorned.

¹⁶⁶⁰ The translation above inserts a definite article not found in the Hebrew for the benefit of how it sounds in this English translation. See ESV, which also inserts a definite article.

¹⁶⁶¹ The translation of *šalhebetyâ* as the Flame of Yah is much debated amongst scholars. The possible readings of the Hebrew are noted by DCH, Vol. 8, p. 364, but Murphy, p. 191 notes that the construction of *šalhebetyâ* is uncommon and problematic. *Šlhbt* is used as flame in Ezekiel 21:3 and Job 15:30, which may be the noun *lhb* with a 'prefixed relative pronoun' (Hess, p. 240). The critical issue is whether the last two consonants of *šalhebetyâ* should be read as a superlative form of *šlhbt* or the noun *šlhbt* alongside a short form (*yh*) of the name of Yahweh.

The short form of *yh* is used elsewhere in Exodus 15:2, 17:16, Isaiah 12:2, 26:4, 38:11, as well as various Psalms (68, 77, 89, 94, 102, 104, 106, 111, 112, 113, 115, 130, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150), many of these psalmic uses are part of the phrase *hlyh* (102, 104, 106, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116, 117, 122, 147, 148, 149, 150). However, unlike Song 8:6, the *mappîq* is used with the *h* in these other verses (Murphy, p. 191).

Moreover, the alternative of reading *yh* as a superlative here ('a raging flame') is based upon the work of D Winton Thomas, 'A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew', *Vetus Testamentum*, 3.3 (1953), 209–24 (p. 221). But it may be the case, as Davidson, p. 626 suggests, that the only 'precise terminological parallel' in the HS to *šalhebetyâ* is *ma'pēlēyâ* in Jeremiah 2:31, which is often understood to be a superlative meaning ('deep darkness', C.f. Fishbane, p. 209) might be better understood by the *yh* being seen as a reference to Yahweh, i.e. that the darkness has its origins from Yahweh.

Importantly, the ancient versions (LXX and Vulgate) do not help matters here to clarify as to the correct reading of this line, as they render this line (8:6f) as being only a strengthening of the previous line (8:6e), thus not rendering as either a 'raging flame' nor 'the flame of Yahweh' (Pope, p. 672). And it is true that early Christian interpreters do not make a point of any reference to Yahweh in their readings of this verse (Pope, p. 672). But interestingly, Martin Luther recognises the reference to Yahweh in his translation of the Bible (Davidson, p. 626, n. 81). And while controversial, various scholars and translations use this reading.

First among the scholars who read *šalhebetyâ* as having a reference to Yahweh is Davidson, pp. 621–622, who is so convinced that *yh* is a reference to the shortened form of Yahweh that he has named his substantial study on sexuality in the HS as 'The Flame of Yahweh'. Other most recent commentators that affirm this position include Duguid, p. 155 and Luter (8:6). Hess, p. 240, Landy, p. 125; Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 168, Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 247, Provan, p. 368, and Murphy, pp. 190–192 also support reading this as a reference to Yahweh. Of older commentators who accept this reading, Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. by M G Easton, Clark's Foreign Theological Library, 4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1877), p. 144 is one.

The reference to Yahweh is also found in the mainstream translations including the ESV ('the very flame of the Lord') and the JB ('the flame of Yahweh himself').

¹⁶⁶² The MT line literally translates as 'if one offered for love all the wealth of one's house', whereas this translation has removed 'house' for ease of meaning. Quotation from NRSV. NLT and CSB also do not include the reference to house. Also, LXX reads 'his whole life, instead of 'all the wealth of one's house'. However, as other versions have the latter clause, this latter meaning is preserved here (Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 187; Pope, p. 675).

12.2.2 Form, Structure and Setting

These verses (8:5-7) immediately follow those discussed in the previous chapter (7:1-8:4), the discussion of which demonstrated the way that the relationship has developed amongst the lovers expressed by the means of the EI. The immediately preceding verse (8:4) is the final of the three adjuration passages addressing the DoJ, which, it was argued is the strongest of the three adjurations.¹⁶⁶³ This sets the context for these powerful verses that follow.

The evidence that this is a distinct section is provided by the question that is asked in 8:5¹⁶⁶⁴. 8:5-7 should be read as a continuous and coherent section, as affirmed by several contemporary commentators.¹⁶⁶⁵ This passage begins with a question posed by a narrative voice with the purpose of drawing attention to the presence of the FP leaning on the ML. Bearing in mind the dialogical role of the DoJ in the Song as audience, it is coherent to recognise them asking this question.¹⁶⁶⁶

The FP then recalls a previous experience of arousing her ML. In this sexual context, she then introduces the climatic EI of the Song (8:6). The FP then uses figurative imagery to explain the power of *ʾahābā* as the reason for her use of the EI. They are such significant verses, and are seen by numerous scholars as being a climatic point within the text.¹⁶⁶⁷ They take place within the closing verses of the Song. Its content is a strong reason for regarding these verses as forming a climatic point within the text as a whole. After this verse there are only six remaining verses that follow in the Song.

12.2.3 Overview of the Use of the Erotic Imperative in this Passage

A unique EI is used in this passage in 8:6a, the imperative *šîmēnî* ('place me') spoken by the FP, addressing the ML. What is particularly important to observe is that this grammatical imperative has a first-person direct object, meaning that the FP is calling on her lover to do something to her.¹⁶⁶⁸ What she asks him to do is of a metaphorical nature, but the imagery is significant for the uniqueness of this use of the EI in the Song. Through this imperative the FP urges her ML to make her inseparable from him.

¹⁶⁶³ 11.4.5.

¹⁶⁶⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206-208; Fredericks and Estes, pp. 339, 405-407; Hess, p. 235, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Fredericks and Estes, p. 407; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 74; Duguid, p. 152; Hess, p. 235; Landy, pp. 112-113. Contra Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 195, who sees no connection between v.5 and 6.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Davidson, p. 621; Duguid, p. 154; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, p. 160; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 196.

¹⁶⁶⁸ There are seven imperatives that have *ni* as a subject by ending with a common singular pronominal suffix. 1:4a; 2:5a; 2:5b; 2:14c; 2:14d; 8:6a; and 8:13c.

12.3 Commentary

12.3.1 The Recalling of an Experience of Arousal (8:5)

This passage opens with an interrogative clause (8:5a) that is identical to the question asked in 3:6¹⁶⁶⁹. In 3:6 the FP asks a question, a rhetorical device to get the DoJ (and the reader as wider audience) to watch the (imaginary) grand arrival of King Solomon on his wedding day from the *midbār* (desert).¹⁶⁷⁰ In 8:5 the DoJ ask a question, with the same purpose, to inform the reader of the presence of the FP *mitrappeqet* (leaning) upon her lover', emphasising that they are together as a couple.¹⁶⁷¹ The fact that the lovers are together acts as a contrast to 3:11, where Solomon is portrayed as getting married, thus not being present with his wife. 8:5 thus acts as a contrast, since the emphasis is on the togetherness of the lovers.¹⁶⁷² The physical contact between them means that there is no physical distance between them, in contrast with the seeking and finding motif of much of the Song.¹⁶⁷³ The portrayed accessibility of the FP prepares the reader for the next line.¹⁶⁷⁴

In the context of this imagery of the lovers' closeness, in 8:5c-e, the FP speaks and a change in aspect is found here, which may be read as the FP recalling a past event.¹⁶⁷⁵ Spencer sees it as being a 'favourite trysting site'.¹⁶⁷⁶ The FP refers to having 'wr (aroused) the ML under the apple tree, the verb root that has been previously used in a

¹⁶⁶⁹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 407; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 207; Hess, p. 235.

¹⁶⁷⁰ The FP is very likely to be the speaker in 3:6, since she addresses the DoJ in 3:11. As Exum, p. 145 notes, there is no reason to see a change of speaker between 3:6 and 3:11, and so a sensible reading is that the female protagonist speaks 3:6. This also means that as narrator of the section describing the arrival of Solomon, that she cannot be the woman that he is marrying. A.R. Pete Diamond, 'midbār', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), iv, 520–28 (p. 527) emphasises that the *midbār* in the Song is one of only two contexts in which the negative connotations of the desert are not seen as a 'hostile' place. Here in this poetic text, it acts as a place for a dramatic entry. See Bloch and Bloch, p. 159.

¹⁶⁷¹ See *mitrappeqet* in notes of 12.2.1.

As the only remaining speakers in the Song, it must be the DoJ who speak here. See Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248. Provan, p. 366 also suggests that the DoJ speak here.

Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 248 draws attention to the rhetorical use of the question. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 195 also notes the rhetorical purpose of this line.

Bergant, p. 95 observes the importance of the FP leaning upon her lover, as does Hess, p. 234 and Duguid, p. 153.

¹⁶⁷² Bergant, *The Song of Songs* p. 96; Fredericks and Estes, p. 408.

¹⁶⁷³ Duguid, p. 153. Hess, p. 235 furthermore, connects the presence of the two lovers, and the embrace of 8:3.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Keel, p. 265 compares this to the setting to the mountain wilderness of 4:8 portraying the distance of the FP from the ML, that was overcome through the use of the EI. See 9.3.1. Fredericks and Estes, p. 408 makes a similar observation about the accessibility of the FP.

Duguid, p. 153 makes the observation about the preparation for the next line.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Commentators who explicitly name this as being a reference to a past event include Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 95 and Spencer, pp. 210-212.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Spencer, p. 211.

sexual sense.¹⁶⁷⁷ The first-time reader is already aware of the erotic nature of the apple tree, with the ML being described as one in 2:3, to which the FP described the sweetness of his taste.¹⁶⁷⁸ This image of arousing him under this apple tree brings these two images together, making the context a particularly sexual one.

Next (8:5d), the FP introduces imagery referring to the ML's mother *hibbēlā* (having conceived) under the tree.¹⁶⁷⁹ Like 3:4, where the FP expressed her want to take the ML back to her mother's chamber, the place of sexual passion, the FP associates this place as a place of sexual passion.¹⁶⁸⁰ The place is emphasised by the twice use of the adverb *šommā* (there).¹⁶⁸¹ The erotic context of the place, being the place important because of it being a place of arousal, seems to be the recurring theme here.¹⁶⁸²

12.3.2 The Erotic Imperative Calling for Inseparability (8:6ab)

Immediately after the FP recalls the erotic context of the apple tree where she aroused the ML, she issues (8:6a) the single, but critical, use of the EI in this section. She speaks the imperative *šimēnī*, which has a first-person pronominal suffix, thereby identifying its object as 'me'.¹⁶⁸³ The text vocalises a volition that the person being addressed (the ML) should carry out *šym* on the speaker.¹⁶⁸⁴ It is the only use of an imperative verb form of *šym* in the HS.

¹⁶⁷⁷ The previous uses of verbs of this root in the Song are 2:7, 3:5, 4:16, 5:2 and 8:4. The verb can also be used in the sense of to awaken from sleep. Pope, p. 663 is correct to read the previous contexts as suggesting that aroused would be the most appropriate reading.

Other commentators who see this '*wr*' as referring to aroused include Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 95; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249; Keel, p. 268, Davidson, p. 614; Bloch and Bloch, p. 152; Duguid, p. 153.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Bergant, *The Song of Songs* p. 96; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249. See 13.2.6 for further discussion.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, 'hābal', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 12 (p. 12) notes the ambiguity of this verb, whether it refers to conceiving or giving birth. Pope, p. 663 notes that in the ANE context 'divine births often took place under trees sacred to the cult'. However, it seems more likely that the imagery of arousal planted in the mind of the reader, continues into this next line.

¹⁶⁸⁰ 8.4.1; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 96. 8.4.1 also noted that referring to the sex lives of parents does not seem to have a sense of cultural revulsion associated with it in the Song, as it does in the contemporary Western world. Spencer, p. 211.

¹⁶⁸¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249.

¹⁶⁸² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249; Spencer, p. 212.

¹⁶⁸³ There are seven imperatives that have *nī* as an object by ending with a common singular pronominal suffix. 1:4a; 2:5a; 2:5b; 2:14c; 2:14d; 8:6a; and 8:13c.

¹⁶⁸⁴ There are forty-eight imperative uses of *šym* within the HS, all of the Qal form. C.f. Genesis 24:2; Genesis 31:37; Genesis 43:31; Genesis 44:1; Genesis 44:2; Genesis 47:29; Genesis 48:18; Exodus 17:14; Exodus 32:27; Numbers 16:7; Numbers 21:8; Deuteronomy 31:19; Deuteronomy 32:46; Joshua 7:19; Joshua 8:2; Joshua 10:24; Judges 18:19; 1 Samuel 8:5; 1 Samuel 9:23; 1 Kings 20:12; 1 Kings 22:27; 2 Kings 2:20; 2 Kings 6:22; 2 Kings 10:8; 2 Chronicles 18:26; Job 17:3; Job 41:8; Psalm 56:8; Psalm 66:2; Jeremiah 31:21; Jeremiah 38:12; Jeremiah 39:12; Ezekiel 6:2; Ezekiel 13:17; Ezekiel 20:46; Ezekiel 21:2; Ezekiel 21:16; Ezekiel 21:19; Ezekiel 25:2; Ezekiel 28:21; Ezekiel 29:2; Ezekiel 35:2; Ezekiel 38:2; Ezekiel 40:4; Ezekiel 44:5; Haggai 1:5; Haggai 1:7;

The root *šym* is summarised as ‘to place, put, i.e., cause an object to be located in a certain space, often implying the object was moved to the new location’.¹⁶⁸⁵ It is a verb that is used extensively in the HS for both metaphors and similes that use imagery in the positioning of ‘objects in space or time’ and this is the way that it is being used here.¹⁶⁸⁶ In this instance, it is being used as part of a simile, as a grammatical marker *k* is used after *šimēnî*.¹⁶⁸⁷ The simile juxtaposes two different semantic fields.¹⁶⁸⁸ In this instance, these lines form a paired simile, where the simile forms a comparison of *nî* (me) and *hôtām* (seal) twice.¹⁶⁸⁹ First, the text describes *hôtām* as being ‘*al-libbekā* (upon your heart). Then, it describes *hôtām* as being ‘*alzērô ekā* (upon your arm).¹⁶⁹⁰ And as an imperative, the FP is calling the ML to do this to her, as if she was a seal.

Seals come in a few forms in the ANE world.¹⁶⁹¹ Firstly, a seal could be attached to a cord and worn around the neck.¹⁶⁹² Secondly, the word is used to refer to a signet ring that was worn on the hand and that had a seal on it.¹⁶⁹³ Thirdly, there were stamp and cylindrical seals.¹⁶⁹⁴ The use of seals is well substantiated by a large number of archaeological finds, with a great variety of types of seal being found.¹⁶⁹⁵

But what does *hôtām* refer to in 8:6? The main purpose of seals was to mark objects so as to identify the ownership of property.¹⁶⁹⁶ Pressing down on clay with a stamp seal would have made an impression that would have enabled the owner of the seal to be identified. Similarly, a cylindrical seal would have been rolled over clay to create a mark identifying a seal's owner. This process of marking an object with the impression of a seal was a recognised means of linking an object with the owner of the seal, to the extent of

Haggai 2:18.

¹⁶⁸⁵ James Swanson, ‘šim’, in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997); BDB, p. 962.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Sam Meier, ‘šim’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 1237–41 (pp. 1237).

¹⁶⁸⁷ David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 50; C.f. Psalm 107:41; Hag 2:23; 2 Kings 13:7.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Meier, *šim*, p. 1237.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 26 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 258.

¹⁶⁹⁰ In both of these instances, the use of the pronoun ‘*al*’ (‘upon’) specifies that these are examples of the positioning of *hôtām* within spatial dimensions, with *hôtām* being described as being placed upon these two parts of the body (‘heart and arm’). It is an example of where verbs of the root *šym* are used with the preposition ‘*al*’ to determine that one thing is placed upon another.

¹⁶⁹¹ BDB, p. 368.

¹⁶⁹² Genesis 38:18; BDB, p. 368; Millard, p. 324; Pope, p. 666.

¹⁶⁹³ Genesis 41:42; Jeremiah 22:24; BDB, p. 368; Pope, p. 666; Swanson, *šim*.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁹⁵ F. B. Huey, ‘Seals’, in *Baker Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), pp. 1915–17 (p. 1916).

¹⁶⁹⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 250; Garrett, p. 254; Longman, p. 209.

ownership of the object by the seal owner.¹⁶⁹⁷ This use is particularly substantiated by the many archaeological finds of pots that have the seal impression of the owner upon them.¹⁶⁹⁸

Furthermore, and very importantly, a seal could be used as a representation of a person themselves.¹⁶⁹⁹ A good example of this is found in Genesis 38:18 where Tamar takes Judah's *ḥōtam* (seal), *pēṭile* (cord) and *maṭ* (staff) as a pledge. By showing these objects back to Judah, he realises that his identity is associated with this seal, indicating to him that he was responsible for Tamar's pregnancy.¹⁷⁰⁰ The seal as an object is linked to the seal owner's identity, not just the person's ownership of an object marked by a seal.¹⁷⁰¹ Both the ownership and identity elements of the seal imagery play a part in understanding this verse.¹⁷⁰²

The next question is how are the nouns *lībbe* (heart) and *zērō'e* (arm) to be understood in this passage? Both nouns could be understood in literal or figurative senses.¹⁷⁰³ Bearing in mind the large amount of figurative imagery in this poetic text, as well as the extensively figurative use of both of these nouns in the HS, this reading sees them as being figurative.¹⁷⁰⁴ *Lēb* can be understood in so many potentially different figurative ways, and as such can refer to the psychological aspect of a human, but can extend as far as the 'essence of a person'.¹⁷⁰⁵ BDB lists one meaning of *zērō'a* as being the 'arm as the seat of human strength'.¹⁷⁰⁶ This image of the arm reasonably could be seen in 8:6 in this metaphorical sense.¹⁷⁰⁷ While not neatly defining the meaning of *lēb*, putting these two

¹⁶⁹⁷ Longman, p. 209; Huey, p. 1917.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Huey, p. 1917; Pope, p. 666; Millard, p. 324.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Longman, p. 209.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Spencer, p. 212; Bloch and Bloch, p. 212; Murphy, p. 191 similarly draw on this narrative to explain the significance of *ḥōtam*.

¹⁷⁰¹ Millard, p. 324 observes how seals could act as 'an extension of the individual's personality'. Spencer, p. 212.

¹⁷⁰² Hess, p. 238.

¹⁷⁰³ C.f. Keel, p. 272 interprets these in a literal sense.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Manfred Dreytza, 'zērō'a', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 1146–47 (p. 1146) observes that 70 of 91 uses of *zērō'a* in the HS are metaphorical.

Commentators who read these as being figurative include Exum, p. 250; Longman, p. 210; Hess, p. 238; Duguid, p. 154; Fredericks and Estes, p. 408.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Alex Luc, 'lābab', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 749–54 (p. 749); F. Stolz, 'lēb', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 638–42; Judges 16:15.

¹⁷⁰⁶ BDB, p. 284; C.f. Job 26:2; 2 Samuel 22:25.

¹⁷⁰⁷ Fredericks and Estes, p. 408; Dreytza, p. 1146.

metaphorical images alongside each other suggests seeing the total person being expressed them.¹⁷⁰⁸

So, reading the imagery of the seal (representing the FP) in this way, alongside the imagery of the heart and arm representing the whole person, what is it that the FP is calling for from the ML by use of this imperative? There are two main interpretations amongst commentators. The first sees the imagery as signifying that the FP (as a seal) wants to be 'imprinted on the man's heart and arm'.¹⁷⁰⁹ The second sees the woman wanting to be a seal that is a representation of the man's identity placed upon his heart and arm.¹⁷¹⁰ The real question is whether the FP as the seal is representative of his identity of her identity, but the passage does not make this clear. This reading takes the woman's identity to be represented by the seal. She is calling him to place her, as a seal representing her identity, and to place her upon himself, his total being.¹⁷¹¹ She is asking that she take possession of him totally as her own, for the seal marks her ownership.¹⁷¹² But she calls upon him to be the one to do that, taking her (her identity represented by the seal) in the process of figuratively responding to her call. In other words, she is commanding that her 'whole identity, her very self ... [be] merging with his'.¹⁷¹³ The imagery of intimacy is implied by the closeness of the seal (her) being to him as a total person, since there is no distance between them in this imagery.¹⁷¹⁴ She is calling to be inseparable from him.

12.3.3 The Reason for the Erotic Imperative (8:6ce)

8:6c begins with the conjunction *kî*, emphasising that what follows provides a reason for the imperative *šîmēnî* being expressed in 8:6a.¹⁷¹⁵ This use is consistent with the way that the EI has been used elsewhere with the conjunction (1:2b, 2:11, 2:14), emphasising the causal link.¹⁷¹⁶ These next two lines are parallelism and this is important for their

¹⁷⁰⁸ Longman, p. 210; Duguid, p. 154. Fredericks and Estes, p. 408 draws a similar conclusion, that these parts of the body figuratively mean his 'inner being' and 'full vigour'.

¹⁷⁰⁹ Duguid, p.154; Longman, p. 210; Spencer, p. 212.

¹⁷¹⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 250; Clarke, p. 208; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 144.

¹⁷¹¹ As Spencer, p. 212 observes correctly, 'the woman in the Song does not ask the man ... to set *his* seal on her, as if marking her as his own, his commodity to do with as he pleases. She envisions *herself as the seal* she wants to impress on his heart and arm'.

¹⁷¹² Longman, pp. 209-210 observes that ownership is part of the imagery of a seal and that the woman is making a plea to 'own' him.

¹⁷¹³ Spencer, p. 212; Hess, p. 238.

¹⁷¹⁴ Bloch and Bloch, p. 212 note how close proximity is conveyed by this imagery, as is intimacy. Hess, p. 238 similarly observes the importance of physical closeness expressed by this image.

¹⁷¹⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 245; Duguid, p. 154; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 210; Hess, p. 238; Keel, p. 272. Landy, p. 118 agrees that the explicatory reading is more likely than the relative reading.

¹⁷¹⁶ See Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 93, Munro, p. 117. As Perry, p. 529 notes, the causal reading is the most common use of *kî* in the HS.

See also Garrett, pp. 151, 160; Hess, pp. 79, 96; Murphy, pp. 137, 141; Exum, pp. 116, 128; Carr,

interpretation.¹⁷¹⁷ Several powerful words appear here for the first time in the Song: the three nouns, *māwet* (death), *qin'ā* (passion) and *šē'ôl*; and the two adjectives, 'azzā (strong) and *qāšā* (fierce). In this couplet, synonymous parallelism exists in this form: (*'ahābā / 'azzā / māwet / qin'ā / qāšā / šē'ôl*).¹⁷¹⁸ Hence, there are comparisons with love being 'as strong as death', 'passion as fierce as the grave', as well as parallelism associating love with passion, and death with Sheol.¹⁷¹⁹

Māwet (death) and *šē'ôl* are often found in synonymous parallelism in the HS and are treated as semantically equivalent in other contexts.¹⁷²⁰ Thus, there is good reason to read them as such within these lines. Sometimes *māwet* and *šē'ôl* are used in parallel in the HS to describe 'the place of death'.¹⁷²¹ But both death and Sheol are also personified forces within the HS, with Sheol being described as a 'fearsome enemy'.¹⁷²² This personified reading is further supported, since the two adjectives, 'azzā and *qāšā* are used to describe the wind and the sea, are often personified.¹⁷²³ This is also supported by the personified reading of *'ahābā* in the adjuration passages, to be discussed below.¹⁷²⁴ As Goldingay puts it, 'when death gets hold of you, it doesn't let go'.¹⁷²⁵

Moreover, parallelism also determines that there is a synonymous relationship between *'ahābā* and *qinah*'. *Qin'ā* is a fascinating word that Pope rightly points out refers to 'strong emotion' in the HS, representing a range of 'emotions'.¹⁷²⁶ At this point it is essential to

Song of Solomon, pp. 100, 110; Fredericks and Estes, pp. 323, 328 for some examples of causative translation amongst commentators.

¹⁷¹⁷ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191; Hess, pp. 238-239; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 251; Walsh, p. 164; C.f. Fredericks and Estes, p. 406; Landy, p. 114. C.f. Waltke and O'Connor, p. 269, Fredericks and Estes, p. 406 for an 'absolute superlatives' reading. The parallelism reading perhaps captures better the extent of the imagery.

¹⁷¹⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 251; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191; Lynell Zogbo and Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible: A Guide for Understanding and Translating* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 2000), p. 21.

¹⁷¹⁹ Exum, p. 251; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191.

¹⁷²⁰ Proverbs 5:5; 7:27; Isaiah 28:15; G. Gerleman, 'mût', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 660-64. (p. 663); Eugene H. Merrill, 'mût', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), II, 886-88 (p. 887).

¹⁷²¹ Merrill, *mût*, p. 887; BDB, p. 560; Benjamin Austin, 'Afterlife', in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. by Douglas Mangum and others (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014); C.f. Psalm 9:13; Job 38:17.

¹⁷²² Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 197; C.f. Hosea 13:14, Psalm 49:14; 88:48; Eugene H. Merrill, 'šē'ôl', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), IV, 6-7 (p. 6).

¹⁷²³ Landy, p. 119; Robin Wakely, 'āzaz', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III, 365-77 (p. 370). Exodus 14:21; Nehemiah 9:11; Isaiah 43:16.

¹⁷²⁴ Chapter 13.

¹⁷²⁵ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 247.

¹⁷²⁶ Pope, p. 668; H. G. L. Peels, 'qānā', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), III,

remember that in this parallel context, this is a poetic text, which opens the possibility of the creation of intentional ambiguity by the poet. Commentators debate as to whether *qin`â* should here be read as ‘sexual instinct or ardor’, ‘intense devotion’, or ‘jealousy’ in the positive sense of ‘rightful ... possession’ of another’.¹⁷²⁷ The choice of the word *qin`â*, on the part of the poet creates intentional ambiguity and allows multiple meanings here. The parallelism of *qin`â* with *`ahăbâ*, bearing in mind the way that *`ahăbâ* is read here (as sexual desire) is suggestive that it refers to ‘sexual passion’.¹⁷²⁸ However, its use in the context of the seal imagery of this EI also potentially conveys the positive meaning of jealousy and devotion.¹⁷²⁹ This deliberate poetic ambiguity by the use of this word enables these multiple meanings to draw together in this immensely powerful imagery.

12.3.4 The Power of *`ahăbâ* (8:6ef)

The FP continues to describe the power of *`ahăbâ* in the following two lines (8:6ef):¹⁷³⁰ *rešăpêhâ rišpê`ēš* (its flames are flames of fire);¹⁷³¹ *šalhebetyâ* (the flame of Yah). These two lines are in parallel with each other.¹⁷³² The first line continues to describe the overwhelming nature of *`ahăbâ*, this time as flames of fire. While there is some uncertainty upon the precise meaning of *rešep*, other examples of use in the HS seem to refer to ‘flames, fire, spark[s or] lightning’.¹⁷³³ Fire might be used to portray the heat of passion, as well as the challenge of stopping it.¹⁷³⁴

The second line (8:6f) is a single word, that as mentioned in the translation notes is a matter of considerable debate amongst scholars.¹⁷³⁵ The last two consonants (*yh*) in the BHS are seen by some scholars as the short form of the name of Yahweh, as is common

937–40 (p. 938) notes the ‘wide range of meanings’ of the 85 times that that word root appears; G. Sauer, ‘*qin`â*’, in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), pp. 1145–47 (p. 1145) for discussion of wide semantic meanings including a ‘strong emotional component’.

¹⁷²⁷ Pope, p. 669 advocates the first option. This is supported by BDB, p. 888, which sees *qin`â* as referring to ‘ardent love’. Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 246 translates as ‘passion’ and imply this reading; similarly, Walsh, p. 164 implies this reading. The reading is the one used by the NRSV. It is also affirmed by Peels, p. 938; Sauer, p. 1146. The main advocate of the second option is Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 197.

Proponents of the third option include: Fredericks and Estes, p. 406; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 207; Hess, p. 237; Duguid, p. 68; Fox, p. 169; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 243; Bloch and Bloch, p. 213; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 186

¹⁷²⁸ Pope, p. 669; Walsh, p. 164.

¹⁷²⁹ Garrett, p. 256.

¹⁷³⁰ By the use of parallelism, this line could apply to either (or both) *qin`â* or *`ahăbâ*, as noted by Duguid, p. 155; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 253. However, Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 253 observes that the overall same meaning is implied.

¹⁷³¹ DCH, Vol. 7, p. 563 also uses this translation.

¹⁷³² Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 191

¹⁷³³ DCH, Vol. 7, p. 563. Another use is Job 5:7; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 253.

¹⁷³⁴ Hess, p. 240; Walsh, p. 162.

¹⁷³⁵ For discussion of the debate, see Hess, p. 240.

in HS poetry.¹⁷³⁶ However, commentators either take this as being a reference to the name of Yahweh, a superlative, or a gloss.¹⁷³⁷ For those who take it as a superlative, reasons include that no use of Yahweh's name *directly* has been used up till this point.¹⁷³⁸ But, as will be returned to later, there is evidence for the 'veiled' name of God in the adjuration passages, potentially affirming God's presence behind the Song.¹⁷³⁹ And bearing in mind the new powerful imagery found in this verse, including its context with the significant use of the EI, it is a context where a reference to God seems appropriate.¹⁷⁴⁰ Furthermore, reading *yh* as a gloss is not supported by the ancient versions, so this does not seem particularly likely.¹⁷⁴¹ To return to the superlative argument, Walsh makes the point that 'while the generic name for god does function as a semantic device for superlatives, this would be the sole case where the proper name Yahweh does'.¹⁷⁴² Bearing in mind the responsibility of using the divine name correctly in the HS, as emphasised by the Third Commandment, a stylistic reading or a gloss at this point seems very unlikely. Taking these arguments together, the use of the divine name seems likely.¹⁷⁴³

But acknowledging the presence of the divine name raises the question as to what is the significance of it here? It is used in reference to a flame, providing a description of the overwhelming power of *'ahābā*. It thus describes how the FP understands her experience, as the cause of her giving the EI in 8:6a. Seen in this way, the reference to the 'flame of Yah' perhaps recognises that God is in some way behind her experience of passion for the ML.¹⁷⁴⁴ The imagery that maybe comes to mind for the first-time reader is the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4), but 'the presence of God in theophany is connected with flames of fire in numerous places in Scripture'.¹⁷⁴⁵ It is as if, at this late point in the Song, that the FP realises (and verbalises) that God is behind this overwhelming power that has

¹⁷³⁶ Hess, p. 240; Terence Freitheim, 'Yahweh', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), IV, 1295–1300 (p.1295) observes that there 50 uses of the abbreviation *yah* for Yahweh in the HS.

¹⁷³⁷ The approaches are referred to in Hess, p. 240; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192 and Pope, p. 670.

The superlative reading is found in translations including NRSV; NIV; NKJV. It is held by Pope, p. 68; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 213; Bloch and Bloch, p. 213; Fredericks and Estes, p. 407; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 187.

¹⁷³⁸ Longman, *NICOT*, pp. 212-213.

¹⁷³⁹ 13.3.3; Davidson, p. 622; LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, pp. 63-63; Luter, 2:7.

¹⁷⁴⁰ Duguid, p. 155.

¹⁷⁴¹ The gloss argument is made by Pope, p. 680. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192 makes the observation about the ancient versions. Davidson, p. 624. As mentioned in n. 1641, the ancient versions do not contain this line at all, instead being a strengthening of the previous line.

¹⁷⁴² Walsh, p. 205, Davidson, p. 625.

¹⁷⁴³ Davidson, pp. 621-632 provides a much fuller discussion of the use of the divine name in 8:6.

¹⁷⁴⁴ Walsh, p. 206.

¹⁷⁴⁵ Davidson, p. 628.

been the reason for her making the EI in this verse.

12.3.5 The Power of 'ahăbâ Continued (8:7ab)

The next two lines continue to expand upon the description of 'ahăbâ, this time moving from the powerful force of fire to the powerful force of water. 8:7a says that *mayim rabbîm* (mighty waters) cannot *kabbôt* (extinguish) 'ahăbâ.¹⁷⁴⁶ This metaphorical language describes the near indestructibility of 'ahăbâ as a personified elemental force.¹⁷⁴⁷ *Mayim rabbîm* is itself a personified force in the HS, having a mythological backdrop.¹⁷⁴⁸ It represents the 'waters of chaos' in texts such as Genesis 1:2, forces over which only Yahweh can have control.¹⁷⁴⁹

This thought is then effectively repeated because of synonymous parallelism in 8:7b¹⁷⁵⁰. The *něhārôt* (rivers) similarly do not have the power to destroy 'ahăbâ. Usually, water would be able to destroy fire, but not this fire.¹⁷⁵¹ Not the Flame of Yahweh!

12.3.6 True Love is Priceless (8:7cd)

The next line moves away from the power of 'ahăbâ to its value.¹⁷⁵² The FP now introduces a conditional statement.¹⁷⁵³ The conditional statement presents an evaluation of someone who *ntn* (offered) *kol-hôn bêtô* (all the wealth of one's house) for 'ahăbâ.¹⁷⁵⁴ The second clause presents criticism of the person who does this, describing them as being *bôz yābûzû lô*, which is translated passively by commentators and translations as 'he would be utterly despised'.¹⁷⁵⁵ Fox and Hess suggest that it is the wealth that is being despised here, not the person offering it.¹⁷⁵⁶ Both are legitimate readings of the text.¹⁷⁵⁷ But the sentiment of both is ultimately the same, that 'ahăbâ is something that by its nature it cannot be bought or sold.¹⁷⁵⁸ Within the ANE, as described above, the bride-price is one means that love was bought, and it is possible that this critique refers to that.¹⁷⁵⁹ However, since the word used (*hôn*) is not the usual word for bride-price (*môhar*),

¹⁷⁴⁶ DCH, Vol. 4, p. 353 uses the word extinguish.

¹⁷⁴⁷ Walsh, p. 178,

¹⁷⁴⁸ The term is used 28 times in the HS. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 214; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192.

¹⁷⁴⁹ Keel, p. 276; Fredericks and Estes, p. 409; Landy, p. 124; Psalm 93:4.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 198.

¹⁷⁵¹ Walsh, p. 178; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192.

¹⁷⁵² Spencer, p. 219.

¹⁷⁵³ Keel, p. 270;

¹⁷⁵⁴ Someone is indicated by a 3rd person masculine singular suffix.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Murphy, p. 192;

¹⁷⁵⁶ Fox, p. 171; Hess, p.241.

¹⁷⁵⁷ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192. Exum, *Song of Songs* p. 254 notes that both readings are basically the same.

¹⁷⁵⁸ Hess, p. 242; Duguid, p. 155; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 192; Fredericks and Estes, p. 409; Landy, p. 128; Provan, p. 368; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 254; Spencer, p. 220.

¹⁷⁵⁹ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 198; Fredericks and Estes, p. 409.

it is more likely that this is a more general critique of trying to buy love.¹⁷⁶⁰ As Bergant has observed, as *'ahăbâ* is more powerful than the overwhelming forces, it is not something that is possible to purchase.¹⁷⁶¹

12.4 Interpretation

12.4.1 The Female Protagonist's Experience of *'ahăbâ*

Before interpreting this passage in more detail, one point needs to be made. Using the powerful imagery of 8:6c-7, the FP describes *her* experience of *'ahăbâ* as an overwhelmingly powerful force, even if she does this through making a more general statement about *'ahăbâ*.¹⁷⁶² It is true that her experience conveyed here is based upon all of the Song up till this point.¹⁷⁶³ The first-time reader has encountered her experience throughout the text so far. Her experience of *'ahăbâ* provides the reason for her using the EI to call her lover to place her as a seal upon his heart and arm.¹⁷⁶⁴ The text puts these words into the mouth of the FP, and so within the wider context it is appropriate to read it as her experience of *'ahăbâ* towards the man.

Some scholars observe that 8:6b-7 is different from in form from previous passages in the Song, and outside of its context, it would sound like a didactic teaching about *'ahăbâ* in a general sense, and 'would not be out of place' in the book of Proverbs.¹⁷⁶⁵ This is a good observation, and recognising this demonstrates the likely way how the FP is through her words offering insight to the audience of the DoJ, and the reader, about what *'ahăbâ* is

¹⁷⁶⁰ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁶¹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁶² Spencer, p. 213 makes a similar observation: 'From the wellspring of this longing ... the woman draws her most profound analysis of love in relation to death and fire, the most powerful forces of nature'; similarly, Fredericks and Estes, p. 407. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 210 describes this as 'a very strong statement of her desire for him.

Keel, pp. 273-274 suggests how the feminine singular noun form could be used to argue that what is being conveyed is the *'ahăbâ* of the FP. While arguing that 8:6b-7 should be read as a 'statement about love in general', Bergant, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 97 observes how 'deep and genuine love, though particular and unique in itself, gives one insight into the very nature of love in general'.

¹⁷⁶³ Landy, p. 47 makes a similar observation by his reading, in which he observes that 'to this conclusion [8:6] all the comparisons and experiences of the Song are adduced'. The reading here is different because it is saying that those experiences previously portrayed have led to this revelation to the FP.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 245; Duguid, p. 154; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 210; Hess, p. 238; Keel, p. 272. Landy, p. 118 all observe that 8:6c-7 is causatively related to 8:6ab.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Quotation from Exum, *The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs*, p. 79. See also J. Cheryl Exum, 'Unity, Date, Authorship and the "Wisdom" of the Song of Songs', [Preprint] <https://www.academia.edu/12872769/Unity_Date_Authorship_and_the_Wisdom_of_the_Song_of_Songs> [accessed 30 June 2021], p. 12, Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of Wisdom and Its Influence*, p. 49, Michael Sadgrove, 'The Song of Songs as Wisdom Literature', in *Studia Biblica 1978 I: Papers on Old Testament and Related Themes*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Livingstone, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979), xi, 245-48.

like. However, this passage is found, not in the book of Proverbs, but in the Song, being the verbalised words of the FP. And it is found in the context of providing a reason for her use of the EI.¹⁷⁶⁶ The Song up till this point has portrayed the experience of 'ahăbâ for the main characters. The context suggests that it should be read as her experience here. Her 'ahăbâ for the ML is the reason for her use of the EI in this passage.

12.4.2 The Erotic Imperative Calling for Inseparability

12.3.2 discussed the powerful seal imagery used in the EI in 8:6ab. It was argued above that 'ahăbâ provides the reason for this EI.¹⁷⁶⁷ The powerful imagery of the seal being put upon the heart and arm being related to identity and ownership have also been discussed. It is a calling for inseparability. The next few subsections will consider the ways that inseparability is called for, by looking at how the EI and the associated imagery of 8:6 portrays commitment and permanency, and it will later consider inseparability in the context of the progression of the Song.

12.4.3 Commitment and Permanency Expressed by the Erotic Imperative

The multi-layered imagery of the FP using the EI to call for her to be placed as a seal can be read as symbolising her calling for permanency in the relationship in numerous ways.¹⁷⁶⁸ Firstly, the verb calls to be put in place upon the ML's heart and arm, symbolising the whole person, his very identity. Bergant observes correctly the profoundness of the extent of this imagery of calling for association with the ML's very identity, and this association makes it so much more than simply a 'pledge of commitment'.¹⁷⁶⁹ The level of association being expressed is so extraordinary that seeing this as merely a 'pledge of commitment' does not do the imagery sufficient justice.

Secondly, seals are used by pressing down and leaving their 'permanent' mark. They leave the mark of the seal into what they are pressed. One medieval Jewish mystical reading describes the consequences of a seal being pressed down: "For as the imprint of the seal is to be discerned even after the seal is withdrawn, so I shall cling to you".¹⁷⁷⁰ Bearing in mind that the imagery of heart and arm potentially symbolises his whole identity, the FP is asking that his identity is left with the permanent mark of her identity. Wherever he may go, she has called for her identity to be impressed into his. The FP is

¹⁷⁶⁶ Exum, *Poetic Genius*, p. 81. See also 12.3.3.

¹⁷⁶⁷ 12.3.3.

¹⁷⁶⁸ While arguing from a different hermeneutic of the Song, Davidson, p. 592 argues that permanency is expressed by the imperative.

¹⁷⁶⁹ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 144; Clarke, p. 208.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Gershom G. Scholem, *Zohar: The Book of Splendor* (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 251.

calling for a 'fusion' and in doing so being apart after this is in some sense not possible.¹⁷⁷¹

Thirdly, the imagery of the power of 'ahăbâ as a force that cannot be destroyed by the 'many waters', and is as strong as the other personified forces, is suggestive that as part of the wider explanation for her use of the EI, that she has called for the use of the seal imagery, because her 'ahăbâ is seemingly inextinguishable.¹⁷⁷² This reinforces the permanency conveyed by the use of the seal imagery itself. She may be calling for the relationship to be permanent because this is the case.

12.4.4 Vulnerability, Strength and Security in the Relationship Expressed by the Erotic Imperative

Bearing in mind the significance of the seal imagery associated with the EI in 8:6, with its implied calling to permanency, another aspect of the image that needs discussing is the vulnerability and strength that is implied by the use of the imperative, as well as what this potentially means for the security being portrayed in the relationship for this to happen.

The calling of the ML by the FP to 'place me' is importantly an imperative verb with a first-person pronoun direct object. In other words, the FP is calling the ML to do something to her. But while the FP has called for the ML to do things to her before using the EI, here she is asking that he treats her as a metaphorical object, a seal.¹⁷⁷³ In doing so, she potentially makes herself vulnerable, for the ML does not have to accept the calling that she puts on him.¹⁷⁷⁴ As Landy has observed, with the use of this imperative, 'she commands him and she is utterly dependent on him'.¹⁷⁷⁵ The imagery demands that only he can be the one that can respond, and the imperative calls him to respond, but he is the one empowered to respond in the way that he chooses.

Of course, there is also a great confidence expressed too by the EI that calls for their identities to be united. Bearing in mind the confidence of the FP throughout the Song, the expression of this imperative is not a surrender of who she is, but a taking possession of him as he takes possession of her. It comes from a place of confidence and boldness. As

¹⁷⁷¹ Landy, p. 117.

¹⁷⁷² 12.3.4; 12.3.5; Hess, pp. 237-238 observes the level of commitment that is being expressed by 8:6, being 'stronger than anything known'.

¹⁷⁷³ Previous times where a first-person direct object has been used by the FP in the contexts of EI are 1:2, 1:4, 2:6 and 8:3. In 2:5 (twice) the FP also uses an imperative with herself as the first-person direct object, but here she is addressing the DoJ.

¹⁷⁷⁴ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 210 emphasises that the FP wants the willing participation of the ML.

¹⁷⁷⁵ Landy, pp. 116-117.

Spencer observes, she 'does not ask the man ... to set *his* seal upon her, as if marking her as his own'.¹⁷⁷⁶ Instead, she is bold enough to call him to allow her to possess him.

Moreover, there is one final observation that should be made and this is that this EI is made within the context of a developed relationship.¹⁷⁷⁷ It is not at the beginning of the text, before the reader has the opportunity to observe the way that the relationship between the lovers develops. Instead, it is almost at the end of the Song, with the reader having had the opportunity to observe the sense of progression between the lovers.¹⁷⁷⁸ It is from this position of a developed relationship, and the security associated with that, that the FP issues this EI.

12.4.5 Tattoo Imagery as a Cultural Equivalent to the Seal Imagery

Noting that tattoos were ruled out under Levitical law, having a tattoo with your lover's name on would not have been a figurative image that would have connected within Israelite Culture.¹⁷⁷⁹ Thus, it is not an image that the poet would have used. However, the imagery of a tattoo with a lover's name on it, shows some similarity in terms of outcome with what is being conveyed by the seal imagery.¹⁷⁸⁰ The EI associated with the seal imagery calls for commitment and exclusivity.¹⁷⁸¹ In cultures where forms of monogamy are considered the cultural norm, a male sailor who had a tattoo made with the name of his preferred woman on it would not be able to keep his association with her a secret from other women, should they look at his body.¹⁷⁸² While the stereotypical sailor had a 'woman in every port', the act of getting a tattoo with a particular woman's name would have made it much harder to develop a relationship with any other women he might meet. His association has been made permanently visible. The woman's identity would become bound up with his in this 'permanent' action of getting a tattoo made, and the potential for exclusivity that arises from that. Nothing can quite match the distinctive seal imagery in this passage, but a tattoo perhaps provides a useful comparison.

¹⁷⁷⁶ Spencer, p. 212.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 97 observes the security that the FP has.

¹⁷⁷⁸ 11.4.4.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Leviticus 19:28.

¹⁷⁸⁰ Spencer, p. 212 correctly observes that tattoo imagery does not go as far as the seal imagery, as the seal imagery implies a deeper level of association of identity. However, as discussed in this section, the imagery works in terms of consequences of the issuing of the EI.

¹⁷⁸¹ Fredericks and Estes, p. 408; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 209; Davidson, p. 588 argue that exclusivity is portrayed in this passage on the grounds that seals are used to mark ownership, alongside the jealousy understanding of *qin'â*.

¹⁷⁸² Laurie Ellinghausen, "'A Wife or Friend at e'ery Port': The Common Sailor in Ballads of the Early British Empire", ed. by David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 50.2 (2020), 431–53 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-8219626>> emphasises the common idea of a women in every port.

12.4.6 The Erotic Imperative of Inseparability in the Context of the Progression in the Song

11.4.4 described how a sense of progression is portrayed in the relationship between the lovers in the Song and how the EI contributes towards this progression. Moreover, the EI of 8:6 also needs to be seen in the light of this sense of progression, because it further substantiates the argument. It was argued above how a unity in terms of desire is conveyed by the way EIs bookend the interruption by the FP of the ML, and her realisation in the final refrain of mutual possession that his desire is for her.¹⁷⁸³ It has also been suggested that the ML expressed an EI potentially calling for inseparability using sexual imagery in 7:2. And other language too is also used which portrays a sense of progression.¹⁷⁸⁴

It follows that reading the EI in 8:6 in the light of this progression in the Song reinforces the way that the relationship has developed to the point of calling for inseparability. The calling for inseparability makes sense within the context of a developed relationship. This use of the EI affirms the state of the portrayed developed relationship in the Song. It passionately expresses and consolidates what has already been established. And it affirms how the overwhelming power of *'ahăbâ* is the reason for her calling for inseparability.¹⁷⁸⁵ What else can the FP do but call to be inseparable and have her identity associated with him, bearing in mind the way the reader has observed the relationship develop because of *'ahăbâ*?¹⁷⁸⁶ Even the FP as a strong woman cannot overcome this passionate overwhelming force of *'ahăbâ*. In the context of the progression of the Song it is perhaps no surprise that the FP calls for inseparability here.

12.4.7 The Erotic Imperative of Inseparability and its Relationship with the Erotic Imperatives of 8:14

The final EIs of the Song (8:14), a little after our main passage of discussion, are similar in form to the EIs of simile of 2:17.¹⁷⁸⁷ In 2:17 the ML was called to *sōb* (turn) and *dēmē-lēkâ* (be like) a gazelle or young deer on the cleft mountains, potentially representing her breasts.¹⁷⁸⁸ Now in 8:14, instead of calling the ML to turn (to herself), the FP calls him to *bērah* (come quickly) to the 'mountain of spices'.¹⁷⁸⁹ *Bērah* is not a verb that has been

¹⁷⁸³ 11.4.3. The EIs are found in 7:8 and 7:11-12. The interruption takes place in 7:9. The refrain of mutual possession is in 7:10.

¹⁷⁸⁴ 7:6. See discussion in 11.3.1.

¹⁷⁸⁵ 12.3.3.

¹⁷⁸⁶ Landy, p. 119 makes a similar observation (from a different approach), that a resolution is expected at this point in the text.

¹⁷⁸⁷ 7.3.4.

¹⁷⁸⁸ 7.3.4.

¹⁷⁸⁹ *Bērah* is translated with an emphasis on urgency in NIV (come away), ESV (make haste); NRSV (make haste); Keel, p. 284 (make haste); Fredericks and Estes, p. 416 (come quickly);

previously used in the Song, and the root is classically understood as to refer to ‘secret, unobserved flight from danger, whether actual or expected’.¹⁷⁹⁰ However, there is no suggestion of any danger, so the use of this verb perhaps comes as a surprise.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind that this imagery of 2:17 has probably conveyed her calling him to turn to herself by the mountain imagery (representing her breasts), it seems likely that a similar meaning is being expressed here, that is the FP is calling the ML to ‘come quickly’ to herself.¹⁷⁹¹ Hence, *bērah* is probably used in 8:14 to express the urgency of the FP’s call.¹⁷⁹² This urgency perhaps expresses the fervency of the FP to have her desires met, potentially with more urgency than 2:17.

Furthermore, unlike 2:17, where the FP gives a time-limit ‘until the day breathes or shadows flee’, no time-limit is given here.¹⁷⁹³ Taking together the urgency and the unrestrictedness of the imperative in 8:14 compared to 2:17, this shows how the relationship between the lovers has continued to develop to this final line of the Song, bearing in mind the EI calling for inseparability in 8:6¹⁷⁹⁴. She calls him, like in 2:17, to be like a gazelle or young deer on the ‘mountain of spices’, making connections with the spices of the garden imagery and all of the pleasure found therein.¹⁷⁹⁵

12.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of this highly significant EI at this late stage in the Song in consolidating the relationship between the ML and FP. It has shown the role of the imperative in calling for inseparability through the powerful imagery that the poet uses.

Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, p. 170 (hurry); Ginsburg, p. 191 (haste).

¹⁷⁹⁰ Jerome A. Lund, ‘bārah’, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), I, 743–45 (p. 743).

¹⁷⁹¹ Murphy, p. 200; Keel, p. 285.

¹⁷⁹² Some scholars see the emphasis of *bērah* referring to both direction and urgency, i.e., that she is being called to ‘flee away’ (e.g., Spencer, p. 229). This is a common understanding of the verb in the HS (Genesis 16:6, 8; Genesis 27:43, Hosea 12:12; Genesis 31:20–22; Exodus 2:15; Exodus 14:5; Jonah 1:3 and others). However, Lund, p. 744 suggests that a unique meaning is plausible within this poetic text of the Song, and bearing in mind there is no obvious danger in this passage, this seems reasonable. Furthermore, Fredericks and Estes, p. 416 suggests that fleeing to a person is similarly expressed in 1 Samuel 22:20.

¹⁷⁹³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 417.

¹⁷⁹⁴ Davidson, p. 598 similarly suggests that 8:14 shows a greater development of relationship than 2:17.

¹⁷⁹⁵ 4:13–14; Exum, p. 262; 9.4.6.

Chapter 13: The Wisdom of the Song

13.1 Introduction

In this chapter it is argued that the three (main) adjuration passages (2:7, 3:5 and 8:4) should be seen as being examples of biblical wisdom based upon experience, being given by the FP to the DoJ.¹⁷⁹⁶ It is argued that their existence in the Song makes it a wisdom text, and as such it provides wisdom about the experience of sexual desire in people's lives. The meaning read here is the FP is telling the DoJ that they will know when it is right to express desire in a particular way.

13.2 Discussion of the Adjuration Passages

13.2.1 Context of the Three Adjuration Passages

The three adjuration passages are critically important in the Song, as they function as a refrain that mark the end of each of the first three major sections of the Song.¹⁷⁹⁷ By their situatedness in the text, as well as their content, they have been regarded by commentators over the centuries as having something significant to say to both the DoJ and to the wider reader.¹⁷⁹⁸ But what is the significance of these passages for this thesis? To begin, it is necessary to consider main interpretations of the adjuration itself.¹⁷⁹⁹

13.2.2 The Text of the Adjuration Passages

There are two main interpretative views about the meaning of the adjuration passages.¹⁸⁰⁰ Firstly, that the adjuration is a warning to the DoJ not to 'incite' or 'excite' love until the

¹⁷⁹⁶ 10.3.1 discussed the adjuration that is different from the others (5:8).

¹⁷⁹⁷ 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4. Hess, p. 81, Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 101, 115, 183 makes a similar observation. Brian P. Gault, 'An Admonition Against "Rousing Love": The Meaning of the Enigmatic Refrain in the Song of Songs', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 20.2 (2010), 161–84 (p. 162) notes the 'general importance both to the arrangement and meaning of the Song'. Similarly, Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 26 notes how the adjurations separate sections of the Song. As discussed in 2.2.3, this thesis is interested in the final form of the text. C.f. Katharine J. Dell, 'Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?', in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*; or *Perspektiven Der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. by Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 8–26 (p. 15).

¹⁷⁹⁸ Brian P. Gault, 'A "Do Not Disturb" Sign? Reexamining the Adjuration Refrain in Song of Songs', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 36.1 (2011), 93–104 (p. 94) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089211419412>> notes that the significance of the adjuration passages has been held as such over the centuries. As has been discussed previously, the DoJ act as an audience, but the reader is also the 'ultimate audience' of the Song (Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 2, 7, 134).

¹⁷⁹⁹ Gault, 'An Admonition Against "Rousing Love"', p. 163 lists eight interpretative options for the adjuration, demonstrating its complexity for scholars.

¹⁸⁰⁰ Spencer, p. 36 correctly observes that essentially the interpretative views 'boil down to two antithetical concerns'.

right time;¹⁸⁰¹ secondly, that the lovers are not to be disturbed in their lovemaking.¹⁸⁰² Here the former view is argued to be the correct reading. It makes most sense that this 'repeated message', as part of this *biblical* love poem, asserts a 'cautionary message' rather than 'a do not disturb sign', and this is supported by examining the adjuration in detail.¹⁸⁰³

The text of the first two adjuration passages (2:7, 3:5) reads *hišba 'tî 'etkem bēnôt yērûšālam bišbaot šēbā 'ôt 'ô bē 'aylôt haššāde 'im-tā 'irû wē 'im-tē 'ôrē'û 'et-hā 'ahābā 'ad šēttehpāš*, which is translated here as 'I adjure you o Daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does, do not incite or excite love until the time is right'. 11.4.5 discussed how the final adjuration has a stronger level of negation, expressed by the lack of mention of the animals and the use of *ma instead of 'im*.¹⁸⁰⁴ In all three adjuration passages, there are the following key parts that contribute towards its meaning: the hip'el and po'lel form of 'wr;¹⁸⁰⁵ the qal verb *hpš*; and the particular meaning of the feminine singular noun 'ahābā (with its definite article).

To begin with, verbs of root 'wr are used at nine points in the Song, with six of these found in the adjuration passages.¹⁸⁰⁶ The other three are found in passages that may be interpreted as 'awake' or 'arouse' in a sexual or sleep sense. In 4:16 it is used by the FP as an imperative in which the FP calls upon the wind, so that they blow upon her 'garden'.¹⁸⁰⁷ The extremely erotic context there is suggestive of its erotic meaning elsewhere. In 5:2, the FP speaks of having 'slept but her heart was awake', which is part of a passage that has an erotic level of meaning.¹⁸⁰⁸ Similarly, 8:5 refers to an erotic situation where the FP says that she 'aroused' the ML under the apple tree.¹⁸⁰⁹ Furthermore, the verb is also used in erotic contexts when it is used in the adjuration passages of 2:7 and 3:5, as discussed below.¹⁸¹⁰

¹⁸⁰¹ Scholars who argue for the right time reading include Longman, p. 115; Hess, p. 83; Walsh, p. 180; Exum, *Song of Songs* p. 118; Pope, p. 387; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 137; Bloch and Bloch, p. 152; Duguid, p. 96; Garrett, p. 152; Luter Boyd, 2:7; Provan, p. 286; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 230; Carr, p. 102.

¹⁸⁰² Gault, 'Do not disturb', p. 104 is the most recent main proponent of this interpretation; Spencer, p. 39.

¹⁸⁰³ Hess, p. 83.

¹⁸⁰⁴ 8:5. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 206; Pope, p. 661.

¹⁸⁰⁵ DCH, Vol. 6, p. 315.

¹⁸⁰⁶ 2:7 (twice in this adjuration passage), 3:5 (twice in this adjuration passage), 4:16 (imperative addressing the wind), 5:2 (qal, reference to *lēb*), 8:4 (twice in this adjuration passage), 8:5 (pi'el, reference to an event under the apple tree).

¹⁸⁰⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 180; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 157.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 193.

¹⁸⁰⁹ 12.3.1. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249; Davidson, p. 571.

¹⁸¹⁰ 13.2.3; 13.2.4.

Moving on to the hip'il and po'lel forms of the verbs, the po'lel, like the pi'el is linked with causation.¹⁸¹¹ Like the pi'el, the po'lel causes 'a state rather than an action', whereas the hip'il causes an action.¹⁸¹² Thus, having the hip'il from of 'wr followed by the po'lel form indicates that the latter should be seen as an intensification of the former.¹⁸¹³

Next, the verb of root *hps* needs to be considered. Roots of this verb have the summarised meanings of 'desire, delight (in), take pleasure (in); be willing, be pleased (to do)'¹⁸¹⁴. Thus, it has both connotations of desire and delight, and there are examples of this verb having 'sexual overtones'.¹⁸¹⁵ A sexual overtone is similarly implied here. But how can 'ahăbâ be something that can desire and delight (being the object of *hps*)?¹⁸¹⁶ And similarly, how can 'ahăbâ be something that can be caused to 'wr?

The conclusion here is that 'ahăbâ is something, like in 8:6, that is personified in these passages.¹⁸¹⁷ It is something that can 'desire' and 'delight' on its own terms. But it is also something that can be 'incited' and 'excited'. Since the FP instructs the DoJ not to 'incite' or 'excite' 'ahăbâ, it is something that is portrayed as an 'elemental power'.¹⁸¹⁸ And similarly, it is something that has a 'mind of its own'.¹⁸¹⁹ Furthermore, as a personified force with a mind of its own, it will be discussed more later how 'ahăbâ is something that has a timeliness, explaining the translation of *hps* as 'until the time is right'.¹⁸²⁰

But what is the meaning of 'ahăbâ itself in the adjuration passage? The fact that the FP refers to 'ahăbâ in them means that 'ahăbâ must be present. Each of the adjuration

¹⁸¹¹ Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, 'Polel', in *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013) observes that 'the polel corresponds in meaning to the piel. As a stem associated with the piel, the polel may express the bringing about of a state. The object of the verb's action "suffers the effect" of the action.

¹⁸¹² Heiser and Setterholm, 'Polel' (see note above). Waltke and O'Connor, p. 400 describe the causative role of the piel compared to the hifil.

¹⁸¹³ Fredericks and Estes, p. 321; Pope, p. 386; Longman, p. 114; Luter, 2:7 see the po'lel use as being emphatic, emphasising its intensification.

¹⁸¹⁴ DCH, Vol. 3, p.287.

¹⁸¹⁵ Carr, p. 102. Gen 34:19, Deut 21:14, Esther 2:14, 3:5.

¹⁸¹⁶ Hess, p. 82 similarly asks the same question.

¹⁸¹⁷ 12.4.1. Spencer, p. 38; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 118.

¹⁸¹⁸ Davidson, p. 620; Keel, pp. 30-37; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 249 says that 'in the adjuration refrain ... love is spoken of as having a will of its own'; George M. Schwab, *The Song of Songs' Cautionary Message Concerning Human Love*, Studies in Biblical Literature (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 45, 'love is conceptualized as an uncontrollable power that is best left asleep'. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 137. Duguid, p. 95 speaks of love as having 'overwhelming power'. Luter, 2:7.

¹⁸¹⁹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p 249; Spencer, p. 38; Luter Boyd, 2:7.

¹⁸²⁰ Translations with this meaning are made by Pope, p. 387; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 137; Bloch and Bloch, p. 17.

passages will now be (re)considered contextually to discuss its meaning, which, it is argued, is desire. The discussion will confirm how 'ahăbâ is this overwhelming personified force.

13.2.3 Contextual Use of the First Adjuration Passage

As the context of the first adjuration passage has not been previously been discussed, unlike 3:5 and 8:4, it will be briefly discussed here.¹⁸²¹ The primary context (2:5) of this first adjuration passage is the FP being *hōlat* 'ahăbâ (faint with love). The previous verse describes how the ML brought the FP to *bēt hayyāyin* (the wine house), which can be understood metaphorically as a place where her kisses being like wine (1:2) can be enjoyed.¹⁸²² In that place the ML gives her the *diglō* (similarly to Akkadian *diglu* for look/intention) of 'ahăbâ, the look of desire towards her.¹⁸²³

This experience is overwhelming for the FP, since she calls upon the DoJ to sustain and refresh her (2:5), her reason being that she is faint with love.¹⁸²⁴ However, it is not necessarily the case the ML is present at the point of the imperatives, for why should the address the DoJ to sustain her, and not him?¹⁸²⁵ His absence seems to provide the reason for her erotic yearning, since if her yearning was being satisfied, she would not be described as being *hōlat* 'ahăbâ.¹⁸²⁶ This is potentially affirmed by an optative reading of the next line (2:6), wishing that his left hand were under her head and that his right hand embraced her.¹⁸²⁷

¹⁸²¹ 2:7.

¹⁸²² Duguid, p. 94; Hess, p. 79; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 25.

¹⁸²³ The Akkadian *diglu* includes meanings of 'look' and 'intention'. Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary*, rev edn (New York, NY: KTAV, 1974), pp. 203-204; Fredericks and Estes, p. 320; Garrett, p. 150 observe the use of the Akkadian. An alternative reading is that *degel* is used in the HS to refer to military standards (DCH, Vol. 2, p. 414). However, Pope, p. 375 notes that such a reading is unclear.

¹⁸²⁴ The DoJ are likely to be being addressed here, because the imperative verbs *sammēkûnî* (sustain me) and *rappēdûnî* (refresh me) are masculine plural imperatives. Exum, p. 116 is correct to note that the DoJ are the audience of the Song' and so are being addressed here. Spencer, p. 35 makes the same argument. Duguid, p. 93; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 114 similarly read the DoJ as being addressed here. Elsewhere, masculine plural volitionals are used in 1:6, 2:15, 5:1 (3 times) and 6:13. Out of these 1:6 and 2:15 are the FP addressing the DoJ. 5:1 and 6:13 are the DoJ addressing the FP

Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 136; Hess, p. 79; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 114 observe the causative link as the reason for her giving the imperatives.

¹⁸²⁵ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone, p. 229.

¹⁸²⁶ Duguid, p. 94. Fox, p. 109 notes that lovesickness in the Egyptian love poems is always centred around the absence of a lover.

¹⁸²⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 117.

Thus, the faintness of the FP, because of her overwhelming experience of desire provides a reason for the adjuration.¹⁸²⁸ Thus she warns the DoJ from her experience about the overwhelming power of 'ahăbâ'.¹⁸²⁹ The erotic context and the way that 'ahăbâ has been used at other points of the Song so far (1:4) is indicative that it refers to 'erotic desire' in this passage.¹⁸³⁰ It is something that can be incited and excited, including by sexual activity, something which she has experienced.¹⁸³¹ And desire is something in her experience can be utterly overwhelming. Thus, her adjuration warns them of desire's power.¹⁸³² It is the personified 'elemental power' that can have *this* effect.¹⁸³³

13.2.4 Contextual Use of the Second Adjuration Passage

The second adjuration passage comes at the end of the first night-time passage that has previously been discussed.¹⁸³⁴ The adjuration comes after having found her lover having sought him in the city streets, and then upon finding him, declaring that she 'would not let him go until' she had brought him her mother's house and the chamber 'associated with intimacies'.¹⁸³⁵ Yet again, encountering the adjuration as a first-time reader after this erotic passage links 'ahăbâ as an overwhelming personified force, with what comes immediately before. The adjuration portrays the FP presenting a 'lesson which ... [she]... derives from her experience'.¹⁸³⁶ And that experience is of 'ahăbâ.

As discussed previously, in the passage the FP experiences the obstacle of her lover's absence and is driven by the experience of her desire into the city streets to find him.¹⁸³⁷

The way that desire is portrayed in this passage indicates that reading 'ahăbâ as the experience of sexual desire makes contextual sense of its meaning in this adjuration passage.¹⁸³⁸ It is something portrayed as an overwhelming personified force that leads to the lover stopping at nothing to overcome the distance between them. Longman comments that 'what woman would not want to feel her passion and find its satisfaction?

¹⁸²⁸ Duguid, p. 95.

¹⁸²⁹ Walsh, p. 163 notes that it is through her experience that she makes this adjuration.

¹⁸³⁰ Bloch and Bloch, p. 152 read as erotic arousal. Walsh, p. 163.

¹⁸³¹ Walsh, p. 182 notes the sexual activity that she has experienced in 2:2-3; Davidson, p. 614 notes that the 'awakening' is undoubtedly sexual arousal'.

¹⁸³² Duguid, p. 95.

¹⁸³³ Davidson, p. 620.

¹⁸³⁴ 3:1-5; 8.4.1.

¹⁸³⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 131; Fredericks and Estes, p. 335.

¹⁸³⁶ Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 147. Walsh, p. 163 similarly observes the 'eyewitness account in undergoing desire'.

¹⁸³⁷ 8.4.1.

¹⁸³⁸ Fredericks and Estes, p. 338 note that sexual desire is being demonstrated in this passage and link it with the adjuration. Longman, *NICOT*, p. 131 describes what is portrayed as passion. Walsh, p. 183 speaks of 'the anticipation of sexual pleasure' for this passage.

Yet the woman wisely tells the others not to rush into love, but rather to wait for the right moment ... the moment indeed she has apparently found'.¹⁸³⁹

13.2.5 Contextual Use of the Final Adjuration Passage

The final adjuration passage (8:4) is discussed above and does not need much further discussion here, except to say briefly that the argument above was that this final, stronger, adjuration occurred in the context of the passage expressing unity in terms of desire, and the final refrain of mutual possession (7:10).¹⁸⁴⁰ The discussion highlighted how this final adjuration should be seen in the context of the developed sense of relationship at this stage in the Song, and that the implication was that inciting or exciting 'ahăbâ can lead to experiencing its overwhelming nature, and has the potential to lead to inseparability from another.

13.3 Interpretation of the Adjuration Passages

13.3.1 Timeliness

The three contextual uses of the adjuration all portray 'ahăbâ as being an overwhelming personified power. But what is the significance of the FP's use of it in the interpretation of the Song as a whole?

The use of the verb *hps* in the passages portrays the idea that this overwhelming power can desire/delight, and thus has a mind of its own. Hence, the literal meaning of the adjuration is not to incite or excite 'ahăbâ until it desires/delights. Numerous scholars recognise the implication that the FP is making of the importance of timeliness in inciting or exciting 'ahăbâ.¹⁸⁴¹ There is very good justification for the translation used here, that 'ahăbâ should be not incited or excited 'until the time is right'.¹⁸⁴² Some scholars recognise this as meaning that there is a timeliness to sexual practice (for example, some scholars arguing for sexual intercourse to be reserved strictly for marriage).¹⁸⁴³ The idea of timeliness of sexual practice is implied by the calling not to incite or excite 'ahăbâ. But as Exum correctly comments, there is more to it than only recognising that 'ahăbâ 'should not be aroused prematurely'.¹⁸⁴⁴ That does not satisfactorily deal with 'ahăbâ as being something that has a mind of its own.

¹⁸³⁹ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 131.

¹⁸⁴⁰ 11.4.5.

¹⁸⁴¹ Pope, p. 387; Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p. 137; Bloch and Bloch, p. 17; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 115; Hess, p. 83; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴² Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴³ Fredericks and Estes, pp. 324; Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 102; Garrett, p. 153.

¹⁸⁴⁴ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 118

As a personified force that has a mind of its own, 'ahăbâ does not need to be incited or excited, for it (presumably) can exist independently, for how else could it desire/delight at all? Here Exum makes an important observation about the portrayal of 'ahăbâ, that as something overwhelmingly powerful, one 'does not need to rouse love, because when it pleases love to be roused, you will know it'.¹⁸⁴⁵ Thus, the FP is telling the DoJ that they will potentially recognise 'ahăbâ for themselves, without them having to force it in some way. It is something that happens.¹⁸⁴⁶ It is something that exists and they are to be aware of.

Furthermore, a sense of timeliness is not only called for by the FP from the DoJ in the adjuration passages, but is a key theme of the Song as a whole.¹⁸⁴⁷ A strong example of this timeliness for the lovers to be intimate is the springtime imagery by which the ML calls the FP by Els to make herself accessible to him, the reason being that the season was right.¹⁸⁴⁸ Hence, timeliness, and following desire at the right time, are both part of the calling of the FP to the DoJ in the adjuration passages, as well as the wider imagery of the Song. It is something of the utmost importance.

13.3.2 The Adjuration Passages Promoting Restraint and Caution, and Promoting Freedom when the Time is Right

What does timeliness look like in terms of the adjuration of the Song? This thesis has already discussed how the Song portrays the development of sexual desire in more developed and explicit ways later in the Song than earlier in the Song, as demonstrated through the use of the EI.¹⁸⁴⁹ Thus, the use of the first adjuration, particularly in response to the love-sickness caused by the absence of the ML, shows how some restraint is given by the FP in the fulfilment of her desires.¹⁸⁵⁰ However, by the time the second adjuration is given by the FP, the text implies that the FP is less restrained in her approach, going out into the city streets in search of him, and then upon finding him, taking him to her mother's house.¹⁸⁵¹ Finally, the last adjuration passage follows the passage of deeply sexual imagery portraying a unity in terms of desire, by which point the FP is giving a stream of Els (7:8a (climb), 7:8b (grasp), 7:8c (let ... be), 7:11a (come), 7:11b (let us go), 7:11c (let us spend the night), 7:12a (let us go out), 7:12b (let us see)) and which is much less

¹⁸⁴⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴⁷ Munro, pp. 117, 119. 7.3.1.

¹⁸⁴⁸ 2:8-17. Munro, pp. 117, 119. 7.3.1.

¹⁸⁴⁹ 11.4.4.

¹⁸⁵⁰ This is perhaps reflected in the absence of the ML (13.2.3).

¹⁸⁵¹ Walsh, p. 183 observes that upon finding her lover, 'presumably ... the anticipation of sexual pleasure would be at its most intense'.

restrained overall.¹⁸⁵² Seen alongside the more general development of the relationship of the lovers, with the earlier imagery (e.g. 2:8-17) showing a greater level of inaccessibility than later in the Song (e.g. 7:1-8:4), the idea of timeliness in terms of restraint is an important reading of the adjuration passage.¹⁸⁵³

However, the discussion above shows that there is another aspect to the meaning of timeliness to the adjuration and this is that when the time is right (when desire is excited), it is not appropriate to 'dabble half-heartedly', but to seek the fulfilment of desire with her lover.¹⁸⁵⁴ Restraint and freedom are two sides of the same coin of timeliness. The FP verbalises that in terms of the adjuration, but also demonstrates this in the way that her relationship is portrayed.

13.3.3 The Significance of the Divine Name and the Use of Language of a Solemn Promise

The discussion has explored what the FP is demanding of the DoJ by the adjuration passage. But the importance given to what she is saying also needs to be discussed, and she establishes this in two ways. Firstly, adjurations are themselves *solemn* promises, and secondly, she calls them to the adjuration using a version of the divine name.

Firstly, Cartledge states that 'in OT life, swearing had ... everything to do with the assurance that one would faithfully keep his or her word'.¹⁸⁵⁵ By adjuring the DoJ, the FP is using a legal formula, effectively calling the DoJ to make an oath to her. There would usually be a 'witnessing and enforcing authority behind the oath' (the gazelles or wild does) and a 'specific responsibility being demanded on the oath-taker', in this case the DoJ.¹⁸⁵⁶ Importantly, this is not just advice giving on the part of the FP.¹⁸⁵⁷ The language of adjuration puts an expectation that her words will be heeded.¹⁸⁵⁸ By using that language, she does so in the HS alongside patriarchs, leaders and kings, thus using the language of authority.¹⁸⁵⁹ Her use language of adjuration calls the DoJ to listen.

Secondly, the FP adjures the DoJ by a 'veiled form' of the divine name.¹⁸⁶⁰ In 2:7 and 3:5 the oath is bound 'by the gazelles or the wild does'. Many commentators observe the

¹⁸⁵² 11.4.3.

¹⁸⁵³ Davidson, p. 617; Hess, p. 107 note the restraint aspect of the adjuration.

¹⁸⁵⁴ Walsh, p. 181

¹⁸⁵⁵ T. W. Cartledge, 'šāba', in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. by Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), iv, 32–34 (p. 32).

¹⁸⁵⁶ Spencer, p. 37; Cartledge, p. 32.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Walsh, p. 180.

¹⁸⁵⁸ Walsh, p. 180.

¹⁸⁵⁹ Walsh, p. 181. C.f. Genesis 24:37; Joshua 6:26; 2 Kings 11:4.

¹⁸⁶⁰ Davidson, 622.

similarity between this phrase and names for God that are used in the HS, i.e., *b'ēlōhē šēbā'ôt* (Elohe Shabaoth) and *bē'ēl šadday* (El Shaddai).¹⁸⁶¹ Making an oath by the divine name was usual practice.¹⁸⁶² The usual form of an oath in the HS would be 'I adjure you by ... [divine name]¹⁸⁶³'. Thus, by adjuring the DoJ by a form of the divine name, the similarity with other oaths is being reiterated and the importance of what she is calling them to do is being reinforced. Some scholars argue that the fact that the divine name is veiled means that there is no particular significance to it being there.¹⁸⁶⁴ But seen in the context of the HS as a whole, a veiled reference to the divine name should not be played down. As LaCocque observes,

No one in the Israelite audience of the poem could have missed such transparent allusions. The formulation could not be construed as a slip of the tongue or a mere poetic substitute for the customary religious content of an oath; besides the occasion was neither casual or perfunctory.¹⁸⁶⁵

By using the same oath formula that is used in much of the rest of the HS, the poet is surely seeking to 'allude intertextually to the divine presence behind the Song'.¹⁸⁶⁶ The reason for the veiling might be to do with preventing perceptions of the divinisation of sex.¹⁸⁶⁷ But it might be that the veiling of the divine name was because of some 'special sensitivities' of using the divine name, because of the regard given to it.¹⁸⁶⁸ Either way, the veiling of the divine name does not mean that there is any 'secularisation' of the text.¹⁸⁶⁹ The use of the divine name reinforces the importance of the adjuration for the DoJ.¹⁸⁷⁰ It is something that the FP wants them to listen to and take note of.

13.3.4 The Adjurations as Wisdom and the Female Protagonist as a Teacher of Wisdom

This chapter has discussed the meaning of the adjuration passages, and the importance that the FP places upon the DoJ to heed her words. The FP calls them to a solemn promise, because she realises the overwhelming power of *'ahābā* to have both a positive and negative affect, and this is demonstrated by the experiences of the *'ahābā* which,

¹⁸⁶¹ Gordis, p. 28; Davidson, p. 622; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 152; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 116; Duguid, p. 96; Fredericks and Estes, p. 321; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 119, LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, pp. 62-63;

¹⁸⁶² Deuteronomy 6:13. Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 101; Davidson, p. 622.

¹⁸⁶³ Davidson, p. 622.

¹⁸⁶⁴ Bloch and Bloch, p. 152 suggest that this is merely 'an artful remaking of conventional language'.

¹⁸⁶⁵ LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote*, pp. 63-63; Luter, 2:7.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Davidson, p. 622.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Davidson, p. 622.

¹⁸⁶⁸ Hess, p. 82.

¹⁸⁶⁹ Davidson, p. 622.

¹⁸⁷⁰ Some scholars see the adjuration by these animals as being a playful reading (see Spencer, p. 38; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 115). Playful it perhaps might be, but this does not undermine the importance of what she is saying by the use of the veiled name of God.

brings enjoyment, pleasure and intimacy with her lover, but also pain at a sense of absence, the judgement of others, and violence at the hands of others. Thus, the FP offers her experiences in the Song to the audience (the DoJ, as well as the reader), but in doing so, she gives strong instruction to the DoJ not to incite or excite love. By making these adjurations, the FP is presenting her wisdom to the DoJ. Davidson rightly observes that these adjurations (and 8:6-7) are great 'wisdom sayings about love'.¹⁸⁷¹ By uttering them, the FP performs the role of a teacher of wisdom (both to the DoJ and to the reader).

Why should the FP conveying her experiences of 'ahăbâ to the DoJ be seen as teacher of wisdom? Brueggemann writes that 'the pragmatism of the wisdom teacher is relentlessly ethical in its reflection concerned with right and wrong, righteousness and wickedness. This is not to say the teaching is moralistic. It is too worldly wise to fall into moralism'.¹⁸⁷² Here Brueggemann makes an observation which applies to the FP by her use of the adjuration passages. The Song is a text which celebrates sexuality, portraying it as part of God's good creation.¹⁸⁷³ It is 'a celebration of all things of human life'.¹⁸⁷⁴ And yet the FP presents these strongly-worded adjurations (strong to the extent of her using the veiled of the name of God), implying that real care must be taken in the inciting and exciting of 'ahabâ'. By these adjurations, the FP is providing commentary on the time appropriateness (and dangers) of 'ahăbâ and in doing so is presenting teaching 'concerned with right and wrong', which is 'too worldly wise to fall into moralism'.¹⁸⁷⁵ Thus, by Brueggemann's definition the FP seems to be teaching wisdom from her experience of 'ahăbâ. Such a view that by the adjuration passages the FP is seeking to teach the DoJ is also observed by other scholars.¹⁸⁷⁶

Furthermore, the adjuration passages are not the only point in the text where the FP is portrayed as potentially communicating wisdom. In the reason that she gives for the EI calling for mutual inseparability (8:6), the FP provides more wisdom commentary on her experience.¹⁸⁷⁷ 12.4.1 mentioned that, out of its context, 8:6-7 is similar to what is found in the book of Proverbs, with the language of proverbs being 'at the heart of wisdom'.¹⁸⁷⁸

¹⁸⁷¹ Davidson, p. 573. Eric Orlund, 'The Wisdom of the Song of Songs: A Pastoral Guide for Preaching and Teaching', *Themelios*, 45.3 (2020), 491–514 (p. 496) calls the adjurations 'a major element of the wisdom of the Song of Songs'.

¹⁸⁷² Brueggemann, p. 256.

¹⁸⁷³ Davidson, p. 607; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 70; Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. xi; Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁷⁴ Walsh, p. 191.

¹⁸⁷⁵ Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace*, p. 256.

¹⁸⁷⁶ Munro, p. 147; Allender and Longman, p. 22; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 115; Sparks, p. 278.

¹⁸⁷⁷ 8:6-7; Davidson, p. 573.

¹⁸⁷⁸ Quotation is from Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom' and Its Influence*, p. 19. See discussion in Mark Sneed, 'Is the "Wisdom Tradition" a Tradition?', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 73.1

Exum argues that it 'would not be out of place' there.¹⁸⁷⁹ By presenting her experience, the FP is providing wisdom commentary. Thus, yet again, while not the main intention of the discourse of 8:6-7, the FP is verbalising wisdom about her experience of 'ahăbâ, and as such, she is portrayed as a character who teaches wisdom.

13.3.5 The Female Protagonist as a Wise Woman

The discussion about wisdom is not to say that the FP should be seen as the character of 'woman wisdom', being 'breathe of the power of God, and a pure-emanation of the glory of the Almighty'.¹⁸⁸⁰ Neither it is to say that she always behaves in a way that some might imagine a wise woman might behave, as some of her behaviour might make her sound more similar to 'woman folly' than 'woman wisdom'. For example, the watchmen see her as a prostitute, perhaps because they see similarity in her behaviour with woman folly in Proverbs 7:6-27.¹⁸⁸¹ Whereas woman folly goes out into the streets at night calling for young men to pull down to Sheol, Woman wisdom goes out into the streets during the day to invite men into her 'life-giving embrace'.¹⁸⁸² The similarity to the former in this passage, instead of the latter, might for some raise concerns about the virtuousness of the FP.¹⁸⁸³ However, the behaviour of this strong FP raises a third possibility, that simply because she does not always follow cultural convention, it does not mean that her behaviour should be considered that of woman folly.¹⁸⁸⁴ Spencer asks these questions:

Why must this, or any other woman be bound by the binary badges of devious whore or dutiful wife? Why can't a 'good' woman move freely about the city, night and day, seeking her unmarried lover ...? Must she automatically be suspected of being a man-deceiver and destroyer, a home-wrecker and societal menace?¹⁸⁸⁵

(2011), 50–71 (p. 65). The following scholars discuss the discourse in 8:6 as wisdom: Exum, *Unity, Date, Authorship and Wisdom in the Song of Songs*, p. 12; Exum, *The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs*, pp. 2-13; Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*. 49; Sadgrove, pp. 245-8.

¹⁸⁷⁹ Exum, *The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁸⁰ Wisdom 7:25. Barbara E. Reid, 'Editor's Introduction to Wisdom Commentary: "She Is a Breath of the Power of God" (Wis 7:25)', in *Song of Songs*, by F. Scott Spencer, ed. by Laureess Wilkins Lawrence, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), xxv, xix–xxxvii (p. xx-xxi). One allegorical approach to reading the Song has seen a portrayal of the love between Solomon and Wisdom, which has its origins in Wisdom 8:2. See Pope, pp. 91, 110, Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁸¹ 8.5.2. Spencer, p. 64; Duguid, 7:9-10; Garrett, p. 174.

¹⁸⁸² C.f. Proverbs 8:17. Spencer, p. 64; Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*, p. 52. Proverbs 31:10-31 is also commonly interpreted as being Woman Wisdom. See Alice Ogden Bellis, *Proverbs*, ed. by Sarah Tanzer, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), xxiii (p. 260).

¹⁸⁸³ The strangeness of her behaviour is discussed in 8.5.2.

¹⁸⁸⁴ Spencer, p. 66. Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and its Influence*, p. 44 observes that 'one might regard the whole atmosphere of the Song as rather different from the more black and white moralistic picture of the alternative paths of Wisdom and Folly'.

¹⁸⁸⁵ Spencer, p. 66.

The FP is wise in verbalising (in the adjuration passages) her experience of 'ahăbâ as being an overwhelming power. She demonstrates in the night-time passages how it is so overwhelming that it can lead to unconventional behaviour, to the extent that she is prepared to put herself at risk for the sake of her lover.¹⁸⁸⁶ This does not make her a fool, but an impassioned woman in a patriarchal culture. This portrayal of the FP as offering wisdom, and yet sometimes behaving unconventionally, challenges the reader's perception of what might be considered wise. In terms of the wisdom of the adjuration, the time is right for her to pursue her lover.

Furthermore, this is not to say that the FP wholly rejects social conventions in her relationship with her lover. As discussed in other chapters, she is aware of cultural norms that, because of her unmarried status, is not able to cross in her culture. A prime example would be her wish to kiss her lover outside publicly, which 8:1 indicates she is not able to do for fear of being despised.¹⁸⁸⁷ However patriarchally restrictive this culture may be, the FP treads a different path of wisdom, recognising both her overpowering desire for her lover, and the cultural limitations that prevent her being able to fulfil her 'ahăbâ in every way that she would wish. In this respect, the FP is a wise woman, one who reflects wisely upon her experience.

13.3.6 The Song of Songs as a 'Wisdom' Text

Taking on board the adjuration passages as presenting a form of wisdom to the DoJ (and the reader), and considering the FP as a form of wise woman, this last interpretation section will consider the ways in which the Song should be seen as a 'wisdom' text more generally, and its implications for this thesis, while noting its genre is love poetry.¹⁸⁸⁸

There is one further aspect that will be considered. The Song has a superscription that relates it to Solomon.¹⁸⁸⁹ The linking of the text with his name links it with the other texts (namely Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) in the HS that bear his name.¹⁸⁹⁰ While the Song is different from the other two in terms of form, as it does not contain a large number of proverbs, its Solomonic association means that some scholars sensibly link it with the continuum of wisdom literature.¹⁸⁹¹ As Sparks asserts, 'if the Song of Songs is not a

¹⁸⁸⁶ Hess, p. 105; Luter, 3:4. Bergant, *The Song of Songs*, p. 35 says that 'overcome with longing, this woman defies social propriety and ignores possible societal denunciation. In her single-mindedness she throws off all social restraint as she seeks the one whom her soul loves'.

¹⁸⁸⁷ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 181; Keel, p. 261; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 248.

¹⁸⁸⁸ Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom' and Its Influence*, p. 58.

¹⁸⁸⁹ 1:1; 2.3.1.

¹⁸⁹⁰ Sparks, p. 284 discusses the connection with Solomon's name.

¹⁸⁹¹ Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom' and Its Influence*, pp. 32-42 discusses the contemporary debate about what constitutes these other books as wisdom texts and whether

wisdom book, then it is the only text associated with Solomon's name that is not such a composition'.¹⁸⁹²

This association of the Solomonic corpus with the expression of wisdom is also supported by considering their general similarity, while noting difference in form and genre, between the three texts.¹⁸⁹³ Goldingay comments on the three books linked with Solomon, that

the basis of their teaching is the way that life works. They look at life and reflect on experience and encourage people to live on the basis of how life works. They don't just leave people to live on the basis of their own experience; they assume that we can learn from other people's experience, and they seek to pass on the reflection of wise men and wise women that arises from that experience. They assume we learn from other people ... We don't have to keep reinventing the wheel.¹⁸⁹⁴

Here Goldingay is correct to link the Solomonic corpus with texts that portray human experience, as indeed is expressed between the lovers in the Song, and specifically by the FP in the adjuration passages.¹⁸⁹⁵ It is this link of experience that constitutes seeing the text as contributing to wisdom. Because of its Solomonic link, and its portrayal of experience, it is entirely plausible that the Song was used as a tool of instruction in some way (though this is not directly provable from the text itself).¹⁸⁹⁶ The Song's reflection on 'ahābā as being a part of human experience means that, while its main genre is love poetry, it provides wisdom because of its subject matter. Such a reading, seeing the Song as providing wisdom gives it a teaching purpose in the Canon, and means that reader as audience is called to take note.¹⁸⁹⁷

wisdom is a nineteenth century construct. She highlights the Solomonic link as being a key characteristic that constitutes a 'wisdom' text. For examples of scholars who make the link of Solomonic association, see Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 4; Sparks, p. 284; Fredericks and Estes, p. 273. Examples of scholars who have associated the Song with wisdom, include Carr, *Song of Solomon*, p. 16; Longman, *NICOT*, p. 15; Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), XIII, p. 104.

¹⁸⁹² Sparks, p. 284.

¹⁸⁹³ Dell, *Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁹⁴ Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹⁵ Longman, *NICOT*, p. 49 describes wisdom as being 'the application of God's will to the nitty-gritty of life'. Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*, p. 51 observes that 'Wisdom covers all aspects of human experience, including sexual love'.

¹⁸⁹⁶ Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of "Wisdom" and Its Influence*, p. 50 suggests that the Song as part of the Solomonic corpus was used to 'train young men in the world'. For discussion of the instructional use of the Song, see also Munro, p. 147; Sparks, p. 248.

¹⁸⁹⁷ Ortlund, p. 495 comments that "it is natural to expect that the Song, as a piece of OT wisdom, instructs its readers in some way".

Part 3: Implications of the Song in the Contemporary Horizon (Application)

Chapter 14: What are the Parameters that Have Emerged for a Theology of Dating from this Study?

14.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discussed sex and relationship scripts for EAs in the contemporary horizon and highlighted how Christians are informed and influenced by contemporary culture. It noted too the difference between church teaching and the sexual behaviour of many Christian EAs. This chapter seeks to respond to this in light of the extensive study of the Song. It brings this study into the contemporary horizon by asking the question of what might the lovers think about contemporary sex and relationships scripts if they lived in the contemporary world.¹⁸⁹⁸ It asks this from the perspective of what 'values' the lovers might affirm from the text, taking Brueggemann's lead on having a reflective, not moralistic approach, starting from a positive perspective of sexuality and about the benefits gained from experience of premarital relationships.¹⁸⁹⁹ These 'values' are seen in the light of emerging adulthood as a developmental period of experimentation.¹⁹⁰⁰ They may be used as parameters from which a more general Theology of Dating could be further developed. And it is these 'values' based upon this reading of the Song, and the implications they have for relationship and sexual scripts, that are this thesis' primary contribution to knowledge. They seek to provide a different perspective from the largely restrictive values that have dominated Christianity.

14.2 Some Values of the Lovers in the Song

This section briefly synthesises the extensive commentary discussion of Part 2 to highlight the key observations of this reading of the Song for this thesis. In doing so it begins to ask the creative question as to what the lovers of the Song would think and do if they lived in the contemporary cultural world and so had to think like EAs who have little choice but to make sense of sex and relationships through the scripts that are available to them. What would they approve of? What would they like? And so, what might their values in terms of sexual desire and activity be?

¹⁸⁹⁸ Such a reading notes that beliefs about sexuality amongst the EA age group continue to change and develop, and have changed during the writing of this thesis. For example, IPSOS MORI, *Gen Z: Beyond Binary: Progressive/Traditional* notes that two thirds of Generation Z 'think of themselves as 'exclusively heterosexual'.

¹⁸⁹⁹ 2.2.1; 1.1.2; 3.5.5. Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace*, p. 256 notes that 'the pragmatism of the wisdom teacher ... is too worldly wise to fall into moralism'. He notes (p. 248) instead the concepts of 'limit' and 'possibility', being central to wisdom, as well as the wisdom teaching being 'reflective' (p. 250).

¹⁹⁰⁰ Olmstead and Anders, *Sexuality in Emerging Adulthood: A Primer on Theory*, p. 14.

Before proceeding, though, with examining some values of the lovers in the Song, one potential point for discussion is whether this thesis should be seen as presenting some values towards an EA ‘Theology of Dating’, or whether what is being proposed might be better described as being some values towards an EA ‘Ethics of Dating’. Part of what originally inspired this thesis was Miller and Clarke’s book, *Dating — Philosophy for Everyone*.¹⁹⁰¹ This book raises all sorts of philosophical questions around the subject matter of dating. But if it possible to think about dating ‘philosophically’ in a broad academic sense, then it is deemed reasonably possible to think about dating ‘theologically’ in a broad academic sense. Ford describes Theology in its ‘broadest’ sense as ‘thinking about questions raised by and about the religions’.¹⁹⁰² Thus, the questions as to how to Christians might have relationships meets this broad description. But to broadly use the description ‘Theology’ means seeking answers to these questions through the Sources of Theology (Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience), and in particular, in this thesis, with an emphasis on the reading of Scripture as a basis.¹⁹⁰³ It is this emphasis on the use of Scripture that is used to make some distinction between Philosophy and Theology.¹⁹⁰⁴ And this is why what follows is broadly described as providing parameters for a ‘Theology of Dating’.

However, using the term ‘Theology of Dating’ from a more specifically academic use of the definition perhaps suggests that what is being argued for is found in the biblical testimonies of the very character of God.¹⁹⁰⁵ Theology in its specific sense refers to the matter of how to speak of God.¹⁹⁰⁶ But the Song’s portrayal of God is debated and is not particularly extensive. The discussion in 12.3.4 noted Song 8:6’s potential portrayal of the FP recognising that Yahweh is in some way behind her experience of ‘*ahăbâ* for the ML.

¹⁹⁰¹ *Dating -- Philosophy for Everyone: Flirting with Big Ideas*, ed. by Kristie Miller and Marlene Clark (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁹⁰² David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, 9, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁹⁰³ McGrath, p. 181.

¹⁹⁰⁴ Neatly separating theology and philosophy is a complex discussion and beyond what can be discussed here.

D. F. Wright, ‘Theology’, in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historic and Systematic*, ed. by Martin Davie and others (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), pp. 903-905 (p. 903) notes that the development of the discipline of Theology in contrast to Philosophy was associated with the former relating to faith, the latter related to Reason. While this oversimplifies the discussion, the use of Scripture as a source of Theology is one of the reasons why this work is described in this way.

¹⁹⁰⁵ Richard Bondi, ‘Notes on the Theology of Marriage’, *Pastoral Psychology*, 25.4 (1977), 294–304 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01761155>>, p. 298-302 discusses various ‘Types of Theology of Marriage’, which include biblical imagery, such as ‘spouses loving each other as Christ loves the Church’ (Ephesians 5:22-23). This is an example of how the language ‘theology of’ often has models based upon the character of God in some way.

¹⁹⁰⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘Theological Method’, in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historic and Systematic*, ed. by Martin Davie and others (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), pp. 901–3 (p. 901).

Furthermore, it is argued in this thesis that the adjuration passages include a 'veiled form' of the divine name, as a way of reinforcing the importance of the adjurations.¹⁹⁰⁷

Together, these parts of the text potentially display some aspects of the character of God, but as the text does not put the testimony of the character of God as a central focus, it would be too much to argue that the character of God is the source of a theology here, and this is not what this thesis has done.

Instead, it may be better to describe this thesis as presenting some parameters for an 'Ethics of Dating' based upon its reading of the Song. Here ethics is understood as 'a disciplined reflection on that dimension of human life denoted moral'.¹⁹⁰⁸ And by basing its reflection upon the text of the Song, and considering its application to life for members of the contemporary Christian community, in this respect the work might be considered *Christian Ethics*, even though not in a classical sense.¹⁹⁰⁹ However, to see this as Christian ethics also means needing to frame the living out of life before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the context of the Church as Christian community.

However, while in practice what is being presented are some parameters for an 'Ethics of Dating', the looser description 'Theology of Dating' has been preserved here. This is because of Ford's description of 'Theology as Wisdom'.¹⁹¹⁰ Ford describes wisdom as about

the good shaping of understanding and of life in the midst of ... multiple overwhelmings ... Wisdom is not just concerned about more information and knowledge but also how they relate to other dimensions of reality, and above all how they can serve the sort of comprehensive flourishing ... described as salvation.¹⁹¹¹

One of these 'overwhelmings' that Christianity has traditionally grappled with is sexual desire, and this thesis seeks to present parameters in the search for wisdom in this grappling from its reading of the Song.¹⁹¹² What is proposed should be seen in the light of that wish for the wisdom of human flourishing as part of the Christian life lived before God, and lived in the light of the Greatest Commandment.¹⁹¹³ In this respect, while what is being proposed might be better considered to be some parameters for an 'Ethics of

¹⁹⁰⁷ 13.3.3

¹⁹⁰⁸ Allen Verhey, 'Ethics', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. by Kevin Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 196–200 (p. 196).

¹⁹⁰⁹ J. P. Chaplin, 'Ethics', in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. by Martin Davie and others, 2nd edn (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), pp. 300–304 (p. 300).

¹⁹¹⁰ Ford, p. 165.

¹⁹¹¹ Ford, pp. 165–166.

¹⁹¹² Ford, p. 9.

¹⁹¹³ Ind, pp. 93–154; Freitas and King, p. 176.

Dating', describing it as a 'Theology of Dating' is valid by Ford's understanding of 'Theology as wisdom', for 'God is wise, and invites people into seeking wisdom and living wisely'.¹⁹¹⁴

14.2.1 Desire for Sexual Pleasure and Physical Attraction Provides a Potential Reason for Action

Central to the discourse of the lovers is the role of how desire (highlighted by the EI) provides a reason for the lovers to call each other to respond.¹⁹¹⁵ Similarly the lovers use the EI as a means of expressing volition to experience sexual pleasure (of one sort or another) from the other.¹⁹¹⁶ Throughout the commentary it has been shown how the lovers demonstrate how attraction and desire can be responded to, and the consequences that it can have.

As the Song joyfully celebrates desire, in the contemporary horizon the lovers would be likely to see desire and attraction, and responding to it, as a reasonable part of relationship development.¹⁹¹⁷ One would also imagine that a suitable relationship script would have scope for sexual desire and activity, noting that these psychologically play a role in relationship maintenance and development in both short term and long term mating strategies.¹⁹¹⁸ Physical and sexual attraction to another is part of the various premarital sex and relationships scripts considered.¹⁹¹⁹ And responding to this can take many forms depending on which script is followed by participants. This is interestingly demonstrated by the use of the app Tinder, in which users swipe right on seeing a profile picture of someone to express their wish to make a 'match', and start chatting, thus it puts a high emphasis on physical attractiveness.¹⁹²⁰ Tinder has got a reputation for being an app used for casual sex, and research suggests that this is certainly a use of the app, but importantly the app is also used successfully as a way of meeting romantic relationship partners.¹⁹²¹ Both of these different types of script on Tinder start from the perspective of physical attraction.¹⁹²²

¹⁹¹⁴ Ford, p. 11.

¹⁹¹⁵ E.g., 1:2 (6.4.1); 2:10-14 (7.3.1); 8:6 (12.3.3).

¹⁹¹⁶ E.g., 1:2 (6.4.1); 4:10 (9.4.1); 7:2, 8, (11.4.1).

¹⁹¹⁷ For discussion of the joyful celebration of desire, see 6.3.1 discussion about the DoJ.

¹⁹¹⁸ See discussion in 3.4.9; 3.4.10; 3.4.12.

¹⁹¹⁹ For example, Spencer B. Olmstead, Jerika C. Norona, and Kristin M. Anders, 'How Do College Experience and Gender Differentiate the Enactment of Hookup Scripts Among Emerging Adults?', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48.6 (2019), 1769–83 (p. 1777) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1233-4>> observes that 31.2% of their study participants gave 'the physical attributes of their hookup partner' as the top reason for a hookup.

¹⁹²⁰ Elisabeth Timmermans and Cédric Courtois, 'From Swiping to Casual Sex and/or Committed Relationships: Exploring the Experiences of Tinder Users', *The Information Society*, 34.2 (2018), 59–70 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2017.1414093>> (p. 61).

¹⁹²¹ Timmermans and Courtois, pp. 66-67.

¹⁹²² Timmermans and Courtois, pp. 67.

However, one important observation should be made about the way that the lovers express sexual desire in the Song, and that is that their wish for sexual gratification is always associated with the other lover. In other words, it is not some nebulous want for sexual activity that is not associated with a particular person. This is different from the reason given by many for participating in hookups that what was wanted was a sexual experience, potentially not mattering who the other person is.¹⁹²³ In their expression of sexual want, the lovers value the other person holistically, and this will be discussed more in 14.2.9.

14.2.2 The Construction of Relationality and Sexuality through Speech

Chapter 6 illustrated how the EI is used to make a subtle distinction between the FP and the DoJ, since it was the FP who called the ML to respond to her using additional EI.¹⁹²⁴ The lovers demonstrate how speech is used to construct some form of relationality, bringing something into being, by speech. And the lovers continue to use speech throughout the Song to construct the developing relationality between them.

In the contemporary world, this opens up a whole area of discussion about the use of speech in the framing, construction and development of relationships and its role in sexual activity. Speech has a key role in the construction of relationality: a person asks another person out on a date; one person invites another person to go to bed with them; consent is expressed or withdrawn verbally;¹⁹²⁵ a friend tells another how they think of them as more than just friends;¹⁹²⁶ one person asks another to marry them. All of these are speech-acts which can change the way that the person performing the speech-act and the recipient perceive the relationship between them.¹⁹²⁷ Speech defines relationality. Unless a person performs a speech-act, calling another to respond to them, then it is impossible for potential romantic relationships to develop.¹⁹²⁸

Consent is one critical area of the use of language that has received much public attention recently, especially as a result of the women who have spoken out as part of the #MeToo movement.¹⁹²⁹ It provides a critical (and legal) framework for the expression of sexual

¹⁹²³ Olmstead, Norona and Anders, p. 1777.

¹⁹²⁴ 6.4.5.

¹⁹²⁵ Regenerus and Uecker, p. 57; Jensen, p. 124.

¹⁹²⁶ Terjessen, pp. 145–146.

¹⁹²⁷ John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969).

¹⁹²⁸ Terjessen, pp. 145–146.

¹⁹²⁹ Srinivasan, pp. 24-25.

want and for responding to that expression. Ind sees it as being ‘one factor ... more important than any other in assessing the rights and wrongs of sexual behaviour’ and something that is a key aspect of ‘loving your neighbour’.¹⁹³⁰ Srinivasan observes correctly that consent can be withdrawn at any time, and there should not be a cultural expectation that ‘when women become sexually involved in men, they owe it to them to follow through’.¹⁹³¹ In her recent book, the EA social influencer Florence Given writes that ‘asking for consent is not only the law, it’s very sexy’, and she suggests eight different ways of doing this.¹⁹³² She emphasises that this form of communication shows ‘maturity, high levels of emotional intelligence and respect for boundaries’.¹⁹³³ Such an understanding fits particularly well with the portrayal of the development of desire in 4:8-5:1¹⁹³⁴. The lovers would affirm the use of language in seeking the consent, and genuine pleasure of the other. They would approve of Given’s use of language to seek for consent, one in which ‘persons making sexual decisions have a voice and that their voice is heard, valued and honoured’.¹⁹³⁵ They would support scripts in which consent could be as freely expressed as possible, as well as being concerned by structural ‘factors which might ... inhibit ... a person’s capacity to say ‘no’’.¹⁹³⁶

14.2.3 Vulnerability, Strength and Security in the Relationship

The commentary discussion has shown a growing sense of security through the sense of progression in the relationship, but alongside that development the EI is used to call for things which make the lovers particularly vulnerable to each other, such as the calling for inseparability using the seal imagery.¹⁹³⁷ This calling for inseparability only happens at a much later stage in the Song, showing the way that security has developed throughout for this level of vulnerability to be expressed.

In the contemporary horizon, the context of growing relationships require participants to grow to be vulnerable to each other, within the context of the growing security in their relationship.¹⁹³⁸ What is needed is ‘appropriate vulnerability’.¹⁹³⁹ This might involve being

¹⁹³⁰ Ind, p. 113.

¹⁹³¹ Srinivasan, pp. 28-29.

¹⁹³² Florence Given, *Women Don’t Owe You Pretty* (London: Cassell, 2020), p. 136. Her list includes: ‘Do you like that?’, ‘Can I take these off?’, ‘Is this okay?’ ‘Do you mind if we switch positions?’, ‘Can I go down on you?’, ‘How do you like it?’, ‘Are you sure you feel ready for this, or would you prefer it we carried on kissing?’, ‘Please know that you can say “no” at any time’,

¹⁹³³ Given, p. 136.

¹⁹³⁴ 9.4.1; 9.4.4.

¹⁹³⁵ Jensen, p. 124.

¹⁹³⁶ Ind, p. 121.

¹⁹³⁷ 8:6 (12.4.4).

¹⁹³⁸ Jensen, p. 125.

¹⁹³⁹ Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, p. 167.

vulnerable enough to set some boundaries about what one is comfortable with in terms of sexual behaviour.¹⁹⁴⁰ Among EAs, Regnerus and Uecker discuss the issues of power in contemporary sexual relationships, and the failure in some cases to get beyond competitiveness in terms of power dynamics between a young man and young women.¹⁹⁴¹ They emphasise rightly that ‘mutual self-giving must eventually emerge ... and ideas about upper and lower hands must disappear, or else the relationship is doomed’.¹⁹⁴² Through observing the development of the relationship between the lovers of the Song, the lovers would approve of scripts where there is the potential for vulnerability in strength to be expressed, as it is done by them as they grow together in intimacy. Their emphasis would be on safe vulnerability, relative to the security developed in the relationship. Such an understanding might be found in scripts where sexual activity is progressive and agreed to by relationship participants.¹⁹⁴³

14.2.4 The Recognition of Preference as Key to the Relationship between the Lovers

Both the ML and the FP of the Song would affirm the importance of the recognition of preference for one other as key to their relationship. The most forthright example of this from the FP is when the DoJ question her to review and discriminate her lover against other men, which she does, and with which she concludes her preference for him.¹⁹⁴⁴ This preference for him ultimately plays a part in her being reunited with him.¹⁹⁴⁵ And it thus results in the continuation of their relationship and the further sense of progression that follows.

Moreover, the expression of preferences should be seen in light of the presence of other men in the Song. The reading of the imperative calling for protection from the foxes portrays the idea of other men trying to pursue the FP.¹⁹⁴⁶ The Song thus portrays a world in which other men are around, giving the potential that another man might be more preferable. But the development of the relationship in the Song portrays her genuine preference for the ML, above other men.

¹⁹⁴⁰ Given, pp. 140-142.

¹⁹⁴¹ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 71.

¹⁹⁴² Regnerus and Uecker, p. 71.

¹⁹⁴³ Freitas and King, pp. 112-113.

¹⁹⁴⁴ 10.3.2. For an example of the ML’s preference for the FP see 6:9, as well as discussion of 7:6 in 11.3.1. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 178 comments that 6:9 ‘underscores how incomparable and superior this woman is’.

¹⁹⁴⁵ 10.3.4.

¹⁹⁴⁶ 2:15 (7.4.1).

In the contemporary cultural horizon, Swami has argued that real experience of relationships enables people to work out their genuine preferences, in a cultural world where choice is required.¹⁹⁴⁷ This includes the recognition that physical attraction towards somebody can change in the process of getting to know them.¹⁹⁴⁸ The lovers recognise their preference for each other at various points in the text, resulting in the sense of progression.¹⁹⁴⁹ In terms of examining the scripts of contemporary forms of relationship, the lovers would give a high status to the recognition of genuine preference in a potential partner. Their preference for each other matters.

Furthermore, the EA age group is often seen as being an age of ‘experimentation, identity exploration [and] self-focus’, implying that this is an age when sexuality and preferences are explored.¹⁹⁵⁰ Research suggests that ‘romantic relationships make important contributions to the identity development’ of EAs.¹⁹⁵¹ Also, it has previously been suggested that EA ‘individuals who perceive themselves to be adults’ are ‘more certain of the characteristics they desire in a romantic partner compared to those who do not perceive themselves to be adults’.¹⁹⁵² It may be that the experience of emerging adulthood, including the experience of premarital relationships, enables many to be able to discern their relational (and sexual) preferences as part of this period of experimentation, and this plays a part in their experience.

Moreover, the changing attitudes towards sexuality amongst Generation Z also potentially has an impact on the EA age being one of experimentation in terms of preferences. While this thesis focuses on heterosexual relationships, research in 2019 indicated that only two thirds of British Generation Z consider themselves ‘exclusively heterosexual’.¹⁹⁵³ And 56% of Generation Z in the US know someone who uses ‘non-gender-binary terms’.¹⁹⁵⁴ In other words, many younger EAs personally experience or encounter others with non-binary perspectives on sexuality, so the age of emerging adulthood being an age of

¹⁹⁴⁷ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 125.

¹⁹⁴⁸ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 128; 3.4.10.

¹⁹⁴⁹ 10.4.2-10.4.4 demonstrates this particularly well.

¹⁹⁵⁰ Olmstead, p. 770 observes that academic ‘debate regarding the applicability of emerging adulthood as a universal developmental period will likely continue’.

¹⁹⁵¹ Olmstead, p. 773.

¹⁹⁵² Carolyn McNamara Barry and others, ‘Friendship and Romantic Relationship Qualities in Emerging Adulthood: Differential Associations with Identity Development and Achieved Adulthood Criteria’, *Journal of Adult Development*, 16.4 (2009), 209–22 (p. 210) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-009-9067-x>>.

¹⁹⁵³ IPSOS MORI, *Gen Z: Beyond Binary: Progressive/Traditional*. This is compared to 71% of Millennials, 85% of Generation X and 88% of Baby Boomers. The research notes that age too may have some influence on this statistic.

¹⁹⁵⁴ IPSOS MORI, *Gen Z: Beyond Binary: Progressive/Traditional*.

experimentation is often an age of investigating preferences.¹⁹⁵⁵ While a great deal of 'sexual identity development' takes place before becoming an EA, the EA age group is still very much an age that is part of this process, and different EAs develop at different rates.¹⁹⁵⁶ It is often an 'age of possibilities' in terms of working out preference.¹⁹⁵⁷ Contemporary sociological scholarship sees sexual identity as 'comprised of cognitive and emotional understandings that individuals have about the meaning and significance about numerous aspects of their sexuality, such as their sexual attraction, desires, behaviours, values and relationships'.¹⁹⁵⁸ The discernment of preference has a part to play in this.¹⁹⁵⁹

14.2.5 The Value of Relating, Even Though the Lovers Do Not Know How Things Will Develop from the Song at the Beginning

One of the key features of reading from the beginning of the Song to the end is not knowing how things will develop. It is the mystery with which the reader engages as they read the Song from beginning to end.¹⁹⁶⁰ Similarly, in the contemporary world, people might recognise their attraction to another, and sometimes they respond to that, and there are consequences of one form or another.¹⁹⁶¹ But both in the action of initiating a relationship, as well what happens afterwards, the participants do not know how things will develop.¹⁹⁶² They do not know what their Song will long look, or if there will be one. But without journeying through the experience, there will be no way of knowing. There will be no opportunity to grow in intimacy. There would be no opportunity to grow through the experience.¹⁹⁶³ In line with desire as a reason for action, the lovers would approve of scripts that allowed relationality, even though, as is always the case, one does not necessarily know how things will develop.

¹⁹⁵⁵ Elizabeth M. Morgan, 'Contemporary Issues in Sexual Orientation and Identity Development in Emerging Adulthood', in *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*, ed. by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 262–79 (p. 263) notes that 'exploring identity options and maintaining flexible commitments in identity domains such as education, work, politics, and religion is commonplace in emerging adulthood ... and sexuality is no exception'.

¹⁹⁵⁶ Morgan, pp. 262, 268.

¹⁹⁵⁷ Morgan, p. 263.

¹⁹⁵⁸ Morgan, p. 263.

¹⁹⁵⁹ This is not necessarily to say that 'sexual identities' are fixed entities, as some contemporary research suggests that sexual identity can 'be altered over the life course as shifts in awareness, understanding, and experience occur. See Morgan, p. 264.

¹⁹⁶⁰ See discussion of reading strategy in 2.3.5. Also, see discussion of not knowing the background of what is being portrayed in 1:2-4 in discussion in 6.4.2.

¹⁹⁶¹ Bredow, Cate, and Huston, p. 9 provide a flow chart of the processes involved in a first encounter with another.

¹⁹⁶² Bredow, Cate and Huston, p. 12 describe this process in the relationship initiation stage as being the movement 'from attraction to affiliation'.

¹⁹⁶³ Freitas and King, p. 180.

14.2.6 The Value of Overcoming Obstacles (or Ending a Relationship) in the Light of Preference

Another 'value' for the FP of the Song is the overcoming of obstacles because of the compulsion of her feelings towards her lover.¹⁹⁶⁴ There is one particular point where the ML and FP are portrayed as being separate from each other, and there is no certainty for the first-time reader if they will be reunited and reconciled.¹⁹⁶⁵ The Song could have ended with the lovers being separate. It is only that it carries on after that the reader is aware that the obstacle of distance was overcome.

14.2.4 highlighted the way that the DoJ asked the FP to review and discriminate her preference for the ML above other men, seeking both to know that her preferences are for him and for her to know that there are other men 'out there'.¹⁹⁶⁶ Her preference for him, in the context of the development of their relationship, was strong enough to overcome the obstacle of separation. This emphasis on preference as a discriminating attitude as to whether a relationship should continue, alongside the level of commitment that has developed between the lovers, has much relevance in the contemporary horizon where choice is required. If the confident FP did not have preferences for the ML, or else there was the obstacle of him being exploitative or abusive, or potentially some other obstacle in the way of their relationship being able to continue, one would imagine her in the contemporary horizon being prepared to end the relationship if necessary.¹⁹⁶⁷ The FP would want a script that gave her the opportunity to live out her preferences with freedom, to recognise and respond to obstacles as required. She would not settle 'for shit men'.¹⁹⁶⁸

In the contemporary world there are many obstacles to monogamous romantic relationships that result in breakups amongst EAs, such as 'a loss of pleasurable affiliation, lack of intimacy, unmet needs to sexuality or passion, infidelity, as well as the greater need for autonomy'.¹⁹⁶⁹ All of these categories, one way or another, can be seen

¹⁹⁶⁴ 8.5.1-8.5.2 and 8.9 discusses the obstacle of the ML's absence in the first night-time passage (3:1-5). 8.8.4; 8.9.1 discusses the action of the FP in response to his disappearance in the second night-time passage (5:2-8).

¹⁹⁶⁵ 8.8.4; Davidson, p. 601.

¹⁹⁶⁶ 10.4.2; Spencer, p. 138.

¹⁹⁶⁷ Jensen, p. 125 argues that in relationships 'the Christian vision of freedom recognizes that the person develops and grows in freedom with one another. When relationships become characterised by manipulation, bitterness, or constricted roles than by nurture and growth, then the relationships begs for transformation, or in the worst cases, termination. Faithfulness does not mean that one stays in a relationship whatever the cost to oneself or others'.

¹⁹⁶⁸ Given, pp. 176- 177 here verbalises her feelings from the experience of staying in a premarital 'toxic' relationship, because of the fear of breaking up. Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 274 notes the psychological phenomenon of 'settling for less' because of the fear of singleness.

¹⁹⁶⁹ Valeriya Bravo, Jennifer Connolly, and Caroline McIsaac, 'Why Did It End? Breakup Reasons of Youth of Different Gender, Dating Stages, and Ages', *Emerging Adulthood*, 5.4 (2017), 230-40

in the light of expressions of preference of relationship participants. People engaging in romantic relationships will probably have 'red flags' of preferences that they reasonably will not compromise on in relationships, and having such boundaries fits with the importance of preference for the lovers.¹⁹⁷⁰ 'Red flags' of preference might refer to the uncaring or abusive behaviour of the other person.¹⁹⁷¹ Or perhaps for a Christian, being with someone who is actively hostile to their faith.¹⁹⁷²

The realisation of preferences has a key role in romantic scripts. Another usual reason why relationships among EAs end is because of 'natural relationship conclusions', life events, such as moving to university or moving home for some other reason, that causes participants in relationships to make the decision to break up.¹⁹⁷³ In both of these cases either participants might end the relationship in advance assuming 'the inevitability of the end' or they will try to sustain a long-distance relationship, and decide to end it, perhaps because the resources required (including time and money) make it not possible.¹⁹⁷⁴ While both of these 'natural relationship endings' may be created by pragmatic situations (such as limited resources to do long-distance relationships), there may often be a choice or expression of preference involved, which can include valuing autonomy as more important than the relationship. Yet again, preference, and its role interacting with commitment, has a role to play. By asking about preference, the DoJ ask the right question of the FP in the contemporary world of choice. And she responds by overcoming obstacles in light of her disposition towards her lover. If this was to be compared to relationships scripts, both King and Freitas' argument for the need of 'temporary relationships' would be affirmed, as would some similarity to the descriptive tool of the elevator model of dating.¹⁹⁷⁵

14.2.7 Growing Commitment Associated with a Sense of Progression in the Relationship

Much of the interpretative discussion in Part 2 has focused upon the sense of progression portrayed between the lovers, as well as their recognition of the relationality between

(p. 231) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696817700261>> observe these reasons from their research. What is interesting to note is that since this research, relationship dissolution amongst emerging adults does not seem to have been revisited.

¹⁹⁷⁰ Given, p. 103.

¹⁹⁷¹ Given, p. 103.

¹⁹⁷² Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 8 writes about the experience of adult Christians who dated people who were not Christians, and while there were differences and 'angst', what is interesting to note is that none of the women who had a partner who did not share their Christian faith affirmed that their previous 'concerns had come to pass'.

¹⁹⁷³ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 71.

¹⁹⁷⁴ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 72.

¹⁹⁷⁵ King and Freitas, p. 27; Rowan and Hallen, p. 49.

them. There are various points in which the FP responds to her realisation of the relationality between her and her lover.¹⁹⁷⁶ In particular, thesis chapters 11 and 12 discussed the recognition of desire in the context of a developed relationship and its association with the calling for inseparability.¹⁹⁷⁷

If this is related to the contemporary horizon, two main models will be recalled. Firstly, in the introductory chapter, the elevator model was used to describe dating relationships.¹⁹⁷⁸ Secondly, there are the stages of relationship development, and this progressive understanding of sexual behaviour is affirmed as being part of the script in recent research about the romantic relationships of EAs.¹⁹⁷⁹ Both of these models see dating relationships as involving a sense of progression from the perspective of participants. And such a model is supportable from the growing sense of progression highlighted in this reading of the Song. The lovers grow in their intimacy in the context of a portrayal of a relationship that develops.¹⁹⁸⁰ They are portrayed as valuing that recognition.¹⁹⁸¹

Furthermore, it was stated above that while the Song is not a text about married love, a reasonable reading is to see the lovers 'on the way to marriage'.¹⁹⁸² An implication of this for a Christian examination of the contemporary scripts might be that if a Christian deemed it a complete impossibility that they would ever marry the other person, then to have sexual behaviour with them may be exploitative, as it would not be an expression of love towards them in terms of the Greatest Commandment.¹⁹⁸³ Such a perspective takes on board the significance of marriage in both Christian teaching, as well as its 'capstone' form being the long-term wish of many EAs.¹⁹⁸⁴ In terms of scripts, this relates well to both the recognition of preference and how this interacts with possibility of ending relationships, if it becomes apparent that it would be seemingly impossible for someone dating to be able to marry the other person.

¹⁹⁷⁶ E.g., 2:15-17 (7.4.2); 6:3 (10.4.4); 7:10 (11.3.4).

¹⁹⁷⁷ 7:2 (11.4.1); 8:6 (12.4.2).

¹⁹⁷⁸ Rowan and Hallen, p. 49; 1.2.1.

¹⁹⁷⁹ 3.4.12; Christopher and Cate, p. 794; Olmstead and Anders, *Sexual Activity in the Contexts of Romantic Relationships*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁸⁰ 11.4.4.

¹⁹⁸¹ 7:10 (11.3.4).

¹⁹⁸² 2.4.3; Goldingay, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs for Everyone*, Old Testament for Everyone, pp. 226-227.

¹⁹⁸³ Ind, pp. 93-154; Freitas and King, p. 176. Ind, pp. 113, 119 speaks of the importance of 'treating others as we ourselves would like to be treated', and applies this in terms of not leading people on.

¹⁹⁸⁴ 3.4.2.

14.2.8 The Ambiguity of the Beginning of the Song Allowing Many Possibilities

While perhaps not a 'value' of the lovers, but instead a value of this reading of the Song, the deliberate ambiguity of what is portrayed at the beginning of the Song, potentially allows a whole array of possibilities.¹⁹⁸⁵ As mentioned above, the reader does not know whether this was the FP's first encounter with the ML, or whether this passage portrays some form of existing relationship. When seen in terms of relationships in the contemporary world, the FP verbalising her desire in terms of the opening passage, and the consequences that it has opens up the possibility of ambiguity and unconventional ways in which relationships may begin. Bearing in mind that later in the Song the FP does not necessarily behave in a culturally conventional way, she would be open to a variety of ways that relationships might begin.¹⁹⁸⁶

14.2.9 Desire as One Aspect of a More Holistic Relationality

The discussion of this thesis has particularly focused on attraction and desire, being the language expressed in the erotic discourses of the text of the Song. This has been seen alongside the language of the development of relationality, to demonstrate the interplay between the two of these themes in the text. However, just because the main focus has been the verbalisation of sexual desire, this does not mean that the lovers do not value the other person for their character. In the discussion the FP desires the ML for more than his physical looks. She potentially finds his character desirable as well, liking his good character.¹⁹⁸⁷ This is supportive of seeing sexuality in the Song in an 'wholistic' sense, absolutely interested in physical attraction and sexual pleasure, but also the character of the other person, and the other as a whole.¹⁹⁸⁸ As discussed in 3.4.10, research has shown how 'inner-qualities' matter in romantic relationships and that a person's character can make somebody more attractive than physical looks alone.¹⁹⁸⁹ If the lovers were in the contemporary horizon, they would not neglect the importance of the role of 'good character'. Furthermore, seeing relationship and sex scripts in light of loving a neighbour means treating another as one would wish to be treated, not as an object, but as a holistic person.¹⁹⁹⁰

14.2.10 The Egalitarianism of the Lovers

As many commentators observe the Song is a text of 'full mutuality and egalitarianism' between the lovers.¹⁹⁹¹ It is a text where the FP, as the main speaker, is not submissive to

¹⁹⁸⁵ 6.4.2.

¹⁹⁸⁶ E.g., 3:1-5; 13.3.5.

¹⁹⁸⁷ 1:3 (6.4.3).

¹⁹⁸⁸ Davidson, p. 581.

¹⁹⁸⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 117-119, 128.

¹⁹⁹⁰ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 10; Given, pp. 8-9; Ind, p. 113.

¹⁹⁹¹ This quote is from Davidson, p. 575. Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 68 sees the Song as 'fairly

her man, but expresses what she wants. The Song portrays equality between the sexes, and a powerful female character in the context of this. One can strongly infer that egalitarianism is something important to the lovers by their character portrayal.

Bringing this into the contemporary horizon would mean considering if relationship scripts are egalitarian in terms of their values. Naturally, whenever people are involved, there is the potential for one side exploiting another. But a relationship in which a woman (or man) is exploited or coerced into doing something that she/he does not want to do would not be consistent with the ethos of the Song. Both characters have ownership over their sexuality, and are willing to offer it on their terms.¹⁹⁹² In terms of scripts of sexual behaviour in relationships, Regnerus observes that EA 'women are the sexual gatekeepers', i.e., that there is high 'correlation between when women thought sex should start and when they actually began having sex in their own relationship', whereas this was not the case for men, wanted sex earlier in the relationship.¹⁹⁹³ Whether or not women feel empowered to exercise their gate-keeping in the way that they would want to is another question.¹⁹⁹⁴ Regnerus notes that many women 'don't sense that they have control of the sexual aspect of their relationship'.¹⁹⁹⁵ But one would imagine the FP affirming relationship scripts that were egalitarian, that respected and valued women as initiators and gatekeepers of sexual behaviour, alongside recognising the importance of timeliness in relationships.¹⁹⁹⁶ Furthermore, as sexual desire and pleasure is emphasised in the Song, an egalitarian perspective also means seeing scripts in the light of how sexual activity can be enjoyable for both male and female participants.¹⁹⁹⁷

Moreover, in practice it could be argued that no sexual or relationship script by itself can create a culture of egalitarianism, since any script involves individual people, interpreting

egalitarian'. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 145 observes the 'equality and mutuality' between the woman and the man. Carol Meyers, 'Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs', in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), pp. 197–212 (p. 211) comments that 'set apart from the stratifying consequences of institutional and public life ... [there is] a balance between male and female'.

¹⁹⁹² One of the best examples of this is found in 9.4.4 through the language of invitation and consent.

¹⁹⁹³ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 56–57.

¹⁹⁹⁴ Srinivasan, p. 45.

¹⁹⁹⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 58.

¹⁹⁹⁶ This discussion is also attached to the matter of sexual economics, and whether some sexual scripts – i.e., forms of casual sex – sell sex too cheaply. See Regnerus, *Cheap Sex*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁹⁷ This is discussed more in 14.3.3. Olmstead, p. 782 observe that EA 'women report more sexual enjoyment in the context of committed sexual encounters as opposed to hookups. These were a function of greater partner familiarity, feelings of commitment and affection, and women feeling freer to communicate sexual needs to a committed partner'. Srinivasan, p. 45 speaks of the 'worsening sexual conditions for women' in the contemporary world.

the script from their own perspective of sexuality, which is not necessarily straightforward.¹⁹⁹⁸ So it is also down to the individuals to behave in an honouring way. But the ideal of egalitarianism is there in the Song, and the lovers of the Song would most affirm scripts where this could be made possible.¹⁹⁹⁹

14.2.11 The Wisdom of Restraint and Wisdom of Freedom (the Importance of Timeliness)

The discussion of wisdom above considered the wisdom of the FP in terms of timeliness, particularly in the adjuration passages.²⁰⁰⁰ Timeliness was observed in terms of the recognition of 'ahābā that inciting or exciting it until the time is right was deemed not a good idea. Timeliness was also the reason given by the ML, encouraging the FP to make herself accessible to him in the springtime scene.²⁰⁰¹ Timeliness is thus an important theme in the Song for both lovers.

It follows that timeliness in terms of sexual activity would be something that the FP would consider important in relationships and sex scripts within the contemporary horizon. But bearing in mind the lack of focus on marriage in the portrayal of the relationship in the text, that this would be an emphasis on timeliness in terms of sexual activity, not necessarily abstinence.²⁰⁰² Walker argues for a holistic vision of Christian sex in which:

legitimate abstinence must be chosen, rather than tolerated as a lack of choice. If it is a choice, it is one made understanding sexuality isn't necessarily tied up with sexual activity, or can't be shut off and switched back on after years of suppression (or repression).²⁰⁰³

Of course, one important association with timeliness is seeking to avoid any sense of regret or shame, with shame sadly being so often associated with sexuality.²⁰⁰⁴ Timely sexual activity might be more of value than simply more sexual activity (e.g. good sex

¹⁹⁹⁸ Buss, pp. 144-145 observes in short-term sexual relationships the potential for men to interpret sexual interest from a woman when there is none. Shari L. Dworkin and Lucia O'Sullivan, 'Actual Versus Desired Initiation Patterns Among a Sample of College Men: Tapping Disjunctures Within Traditional Male Sexual Scripts', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42.2 (2005), 150–58 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490509552268>> discusses the example of heterosexual men who had an egalitarian view of sexual desire instead of the dominant masculine script.

¹⁹⁹⁹ From a feminist perspective, Srinivasan, p. 7 argues that 'in this world, sexual freedom is not a given, but something to be achieved, and is always incomplete'.

²⁰⁰⁰ 13.3.1; 13.3.2; 13.3.5.

²⁰⁰¹ 2:8-17 (7.3.1)

²⁰⁰² From a different basis, Freitas and King, pp. 107-113 argue for a different understanding of chastity, one in which sexual activity is related to commitment. Similarly, Jensen, pp. 117-118 writes of the 'vocation of singleness', being neither marriage nor avowed chastity, but being a time when 'single Christians date; single Christians have sex'.

²⁰⁰³ Walker, *Relatable*, ch. 6.

²⁰⁰⁴ Ind, pp. 93-94, 97.

does not have to mean sleeping with as many different people as possible) and this is certainly something to consider for younger adults.²⁰⁰⁵

It follows that an understanding of the wisdom of timeliness potentially works with the elevator model of progressive relationships, where different levels of sexual activity might be associated with floor numbers.²⁰⁰⁶ It also potentially could work with the important psychological study of a 'Topography of Social Touching', based upon the perceived pleasantness of being touched by another person, dependent on the emotional bond that exists between them and the other person.²⁰⁰⁷ According to this research, 'emotionally closer individuals in inner layers of the social networks were allowed to touch wider bodily areas', partners being considered to be able to touch anywhere, while strangers being 'limited to the hands and upper torso'.²⁰⁰⁸ So the implication is that the stronger the emotional bond a person has with another, the more of the body it is perceived as being pleasant for them to touch. This could be related to the wisdom of timeliness. While there is ambiguity in terms of what sexual behaviour is being expressed at various points in the Song, the latter part of the Song is more developed in the depth of its sexual description, alongside the portrayal of a more developed relationship, and so timeliness is something that is expressed in practice by the FP, alongside her desire for the ML from her opening words.²⁰⁰⁹ The FP would value scripts that value timeliness and with some flexibility in terms of timeliness.

14.3 Examining Scripts to Establish Some Parameters for a 'Theology of Dating'

Chapter 3 described in detail some of the marriage, relationship and sexual scripts that are influential in the contemporary cultural horizon of British EAs (and other Western Christians) before they get married for the first time. These will now be considered in the light of the values above.²⁰¹⁰ It will creatively apply this discussion to the question of what the lovers of Song would potentially think about some of these scripts, knowing that people in the contemporary horizon are not able to disassociate themselves from the cultural world around them, and that the wider culture informs their thinking.

²⁰⁰⁵ Ind, pp. 93-94; Jensen, pp. 115, 137 p. 115 all note the importance of age as a factor in terms of the consideration of timeliness.

²⁰⁰⁶ 1:2; Rowan and Hallen, p. 49.

²⁰⁰⁷ Juulia T. Suvilehto and others, 'Topography of Social Touching Depends on Emotional Bonds Between Humans', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112.45 (2015), 13811–16 <<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1519231112>>.

²⁰⁰⁸ Suvilehto and others, p. 3.

²⁰⁰⁹ 1:2; 11.4.4.

²⁰¹⁰ 14.2.1-14.2.11.

14.3.1 The Waiting for Marriage Script

As this section is specifically interested in premarital scripts, this thesis will not return to discussing the marriage scripts of ‘capstone’ marriage and ‘foundation stone’ marriage, even though marriage scripts are attached to premarital relationships.²⁰¹¹ However, one ‘marriage’ script, which is in practice a ‘premarital script’, which the values of the lovers would have something to say about, would be the ‘Waiting for Marriage Script’, the complementarian script that says that Christian women are to wait for men to initiate relationships, even if there are no men to do the initiating.²⁰¹²

The Waiting for Marriage script makes no sense compared to the values of the lovers. The FP is not a woman who would wait aimlessly for a man to make the first move in a potential relationship.²⁰¹³ One would imagine her being disappointed at a script which is so deeply disempowering to women.²⁰¹⁴ She is confident, bold and knows what she wants, and responds with action to her desire for the ML at the start of the Song.²⁰¹⁵ She potentially stands out from the DoJ in the opening passage, since while they desire the ML too, she is one who acts.²⁰¹⁶ As a text which portrays equality between the lovers, she is not constrained by the rules of complementarianism.²⁰¹⁷ She calls the ML to respond to her.

This pro-relationship emphasis of the Song is different from the waiting for marriage script, with its strong complementarian basis and focus. The script is not one that corresponds to the portrayal of the relationship of the lovers. It is an extremely unhelpful and disempowering script for women. In the contemporary context the FP would encourage women to find ways to go and meet some men, disregarding the accusations that this would make them ‘slutty’.

14.3.2 The (No) Sex Before Marriage Script

The next script to be considered is the sexual abstinence script, the no sex before marriage script, which as was discussed above, is far from wholly practised by Christians.²⁰¹⁸ It is a script that when followed often leads to the ‘how far is too far’

²⁰¹¹ 3.4.2-3.4.3 observes the pragmatic reality that many Christians are trapped between the two marriage scripts.

²⁰¹² 3.4.8.

²⁰¹³ Allender and Longman, p. 45 makes a similar critique of religious cultures where stereotypical ideas prevent women from being able to start relationships.

²⁰¹⁴ 14.2.10.

²⁰¹⁵ 14.2.1.

²⁰¹⁶ 14.2.2.

²⁰¹⁷ 14.2.10.

²⁰¹⁸ 3.4.6.

question.²⁰¹⁹ Sexual activity was described above as a broad term including ‘kissing, caressing, heavy petting, making out, oral sex, mutual masturbation and sexual intercourse’.²⁰²⁰ It was discussed how in the wider contemporary cultural horizon, sexual activity has a perceived role in ‘relationship stability and maintenance’, as well as corresponding to perceptions of relationship developmental stage.²⁰²¹

Bearing in mind the discussion above about the importance of timeliness in the vision of the Song, as well as the how this interacts with how desire for sexual pleasure and attraction provides a potential reason for action, the lovers in the contemporary world would not support the script of total sexual abstinence prior to marriage at a potentially older age.²⁰²² In practice, this would mean participants in romantic relationships working out for themselves through conversation as to what sexual activity they are comfortable with as their relationship develops.²⁰²³ This does not mean an obsession with the ‘how far is too far question’, but an approach which sees sexuality as a good thing.²⁰²⁴

Nevertheless, for those who are more conservatively minded, it was noted in 3.4.12 that sexual desire is potentially more significant than sexual activity for ‘relationship quality or maintenance’.²⁰²⁵ This means that for those who for good reasons consider timeliness for sexual activity to be sometime in the future (such as marriage), the wisdom of timeliness could be taken in this way. But the fact that many Christians engage in sexual activity before marriage means in practice that the timeliness of waiting till marriage does not match up to many people’s actual experiences.²⁰²⁶ Neither does it match with how the lovers of the Song engage with sexual activity. The lovers would expect some form of sexual activity in a growing romantic relationship. And having some sense of progression in a relationship would be a wise thing to do.

14.3.3 The Hookup Script

The discussion will now move to sex scripts, being those that focus on sex instead of relationships. Three sex scripts in the contemporary culture were described above: Hookups, FWBRs, and starting a relationship with sex.²⁰²⁷ The first two of these attempt

²⁰¹⁹ 3.4.7.

²⁰²⁰ 3.4.12; Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, p. 54.

²⁰²¹ Sprecher and McKinney, pp. 105, 110; Owens, p. 269.

²⁰²² 14.2.1; 14.2.11.

²⁰²³ Freitas and King, p. 112.

²⁰²⁴ Freitas and King, p. 111 note that not all dating relationships are the same, and so being prescriptive about what sexual activity can take place does not seem appropriate.

²⁰²⁵ Regan, *The Role of Sexual Desire and Sexual Activity in Dating Relationships*, pp. 53, 56.

²⁰²⁶ 3.4.6.

²⁰²⁷ 3.4.14; 3.4.15; 3.4.16.

to disassociate sexual activity from usual forms of romantic relationships, and the third is an attempt to move from sex to a relationship.²⁰²⁸ Importantly, a real concern for 60% of those involved in FWBR in one study was that ‘sex might complicate friendships by bringing forth unreciprocated desires for romantic commitment, and ironically that these relationships were desirable [for participants] because they incorporated trust and comfort, while avoiding romantic commitment’.²⁰²⁹ Similarly, reasons given for hookups amongst EA participants is that many considered themselves ‘too busy to make commitments to a romantic partner and thus became involved in casual sex to meet their sexual needs’, as well as many ‘not wanting to be “tied down” to one sexual partner’.²⁰³⁰ In other words, a ‘rule’ of these sex scripts is that they do not become romantic relationships, even if this something that some (both EA men and women) might actually prefer.²⁰³¹

But how does the hookup script relate to the values? While the beginning of the Song is ambiguous, and so gives possible scope for a relationship to start in a variety of ways, as a whole the Song emphasises a relationship, and sexual desire and activity is situated within that. Desire is a central aspect of that relationship, but sex is not disassociated from relating to the other person more holistically.²⁰³² Thus, the idea of random, one-off sex with a complete stranger does not fit with the overall integratedness of the relationship of the lovers of the Song. Neither does it fit with the values of loving another person, since they are little known. For this reason, the hookup script is one which does not sufficiently fit with the values of the lovers and so is rejected as being a script that the lovers would support.

Furthermore, the hookup script also falls short in terms of the values because, while the script emphasises sexual pleasure, it is not a script that provides equally satisfying sexual activity for both men and women. Thus, it falls short on the grounds of egalitarianism.²⁰³³ Research indicates that hookups are often less sexually satisfying for EA women than they are for men.²⁰³⁴ Bearing in mind that getting tipsy or drunk is often associated with hookup culture, it is plausible that this happens in order to anaesthetise the experience for women who might not wholly want to participate in this behaviour, but feel that they have

²⁰²⁸ Olmstead, p. 780; Owens, p. 270, Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 61-62, 108.

²⁰²⁹ Bisson and Levine, p. 66.

²⁰³⁰ Olmstead, p. 780. For further discussion about the context of sex in busy university lives, see Regnerus and Uecker, p. 104; Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 2.

²⁰³¹ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 9 notes this with regards to hookup culture.

²⁰³² 14.2.9.

²⁰³³ 14.2.10.

²⁰³⁴ Srinivasan, p. 45, 156 n. 44. Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 110-111. Srinivasan, p. 44 laments the ‘decreasing pleasure and shrinking options for sex on their [young women’s] terms’.

little choice within their cultural horizon.²⁰³⁵ The lovers would question a culture in which EAs 'in gearing up for sex, must at the same time drain themselves of feeling'.²⁰³⁶ While not every sexual experience a person has is necessarily positive, 'to at least strive for good sex is not an unreasonable goal' for both men and women, and this is something that the lovers would affirm.²⁰³⁷

Also, the lovers would question the hookup script on the grounds of how uncaring a script it is.²⁰³⁸ This observation is made by considering the values of egalitarianism, wisdom of timeliness, as well as desire as being part of an holistic emphasis.²⁰³⁹ Ind argues for the importance of 'loving yourself' in terms of sexual ethics, which includes 'not allowing ourselves to get into situations where we are treated carelessly'.²⁰⁴⁰ Freitas argues that hookup culture 'teaches young people to care less about their own feelings, and everybody else's, [and] that bodies are to be used and disposed of afterward'.²⁰⁴¹ But the lovers of the Song value each other and value the pleasure that they gain from their sexual relationality. While they have to face an obstacle in the development of their relationality, they have preferences for each other (and presumably care enough for each other) for their relationship to continue afterwards.²⁰⁴² As sexual activity is enjoyed in the Song, so forms of sexual script that do not create a culture of enjoyment -- because of the sense of regret associated with it, alongside any sense of exploitation or a lack of self-love -- would not comfortably fit with the vision of the lovers.²⁰⁴³

Furthermore, as the rules of the hookup mean that there is no scope for relational development, it is not one that fits with the value of having the scope for some sense of progression between two people. It is true that the repeated hookup with the same person is a phenomenon (a quasi-FWBR focused solely around sex).²⁰⁴⁴ And occasionally hookups have been known to lead to romantic relationships.²⁰⁴⁵ However, hookups in

²⁰³⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 110. Furthermore, Regnerus and Uecker, p. 112-113 observes that many emerging adult women 'feel duty bound' to not judge other women who participate in hookups, creating a perceived culture of acceptability, even if it is something that many women do not enjoy.

²⁰³⁶ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 11.

²⁰³⁷ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 11.

²⁰³⁸ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 15 discusses the potentially uncaring nature of the script.

²⁰³⁹ 14.2.9; 14.2.10; 14.2.11.

²⁰⁴⁰ Ind, p.96.

²⁰⁴¹ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, pp.15-16.

²⁰⁴² 14.2.6.

²⁰⁴³ Freitas, *The End of Sex*, p. 12 questions how much in many cases 'desire ... is part of the equation at all' of hooking up. Regnerus and Uecker, p. 110 notes the 'regret script' associated with sex and alcohol.

²⁰⁴⁴ Mongeau and others, p. 44.

²⁰⁴⁵ Olmstead, p. 788.

their scripted form do not allow relational development, and so would be rejected by the lovers. Bearing in mind the suggested limitation above that if it would be seemingly impossible to marry someone, then sexual activity with them would be inappropriate, the hookup script, both because of its scripted lack of potential for relational progression, as well as the lack of any holistic knowledge of the other person, would not be a script that would be supported by the lovers.²⁰⁴⁶

14.3.4 The Friends with Benefits Relationship Script

The next sex script to be considered in light of the values of the lovers is the FWBR script. In comparison with the 'hookup script', it is argued here that lovers would potentially value FWBRs. Participants in FWBRs note the numerous benefits that they perceive they have from this type of relationship.²⁰⁴⁷ FWBRs are describing as combining 'the psychological intimacy of friendship with the sexual intimacy of a romantic relationship'.²⁰⁴⁸ 'True' FWBRs thus add another dimension to an existing form of relationship with its own type of friendship intimacy.²⁰⁴⁹ It follows that there are numerous reasons why the lovers might potentially appreciate this script. It is a script in which there may be much opportunity to learn about relationships and sexuality.

Firstly, True FWBRs are those in which participants know each other in a fuller sense than only in a sexual way. In this respect, it affirms the value that desire is one aspect of the holistic relationality of the Song.²⁰⁵⁰ Unlike the hookup script, where the other is not really known, True FWBRs are friendships, and so provide a potentially integrated relationship for sexual activity. Friendships are relationships that have been developed through 'personal disclosure', and thus may have involved vulnerability to grow in friendship.²⁰⁵¹ As part of his wider argument, Thatcher theologically argues for 'sexual friendships', emphasising that sexual activity may be 'an expression of the celebration of friendship' and 'may enrich and enhance' a friendship.²⁰⁵² Friendship should not necessarily be defined as being a sexless relationship.²⁰⁵³ This seems to be affirmed by the actual experience of EAs in one study, in which comparison using an analysis tool (Sternberg's love scale) of FWBRs with both 'committed romantic relationships' and traditional friendship with the criteria of intimacy, commitment and passion, reveals that FWBRs

²⁰⁴⁶ 14.2.7.

²⁰⁴⁷ 3.4.15; Weaver and others, p. 46.

²⁰⁴⁸ Bisson and Levine, pp. 67, 68.

²⁰⁴⁹ Mongeau and others, p. 39 describes a 'True' FWBR as one in which 'close friends ... have sex on multiple occasions'.

²⁰⁵⁰ 14.2.9.

²⁰⁵¹ Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, pp. 162, 167.

²⁰⁵² Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, pp. 165, 167.

²⁰⁵³ Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, p. 166.

have been rightly labelled as friendship relationships.²⁰⁵⁴ According to Thatcher, theologies of sexual friendship have the potential to avoid the 'disastrous split ... between spirit and flesh, mind and body, reason and passion'.²⁰⁵⁵ The lovers of the Song would potentially affirm a script in which sexual expression is integrated.

Secondly, FWBRs is a script that has the theoretical potential to be egalitarian, allowing both men and women to be the ones to say that they would like to participate in sexual activities with another from the safe place of friendship intimacy.²⁰⁵⁶ Theoretically, at least, it may be a relational form which feminists would recognise as genuinely empowering for women, since the friendship has the potential to provide a framework in which women could be able to have sex 'on their terms'.²⁰⁵⁷ This is affirmed by EA participants of FWBRs who perceive them as being a 'relatively safe environment'.²⁰⁵⁸ Such safety has the potential to facilitate some form of safe vulnerability (which the lovers would affirm) and which Thatcher affirms would be part of a theology of sexual friendships.²⁰⁵⁹ Such a space could provide a place where 'desire as a reason for action' could be exercised. Obviously, in practice egalitarianism depends upon the egalitarianism of the people in the friendship, as there are examples of men who would just make contact with one of their female friends when they 'couldn't get hold of anyone else'.²⁰⁶⁰ But in principle, FWBRs have potential for egalitarianism in the context of safe vulnerability, particularly when compared to the hookup script.

Thirdly, in theory at least, an already established friendship intimacy could provide an appropriate context for the 'construction of relationality and sexuality through speech', meaning that talking about the relationship, and matters like consent, etc. may be possible because of the existing relationship.²⁰⁶¹ However, this is not necessarily the case, since

²⁰⁵⁴ Bisson and Levine, p. 72 observe that intimacy scores highly for FWBR, but that commitment and passion do not score as highly. All three of these values had higher scores for romantic relationships. See Robert J. Sternberg, *The Triangle of Love: Intimacy, Passion, Commitment* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1988),

²⁰⁵⁵ Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, pp. 171-172.

²⁰⁵⁶ Ind, p. 96 describes love of self as being 'able to ask for sex when we wanted it and we would be able to bear with the vulnerability that invitation engenders'.

²⁰⁵⁷ Srinivasan, p. 45 notes the importance of women being able to have sex 'on their terms'. Linda Kirkman, 'Doing Relationships Differently: Rural Baby Boomers Negotiate Friends-With-Benefits Relationships' (unpublished PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2015), pp. 93, 106 from her feminist perspective, discusses examples of FWBRs in which baby boomer heterosexual women specifically enjoyed the 'benefits' of this form of relationship. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, 'The Personal Is Still Political: Heterosexuality, Feminism and Monogamy', *Feminism & Psychology*, 14.1 (2004), 151-57 (pp. 155-156).

²⁰⁵⁸ Bisson and Levine, p. 69.

²⁰⁵⁹ 14.2.3; Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, p. 167.

²⁰⁶⁰ Regnerus, *Casual Sex*, p. 39.

²⁰⁶¹ 14.2.2.

one of the issues particularly surrounding FWBRs is the struggle for participants to be able to talk about it between themselves. Of course, the struggle to talk about sex and relationality within the context of relationships is not unique to FWBR.²⁰⁶² But it is a recognised experience of EA participants of FWBR.²⁰⁶³ Research suggests that amongst participants there is a great deal of ‘uncertainty’ around them related to the communicative difficulties, including ‘uncertainty about how to label the relationship, the future trajectory of the relationship, how they felt about the relationship, and if they could stay friends’.²⁰⁶⁴ But the experience of the inability to talk about FWBRs might have more to do with communicative difficulties than something necessarily being wrong with the script. If FWBRs were done in a such a way that the nature of the relationship was well communicated, then it is something that the lovers would likely affirm.

But how does this interpretation of the FWBR script relate to the value of ‘growing commitment associated with a sense of progression in the relationship’?²⁰⁶⁵ By its definition FWBRs in its ‘true’ form is not a script where there is scope for them to become romantic relationships, for the ‘rules’ do not allow it. And part of the perceived benefits are that there is the opportunity for sex without the complications of a romantic relationship.²⁰⁶⁶ For some within these relationships there is a concern that another may have ‘unreciprocated desires for romantic commitment’.²⁰⁶⁷ However, if the principle is applied to this script that if a person sees it as potentially impossible to marry a particular person then they should not be having sex with them, then trying to limit a FWBR strictly to the script and not allow it to develop into a romantic relationship is unreasonable and potentially unloving. The fact is that ‘some FWBR partners do have romantic feelings’ and ‘when romantic interest is mutual a FWBR *can* become a romantic relationship’.²⁰⁶⁸ The emphasis of a growing commitment between the lovers of the Song means that a FWBR should at least have the potential to progress to something more, for the lovers to affirm it. If one enters the relationship elevator, even if the relationship is following a different script from traditional romantic relationships, then to put a limit on the floor that can be reached is to limit the potential of following that script. Good communication could mean that participants are to review the FWBR script to see if it matches their genuine wishes, in a

²⁰⁶² See discussion in 3.4.7 of evangelical students unable to talk about having oral sex together.

²⁰⁶³ Bisson and Levine, pp. 70-71.

²⁰⁶⁴ Bisson and Levine, pp. 70-71 make this observation and in their study 85% of FWBRs had no ‘relationship talk initiated and 73% indicated no discussion of relationship ground rules’.

²⁰⁶⁵ 14.2.7.

²⁰⁶⁶ Bisson, p. 66.

²⁰⁶⁷ Bisson and Levine, pp. 66, 70, 72.

²⁰⁶⁸ Mongeau and others, p. 38. Regnerus, *Casual Sex*, p. 39 shares the example of Jessica who had a four year ‘dead-end’ FWBR hoping that it would become romantic, but it never did.

not dissimilar way from the way this happens in romantic relationships.²⁰⁶⁹

14.3.5 The Starting a Relationship with Sex Script

The third sex script to be considered is the 'starting a relationship with sex' script, which as discussed above has the significant problem that it hardly ever achieves its goal for those who enact it.²⁰⁷⁰ The further problem from the perspective of the values of the lovers is that this script potentially fails to be holistically integrated if it does not start with some form of existing knowledge and relationship with the other person, in this respect being similar to the hookup. It does not follow a natural relationship progression, attempting instead of trying to get into the relationship elevator from a higher floor, a floor which often does not have a door to the elevator. And as such it does not follow the value of the wisdom of timeliness.²⁰⁷¹ While there is ambiguity in the opening passage of the Song, if the lovers had tried this script in the contemporary world, it is unlikely that their relationship would have developed in the way that it does in the text.²⁰⁷² Thus, it is probably one that they would not wholeheartedly support in the contemporary horizon.

14.3.6 Concluding the Analysis of the Sex Scripts

To conclude, the sex scripts of hookups and starting a relationship with sex may meet some of the sexual needs of EAs, by being ways available for action in response to desire.²⁰⁷³ However, in both of these cases they potentially remove sexual activity from a holistic knowing of the other person, as well as not necessarily being particularly sexually satisfying for women in comparison to romantic relationships. FWBRs in the true context of friendship (and not simply friends for the sole purpose of sex) on the other hand have much more potential as a sex script. But sexual activity has the potential to change friendships, and so there must be the potential to move to an alternative relationship script. Here it is argued that the lovers would best affirm a hybrid version of FWBRs, since the potential for progression in terms of relationality and desire is important for the lovers of the Song, and so there should not be a limit set on how a relationship should be allowed to progress by the limit of a strict following of a sex script.

14.3.7 Premarital Serial Monogamy as a Relationship Script

Having discussed how the lovers might reflect on some of the sex scripts in the contemporary horizon, this thesis will now discuss the relationship script of premarital serial monogamy.²⁰⁷⁴ This is the script in which 'the majority of young adults were found to

²⁰⁶⁹ Regnerus, *Casual Sex*, p. 39

²⁰⁷⁰ 3.4.16.

²⁰⁷¹ 14.2.11.

²⁰⁷² 14.2.8.

²⁰⁷³ 14.2.1.

²⁰⁷⁴ There are other relationship scripts in the contemporary cultural horizon (such as consensual

expect sexual activity to occur' and it provides the frame in which most premarital sexual activity happens.²⁰⁷⁵ According to the values of the lovers, if they were in the contemporary horizon, they would arguably see premarital serial monogamy as a best fit script. This is not necessarily surprising, bearing in mind that the relationship between the two lovers is a central theme. This script has the scope for desire and attraction to be a reason for action, for recognition of preference and the construction of relationality through speech.²⁰⁷⁶ It is a script large enough to allow some degree of ambiguity as to how a relationship might begin (allowing many different ways that people may get to know each other and interact), and it does not demand that the end is known from the beginning.²⁰⁷⁷ It can give space for vulnerability, strength and security to grow in a relationship, for growing commitment alongside a sense of progression and for the recognition of the wisdom of timeliness.²⁰⁷⁸ It is a script that has the potential to lead to marriage.

Furthermore, depending upon the participants, it also has potential for egalitarianism, even if many egalitarians 'still behave in ways that are consistent with cultural scripts at the start of their relationships'.²⁰⁷⁹ As 'committed sexual encounters' they are a script in which sexual activity has been perceived as being more enjoyable for EA women than alternatives like hookups.²⁰⁸⁰ This integratedness is reflected in that the script frames desire as one aspect of relationality, thus providing a more holistic experience than sex scripts like hookup culture, in which the other person is often not really known.²⁰⁸¹ If the lovers had to engage with serial monogamy in the contemporary world, they would aspire it to be a script in which both participants could equally call the other to love, thereby empowering women to be able to make the moves that they genuinely wish to make.

Of course, serial monogamy is not a perfect relationship script. Any relationship or sexual script is only as virtuous as the way that people virtuously follow them. And there are ways too, beyond the values of the lovers (with their principally monogamous focus) that are possible limitations to serial monogamy. For example, if human beings are wired to be polyamorous, then strict serial monogamy will potentially lead to 'cheating' scenarios.²⁰⁸² According to the rules of serial monogamy amongst EAs, 'cheating' is not allowed, and it

non-Monogamy), but these require more discussion than is possible here.

²⁰⁷⁵ Olmstead, p. 775; Regnerus and Uecker, p. 23.

²⁰⁷⁶ 14.2.1; 14.2.2; 14.2.4.

²⁰⁷⁷ 14.2.5; 14.2.8.

²⁰⁷⁸ 14.2.3; 14.2.7; 14.2.11.

²⁰⁷⁹ Swami, *Attraction Explained*, p. 267; 14.2.10; see also Olmstead, p. 775.

²⁰⁸⁰ Olmstead, p. 782.

²⁰⁸¹ 14.2.9.

²⁰⁸² Ryan and Jethá, pp. 299-300.

‘remains a serious norm violation that gives the victimized party ... a perceived moral obligation to end the relationship’, whether or not they actually want to, or think that it is right to do so.²⁰⁸³ Some feminists suggest that this compulsory ending of a relationship is a particular unfortunate structural aspect of the serial monogamy script.²⁰⁸⁴ But the other side of the coin is the permission-giving ability to be able to end a relationship in which a participant becomes certain that they could never marry the other person.

However, with all of its problems, as the dominant relationship script within the Western cultural horizon, serial monogamy is a script that is known about amongst EAs. It is also a script which can lead to the ‘permanent’ monogamy script of marriage, which is a script still desired in its capstone form by many EAs, and still strongly emphasised by Christian churches. Serial monogamy gives the opportunity for sexual and relational experience for many, and for EAs can be ‘like training for learning how to have a relationship that could lead to marriage’.²⁰⁸⁵ Out of the relationship scripts considered it is a best fit according to the values of the lovers of the Song.²⁰⁸⁶ But FWBRs as a sex script may also have some significant potential.

14.4 Wider Ethical Considerations

The chapter so far has sought to provocatively provide some parameters towards what it terms an EA ‘theology of dating’ based upon the positive portrayal of sexuality in the Song. It comes from the position of arguing that without research like this that pushes the boundaries, that, as it stands, many Christian theologies effectively prohibit dating, which potentially can consequently lead to ‘cognitive dissonance’ and ‘alienation from religion’.²⁰⁸⁷ The research itself thus comes from the position of seeing human flourishing as including the possibility of romantic and sexual relationships. This would be the perspective of the lovers of the Song.

The parameters towards an EA Theology of dating came out of thinking about the situation in the light of ethical questions. And the parameters themselves raise all sorts of questions, including ethical ones. And as a positive perspective, as sexuality is always

²⁰⁸³ Regnerus and Uecker, pp. 23-24.

²⁰⁸⁴ Jackson and Scott, p. 157; see also the discussion of upper and lower hands in Regnerus and Uecker, p. 73.

²⁰⁸⁵ Regnerus and Uecker, p. 15.

²⁰⁸⁶ Grant, p. 46 criticises serial monogamy, instead promoting young marriage. This may be possible in some situations where there is a plausibility structure making this seem like an appropriate idea, but not all Christians have this, and for many the ‘capstone’ model is strongly influential.

²⁰⁸⁷ 1.1.1, King and Freitas, pp. 26-28. See also Marvin Mahan Ellison, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 130.

controversial from someone's perspective, and as it is an extremely complex topic, this thesis cannot deal extensively with many of these ethical questions, bearing in mind that this thesis provides some parameters *towards* a 'theology of dating' Such a study would require a fuller discussion than is able to be given here. Nonetheless, there are some ethical issues of more negative aspects of sexuality and relationships that need to be acknowledged.

It follows that the nature of any discussion about sexual ethics is that issues are related. Arguing for a more positive perspective of sexual desire and its role in premarital relationships has potential consequences for the ethics of the use of contraception, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and sexual health related issues. It also raises the question as to what extent a sexual ethic should seek (or be seen) to be distinctively Christian or what does it mean for a sexual ethic to be distinctively Christian if sexual behaviour is not strictly limited to marriage.²⁰⁸⁸ How might the suggested sexual ethic work in practice for followers of Jesus Christ, as those who 'bend the knee to him as a sign of worship and adoration'?²⁰⁸⁹

How does this work in cultural world in which recent research suggests that 'half of U.S. Christians say casual sex between consenting adults is sometimes or always acceptable'?²⁰⁹⁰ Over recent decades, different local churches and mainstream denominations, as well as academics and clergy have reflected and responded differently to sexual ethics within the changing cultural world. This section will briefly reflect upon these wider ethical issues of this thesis in this light. Finally, the ethical discussion will conclude by considering the question as to whether the Song itself can be accepted from an ethical perspective.

14.4.1 Roman Catholic Sexual Ethics

Roman Catholic Sexual Ethics, with its conservative stance on the use of contraception and abortion, and its use of 'Natural Law' is one approach to Sexual Ethics.²⁰⁹¹ It is an

²⁰⁸⁸ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 3.

²⁰⁸⁹ D. Stephen Long, *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, 238 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 4-5.

²⁰⁹⁰ Jeff Diamant, 'Half of U.S. Christians Say Casual Sex between Consenting Adults Is Sometimes or Always Acceptable', *Pew Research Center* <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>> [accessed 26 May 2022].

²⁰⁹¹ Stuart and Thatcher, pp. 43-45. Andrew Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics Since Vatican II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 30 defines Natural law as being the belief that 'an objective moral law ... both exist[s and is] ... accessible to us, which is something that the Catholic moral tradition has always maintained'.

approach of ‘absolute sexual norms’.²⁰⁹² Importantly, some distinction should be noted between the official teaching of the Catholic Church and theologians (many being lay people) that make up its membership.²⁰⁹³ As an approach which seeks to strictly limit sexual intercourse to heterosexual marriage (with chastity beforehand), it seeks to be an integrated approach.²⁰⁹⁴ It is required by Catholic teaching that sexual intercourse only takes within marriage and that it has both ‘unitive significance’ and ‘procreative significance, which are both inherent to the marriage act’.²⁰⁹⁵ This means by Catholic teaching that within the institution of marriage, contraception is considered to be ‘not merely wrong, but an “intrinsic evil”’.²⁰⁹⁶ Abortion is understood to be ‘always wrong’, based upon the interpretation of the Fifth Commandment (not to kill/murder) to a human foetus.²⁰⁹⁷ Importantly for those who hold to this position, this stance provides ‘clear teaching’ and ‘enables a counter-cultural stance to be taken, which firms up Christian identity’.²⁰⁹⁸

However, the evidence suggests that this position is often not held either in belief or practice by many EA, and other Catholics.²⁰⁹⁹ It is one at which some EA Catholics who were studied ‘literally laughed [at] out loud’.²¹⁰⁰ And regrettably the Roman Catholic Church has so sadly woefully publicly failed in the issues of successfully addressing sexual issues, perhaps most evidently seen by the sexual behaviour of its clergy,

Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *Introduction to Catholic Theological Ethics: Foundations and Applications* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), p. 2 note that ‘argument is never from “nature” alone or ‘reason alone, but always from “nature” interpreted by reason’.

²⁰⁹² Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, WA: Georgetown University Press, 2008), p. 74.

²⁰⁹³ Charles E Curran, ‘Foreword’, in *The Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology*, by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler (Washington, WA: Georgetown University Press, 2008), pp. xi–xvi (pp. xiii–xv).

²⁰⁹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana - Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, 1976

<https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html> [accessed 6 June 2022] states that ‘every genital act must be within the framework of marriage’.

²⁰⁹⁵ Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 25 July 1968 <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html> [accessed 6 June 2022], #12. Long, p. 107 summarises the unitive meaning as ‘uniting the two persons in an intimate relation’.

²⁰⁹⁶ This quote is from Stuart and Thatcher, p. 45. This is expressed in *Humanae Vitae*, # 11, that ‘each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life’.

²⁰⁹⁷ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 44.

²⁰⁹⁸ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 46.

²⁰⁹⁹ Freitas, p. 13. Curran, p. xi suggests that ‘the vast majority of Roman Catholics do not follow the teaching of the Catholic Church’.

²¹⁰⁰ Freitas, p. 13.

particularly with regards the sexual abuse of minors.²¹⁰¹ Some Catholic academics argue that forced clerical celibacy is associated with clerical sexual abuse.²¹⁰² It is no surprise that in the light of these scandals that some progressive Catholics have called for a 'long overdue re-examination' of everything that the church officially teaches about medical ethics and sexuality.²¹⁰³ The approach of the Roman Catholic Church (with its official teaching as authority) to the suppression of sexual desire by means of outlawing contraception, abortion and divorce is one approach to sexual ethics, and arguably a failing one in terms of the disconnect between official church teaching and the sexual behaviour of many of its EA and other members.²¹⁰⁴ Significantly, it does not fit with the pro-sexuality perspective of the Song and the parameters argued for here. The approach is an example of the 'conservative Christian temptation to fashion absoluteness that stands disconnected from the dominant culture'.²¹⁰⁵ Many Catholics may be 'unpersuaded by [the approach's] absolute language and [its] arguments from authority'.²¹⁰⁶

14.4.2 Ethics of contraception amongst other churches

The approaches of other mainstream British denominations to contemporary sexual ethics perhaps shows some degree of stronger empathy with the 'pastoral realities of the lives of sexually active Christian men and women'.²¹⁰⁷ While churches still generally limit themselves to the official teaching of 'no sex before marriage' (and the problems described in 3.4.6 about the effectiveness and usefulness of this teaching amongst EAs), the acceptance of its use amongst protestants has largely facilitated the separation between 'sexual activity' and 'procreative activity' in terms of their thinking about sex.²¹⁰⁸ And in practice the 'availability of contraception' has resulted in greater freedom for those who use contraception of having a much lower chance of pregnancy, whether sex takes place within or outside marriage.²¹⁰⁹ The Methodist Church in 1990, for example, recognised the 'freedom' this separation between procreative and sexual activity brings 'to

²¹⁰¹ Nancy Scheper-Hughes and John Devine, 'Priestly Celibacy and Child Sexual Abuse', *Sexualities*, 6.1 (2003), 15–40 (p. 18) comments on the widely publicised statistic (from an unknown source) that 5% of Catholic clergy have 'been involved in sexual abuse', arguing that 'the crimes have occurred on magnitude which belies the feeble rationalization that clerical paedophilia is no more common than that which can be found in society at large'.

²¹⁰² This is discussed in Scheper-Hughes and Devine, pp. 18-21. One particular scholar who stresses this link is Garry Wills, *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit* (London: Darton, Longman + Todd, 2000), pp. 185-187.

²¹⁰³ Scheper-Hughes and Devine, p. 20.

²¹⁰⁴ Curran, p. xi.

²¹⁰⁵ Sharp, *Introduction*, p. 8. Here Sharp is quoting Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 27.

²¹⁰⁶ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 46.

²¹⁰⁷ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 46.

²¹⁰⁸ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 46. Such an approach differs from Catholic perspectives where there must be a procreative meaning to marriage.

²¹⁰⁹ Stuart and Thatcher, pp. 45-46.

value sexual activity for itself', instead of for procreative purposes, acknowledging that this 'freedom' is something 'known already by lesbians and gay men', who of course, at the time were unable to marry.²¹¹⁰

It follows that the extrapolation of the use of this language of freedom created by the use of contraception (and verbalised by the Methodist Church) is something that is applicable to the parameters for an EA theology of dating being argued for here. Bearing in mind such little attention is paid to procreativity by the lovers in the Song, them instead emphasising sexual desire without an emphasis on procreativity, it is reasonable to argue for a means by which sexual activity can be experienced without its association with procreativity.²¹¹¹

Moreover, other churches are also considering the use of contraception amongst unmarried Christians because of the reality of the number of unwanted pregnancies. As mentioned above, the National Association of Evangelicals in the US is one such group, in their case to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, because of their conservative ethic towards abortion.²¹¹² Their discussions recognise the reality of the sexual behaviour of their teenagers and EA potentially means that the use of contraception is better in terms of sexual ethics than the abortion of unwanted pregnancies.²¹¹³ This both demonstrates the interconnectedness of issues of sexual ethics, but also the reality of sexual behaviour of young Christian people, and why a considered sexual ethic for EAs is important. If the National Association of Evangelicals were to take the step of recognising the use of premarital contraception as being necessary, then their understanding of Christian distinctiveness, as of that of the parameters of this thesis, would be different in form from the absolutism of Roman Catholicism.

For the parameters of this thesis, recognising the importance of the use of contraception reduces the risk of sexual transmitted infection (STI), as well as unwanted pregnancies. Bearing in mind that some statistics indicate that sexual activity does not happen any less amongst young Christians compared to that age group more generally, but that the risk of sexually transmitted infection is higher because of the lack of use of contraception,

²¹¹⁰ The Methodist Church of Great Britain, *The Report of the Conference Commission on Human Sexuality*, 1990, #14. Of course, Same Sex Marriage is itself a contemporary issue to which churches are debating and responding differently.

²¹¹¹ 2.4.3.

²¹¹² 3.4.6; Banks, 'Evangelicals Say It's Time for Frank Talk about Sex'.

²¹¹³ Banks, 'Evangelicals Say It's Time for Frank Talk about Sex'.

arguing for the use of contraception seems both sensible and necessary.²¹¹⁴ This is supported by similar research by Clapp, which concludes that churches his research that provided teenagers information about contraception as part of their ‘sexuality education’ did not end up with more teenagers having sex, but did result in less STIs and unwanted pregnancies.²¹¹⁵

14.4.3 Start of life ethics, unwanted pregnancies and STIs

Any heterosexual sexual ethic which accepts the reality of premarital sexual activity amongst EAs leaves open the possibility of pregnancy, and this raises the potential ethical questions about unwanted pregnancies and the ethicacy of abortion.²¹¹⁶ And sexual intercourse without the use of condoms can also lead to the spread of STIs. Both of these situations emphasise that sexual activity can have ‘life-altering’ consequences.²¹¹⁷ And these consequences can also have wider societal implications, such as in the case of unwanted pregnancies, financial costs to the state (where such provision is available) of abortions or adoptions.

Amongst individual Christians and different churches, there are numerous different views on abortion. While official Roman Catholic teaching espouses one absolute position, Christians and churches have different, and sometimes nuanced, views on this.²¹¹⁸ Ethics may emphasise on the one hand the right to life of the foetus or on the other ‘the total dependence of the fetus on the mother, to whose life, capacities or existing responsibilities the fetus may pose a threat of which she is acutely aware’.²¹¹⁹ Different Christians may emphasise one of these emphases over the other. But one piece of research suggests that while there are different views on abortion, it is common amongst US women of faith, applying to 80% of women having an abortion in that piece of

²¹¹⁴ Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 153.

²¹¹⁵ Steve Clapp, Kristen Leverton Helbert, and Angela Zizak, *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality* (Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest, 2010), p. 121; Ellison, p. 122.

²¹¹⁶ Pregnancy scares are a common experience amongst EAs, according to Regnerus and Uecker, p. 45.

²¹¹⁷ Ellison, p. 100.

²¹¹⁸ Official Catholic teaching does not allow ‘formal co-operation’ in abortion (see Stuart and Thatcher, p. 44). For one example of a different (and nuanced) response, see a recent official response given to an operation open letter on the issue. Church of England, ‘Response to Open Letter on Abortion’, *The Church of England*, 2019 <<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/response-open-letter-abortion>> [accessed 15 June 2022].

²¹¹⁹ This quote is from The Methodist Church of Great Britain, *A Methodist Statement on Abortion (Adopted by the Methodist Conference on 1976)*, 1976 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi_abortionstatement_76.pdf> [accessed 26 May 2022]. Ellison, pp. 99-112, as a Christian ethicist, discusses the well the ‘pro-choice arguments’. In terms of the pro-life perspective, part of the ethical basis for this argument is based upon reading the Fifth commandment’s prohibition to murder as applying to abortion, as well as understanding the foetus as being a ‘human person’. Stuart and Thatcher, p. 44.

research.²¹²⁰ It may well be that in terms of what actually happens, not having abortions does not appear to mark out Christians out as distinct, even if their churches have a more absolutist position in this area of sexual ethics.

Moreover, the tension between the two emphases is a reasonable one, as the issues involved are extremely complex, and involve attempting to care for both the foetus and the woman. It explains why some churches make statements such ‘there are situations in which abortions can be justified’.²¹²¹ As 14.4.2 argues for the acceptable use of contraception as a means to facilitate a prosexuality perspective, then if such a position is applied responsibly then this should prevent the risk of pregnancy, meaning that abortion should not be needed to be used as an ‘alternative to contraception’.²¹²² However, there is also the argument for freedom, and Ellison argues that the ‘Christian tradition has long celebrated human freedom to reshape life conditions, including intervening in natural processes so that human well-being is enhanced’ and so arguably this could be applied to the freedom of women in being able to end a pregnancy.²¹²³ Maybe what is required is the freedom for the persons involved to make responsible decisions, noting that each situation is complex and each situation is different, and the lives of the women involved matter too.²¹²⁴

Ultimately, what needs to be acknowledged is that sexual activity can have consequences in terms of unwanted pregnancies and STIs. This must be borne in mind when considering the values of the Song in terms of the ‘wisdom of restraint and wisdom of freedom’.²¹²⁵ Part of that wisdom in the contemporary world would reasonably include being aware of any risks involved and making wise choices about how to respond, especially in terms of risk-reduction. Part of that wisdom would surely be not to participate in sexual activity if there was not a preparedness to live with the potential

²¹²⁰ Ellison, p. 100 observes that in this study ‘43% identified as Protestant, 27% as Catholic, and 8% as belonging to other faith traditions’.

²¹²¹ Stuart and Thatcher, p. 44 mentions the Church of England’s position on this.

²¹²² The Methodist Church officially teaches that ‘abortion must not be regarded as an alternative to contraception, nor is it to be justified merely as a method of birth control’; The Methodist Church of Great Britain, *A Methodist Statement on Abortion (Adopted by the Methodist Conference on 1976)*, 1976.

²¹²³ This quote is from Ellison, p. 111. Ellison, p. 102 also argues that ‘procreation is ... properly situated within a moral freedom, discernment, and deliberation’.

²¹²⁴ Ellison, p. 111. Ellison, p. 102 also argues that ‘even though there is a moral presumption to care for and preserve human life, including developing foetal life, only a strict moral absolutist would insist that this one moral value necessarily trumps all other claims’.

²¹²⁵ 14.2.11.

consequences.²¹²⁶ The lovers of the Song do not emphasise pregnancy, and so in the contemporary horizon, one does not imagine them being concerned, for example, if the FP got married with a bump. But the emphasis of the wisdom of restraint and wisdom of freedom recognises the need to be responsible, and that behaviour can have unwanted consequences.

Moreover, this emphasis on wisdom in terms of sexual desire and activity in the church where premarital sex is potentially part of the lives of EAs stresses the importance of the Church providing genuinely helpful sex education. While from a feminist perspective, Srinivasan paints a picture of a 'real movement to abolish abortion' that would, amongst other things, have to include '(non-abstinence-based) sex education'.²¹²⁷ Similarly, from a Catholic perspective, in her discussion of sexuality amongst EAs, Freitas emphasises the importance of Christian (and secular) higher education institutions, as well as parents, and clergy focusing on the excellent provision of sex education (which extends beyond the practicalities of sexual activity).²¹²⁸ Such an education would seek to provide EAs with the tools to make wise decisions and give them a vision of living out their sexuality in the light of being a Christian.

14.4.4 Christian distinctiveness

Having briefly discussed some potential ethical implications of the parameters for an EA theology of dating, the question might be asked as to what this might mean in terms of Christian distinctiveness. The discussion has shown that contraception is accepted within some Christian churches because of the acknowledgement of the reality of premarital sexual activity. But the question of Christian distinctiveness means acknowledging that the wisdom being emphasised by the lovers of the Song for the contemporary Christian is found in several ways.

Firstly, the discussion reflecting on the hookup script in light of the values of the lovers of the Song would be one that would be rejected by the lovers for various reasons, including observing the way the hookup script fails in terms of love because sex is potentially 'disassociated from relating to the other person holistically'.²¹²⁹ In other words, there is a

²¹²⁶ Brueggemann, *Disruptive Grace*, p. 254 says that 'every act of freedom carries inescapable futures, so that present choices must be considered in light of the futures they inevitably generate. ...it follows then that freedom carries with it immense responsibility'.

²¹²⁷ Srinivasan, p. 121.

²¹²⁸ Freitas, p. 239; Ellison, p. 116 argues for a similar provision of genuinely helpful sex education for young people.

²¹²⁹ 14.3.3.

limit to what would be considered wise by the values of the lovers of the Song, and so what is not being called for by this suggested ethic is 'anything goes'. There have to be lines drawn somewhere.²¹³⁰ Secondly, for the Christian, the wisdom as to how to respond in light of the values of the lovers could be grown through the context of worship, and that is where distinctiveness is found. In discussing higher education institutions in the US, Freitas says that religiously affiliated institutions are often *better* prepared than secular schools for opening up new dialogues about sex, sexuality and hookup culture, *because* of the additional resources and spiritual practices they provide on campus'.²¹³¹ Freitas rightly suggests that it is through the 'opportunities to go on retreats, to seek spiritual direction, to practice mindfulness, contemplation, or attend worship, and other structured time that facilitates slowing down and developing the ability to avoid being overwhelmed by the many distractions and pressures that students face, has never been more important'.²¹³² Here living in love and worship of Christ provides the context for the growth in wisdom, a wisdom that is critical to the lovers of the Song. It provides the context in which Christian EAs think about their individual romantic and sexual relationships, and how God might guide them in the midst of them.

Reflecting upon these two aspects of wisdom as being part of Christian distinctiveness, some may respond that there does not seem to be a significant amount of distinctiveness in terms of the externals of behaviour if sexual activity before marriage is accepted and the use of contraception is permitted. But this is potentially to fall into the trap of an over-emphasis on 'externals'.²¹³³ Part of the thinking behind the New Perspective on Paul centres around the argument that Paul criticises the view that emphasising the keeping of 'specific acts ... marked one out as an insider in contrast to those outside the community'.²¹³⁴ Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16 speak of 'the works of the law', which through looking at both passages, Dunn as a pioneer in terms of the New Perspective interprets these as references to circumcision (Romans 2:25), the keeping of food laws (Galatians 2:1-15), and sabbath observation.²¹³⁵ This distinctiveness of Israel was 'deeply rooted in Israel's national consciousness' and according to Dunn, Paul emphasises that Israel sees that the law acted in sociological terms as both an 'identity marker' and

²¹³⁰ Ellison, p. 139.

²¹³¹ Freitas, p. 254.

²¹³² Freitas, p. 254.

²¹³³ Circumcision would potentially have been an 'external' distinctiveness in the ancient world when men had to bathe.

²¹³⁴ Michael B Thompson, *The New Perspective on Paul*, Grove Biblical Series (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2002), p. 10.

²¹³⁵ James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 38A, pp. lxxi, 152. Importantly, Dunn's position is an example of the 'New perspectives on Paul' school of Pauline studies. See Thompson, pp. 9-11 for a summary of Dunn's research.

'boundary' from other nations.²¹³⁶ But Paul's discourse in Romans before this in the previous one and a half chapters is a polemic against the 'works of the law', namely the 'Jewish pride in the law', and most of all its stress of the distinctiveness of circumcision.²¹³⁷ The same pride in distinctiveness (in the externals of food laws and circumcision) is also criticised by the reference to the 'works of the law' in Galatians 2:16.²¹³⁸ It was pride and justification by these 'make or break' externals that Paul speaks against through his polemic.²¹³⁹ If taking pride in the externals of behaviour is considered more generally, it may well be the case that through the meaningfully good intention of trying to create Christian distinctiveness that Christians and churches have overemphasised externals, including in the areas of sexual behaviour, externals such as that Christians should not be seen to have sexual intercourse before marriage or that Christians should not be seen to be in possession of contraception.²¹⁴⁰ But the values of the lovers of the Song potentially call for wisdom in terms of sexual activity, wisdom that might not fit neatly in terms of externals that some may wish for.²¹⁴¹ Speaking of his own research, Ellison comments that 'if what counts as authentically Christian is allegiance to a fear-based, patriarchal paradigm of sexual and social control, then this study fails the test'.²¹⁴² A fear-based patriarchal paradigm is not one that the lovers of the Song would endorse.

To conclude this discussion of Christian distinctiveness, the parameters proposed by this thesis seek to be genuinely Christian, by attempting to strike a greater balance between the effective dualism that is so prevalent amongst Christian perspectives about sex.²¹⁴³ This thesis argues for a 'balanced theology of sex which seeks avoids the extremes of the "hook-up culture" on the one hand, and the "no-sex-thank-you-we-are-evangelicals" on the other'.²¹⁴⁴

14.4.5 Accepting the Song from an Ethical Perspective

The final ethical matter to be very briefly touched upon is, can the Song itself be accepted from an ethical perspective, bearing in mind that there are biblical texts that many people

²¹³⁶ Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, p. lxix.

²¹³⁷ Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, p. 154. Dunn also included external faithfulness to the Jewish calendar and following the dietary rules. See discussion in Thompson, p. 10.

²¹³⁸ James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1993), p. 136.

²¹³⁹ Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 136.

²¹⁴⁰ This thesis has emphasised that some EA Christians do have premarital sex, as discussed in 3.4.6.

²¹⁴¹ One good example of this would be the discussion of the FP's behaviour in the night-time passages (3:1-5; 5:2-8); 13.3.5.

²¹⁴² Ellison, p. 139.

²¹⁴³ Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, pp. 3-4.

²¹⁴⁴ Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex*, p. 5.

today would not see as being ethical, for example, texts that Tribble might classify as ‘Texts of Terror’.²¹⁴⁵ Davies describes the problem that the HS ‘often appears to advocate moral standards that seem to us to be offensive and unacceptable’;²¹⁴⁶ Important hermeneutical questions are raised here including how does one make a judgement as to whether a Scriptural text is ethical and who has the right to make that judgement?²¹⁴⁷ But for contemporary readers many texts in the HS would be considered abhorrent because of the cultural world portrayed when judged from Western values of the contemporary world. Of those texts that deal with sexual issues, ones that might be considered particularly abhorrent would potentially include Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 22:28-29 and Genesis 38:24, because of the way that women are treated in these texts.²¹⁴⁸ Reeder is correct to note that ‘we live in a world ... in which violence against women and the punishment of women for perceived sexual wrongdoing are all too frequent’.²¹⁴⁹

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 describes the scenario of a man publicly accusing his wife of not being a virgin, because of his hatred towards her.²¹⁵⁰ If he is proven to be telling the truth, she is to be stoned to death.²¹⁵¹ If it is proven that he is slandering her, he is not allowed to divorce her, and he is to pay the father of the woman one hundred shekels.²¹⁵² Here the punishment within this patriarchal society is unfairly stacked against the woman, because the man who had sex with her to lose her virginity is not punished, and potentially even worse, there need be no witnesses or any evidence of any actual

²¹⁴⁵ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror* (London: SCM, 2002).

²¹⁴⁶ Eryl W. Davies, *The Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), p. 3.

²¹⁴⁷ Davies, p. vi lists different hermeneutical responses offered to these ‘immoral passages’, such as the Evolutionary approach, the Cultural Relativist approach, the Canonical approach, the Paradigmatic approach, and the Reader-Response approach. Melissa Raphael, ‘Hermeneutics from a Feminist Perspective’, in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, ed. by Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 99–102 (p. 99) note that Feminist hermeneutics as a method, for example is ‘guided by its own absolute ethical values; it believes that the text has a message to reclaim from its “patriarchal captivity”’.

²¹⁴⁸ Examples of discussion of aware of this perception by scholars for these passages include Caryn A. Reeder, ‘Sex and Execution: Deuteronomy 22:20-24’, *The Expository Times*, 124.6 (2013), 272–81 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524612465382>>; Sandra L Richter, ‘Rape in Israel’s World ... and Ours: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:23–29’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 64.1 (2021), 59–76.

²¹⁴⁹ Reeder, p. 272.

²¹⁵⁰ Christensen, p. 519, Reeder, pp. 274-275.

²¹⁵¹ Deuteronomy 22:15-16 states that the father of the woman is to provide the evidence of the woman’s virginity, by showing the ‘wedding cloth’. See discussion in Christensen, p. 520. Davies, p. 5 observes that death by stoning was only also called for as a means of punishment for idolaters (Deuteronomy 13:6-11) and blasphemers (Leviticus 24:14).

²¹⁵² The text also says that he is to be *ysr* (disciplined/chastised), which may be a reference to flogging, as it is in the ancient versions; Christensen, p. 520.

violation.²¹⁵³ Similarly, Deuteronomy 22:28-29 describes the situation of a man raping a virgin woman, and if he is caught in the act he is to pay fifty shekels of silver (the bride-price) and he is not allowed to divorce, no matter what the feelings of the woman at being forced to be married to her rapist.²¹⁵⁴ Again, by today's values, the treatment of the woman by this law is abhorrent.²¹⁵⁵ And perhaps this was recognised in later Jewish tradition, where it became possible for the father and woman to pass on the marriage.²¹⁵⁶ Lastly, in Genesis 38:24 Tamar is prescribed a punishment of being burnt to death by order of Judah (her father-in-law), because of the perception that she has 'played the whore', in this case getting pregnant, hypocritically through Judah himself.²¹⁵⁷ From today's perspectives, the treatment of women in these passages within the patriarchal culture is abhorrent and would not be something that would be acceptable from an ethical perspective within contemporary Western society.

Moreover, it needs to be acknowledged that the Song too has its own difficult passage which describes the violence against the FP at the hands of the watchmen.²¹⁵⁸ This is something deeply disturbing and should not be underplayed, as is emphasised in Section 8.8.5. And what is even more potentially disturbing is that the FP does not make any comment about the violence.²¹⁵⁹ The discussion has observed that the watchmen act as an additional obstacle between the lovers.²¹⁶⁰ This is not to ignore the violence that the text portrays them as committing. But the important question is should this strange portrayal of an act of violence mean that the Song as a whole should be considered unethical? To make a judgement like this would potentially be 'to throw the baby out with the bathwater'. Numerous feminist scholars note the incredible value of the Song, even though the second night-time passage indicates that the lovers (with their relative egalitarian relationship) still exist in a patriarchal world.²¹⁶¹ Ostriker perhaps observes well

²¹⁵³ Reeder, p. 275 makes these observations, as well as noting that not every woman bleeds the first time that they have sexual intercourse.

²¹⁵⁴ Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness Rape in the Hebrew Bible*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 116-117; Christensen, p. 522.

²¹⁵⁵ Scholz, pp. 116-117, observes that this law is harsher than other ANE ones, such as the Code of Hammurabi, SS 156, in which a woman was not restricted in this way.

²¹⁵⁶ Christensen, p. 522.

²¹⁵⁷ Bergant, *Genesis*, p. 106 notes that her betrothal to Shelah means that her being pregnant is considered to be evidence of an act of adultery. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 368 notes that because of this, by the law described in Deuteronomy 22:21, it would be legal for him to call for the penalty of death, but Wenham also suggests that calling for death by burning 'was extreme'.

²¹⁵⁸ 5:7; 8.8.5. Ostriker, pp. 51-52 describes the challenge of debating this passage with her students.

²¹⁵⁹ 8.8.5; Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 198.

²¹⁶⁰ 8.8.5; Duguid, p. 129.

²¹⁶¹ Exum, *Song of Songs*, pp. 80-81 and Spencer, p. lii discuss their readings of patriarchy within the wider context of the Song.

that 'within the larger structure of the Bible, the Song is like a loophole through which we peak into an alternative existence. Within the Song, this episode is like a loophole through which we peer back at existence as we know it'.²¹⁶² Consequently, the Song as a text should not be rejected from an ethical perspective if it gives us a glimmer of the sad reality and existence of sin and violence in our world.

14.5 Chapter Conclusion

There is much in this chapter for further research and reflection. The values of the lovers have provided the opportunity for the discussion of some contemporary sex and relationship scripts of EAs, to present some parameters for a 'Theology of Dating' as this thesis's contribution to knowledge. The values and discussion of the scripts give an opportunity for further discussion by theologians and ethicists, as well as providing further resources for discussion of these matters amongst those involved in education and support of EAs, including churches and educational institutions. The significance of this chapter is that it seeks to artistically approach this subject from the perspective of the lovers of the Song. And their voices are worth listening to.

²¹⁶² Ostriker, p. 52.

Chapter 15: Concluding remarks and further research

15.1 Concluding Remarks

Relationships in the contemporary Western world are changing. Changing ideas about sexuality and gender are having a significant impact on contemporary generations. In the midst of all of this the Christian Church in its diversity is having to find ways to respond to the pastoral and missional situation. This situation, alongside the contemporary world of Biblical studies, created the opportunity for this thesis to seriously consider the important issue of premarital relationships of EAs from one particular reading of the Song. From this it has sought to provide some parameters for further developing a 'Theology of Dating' as well as considering some of the contemporary relational and sexual scripts that EAs face in the contemporary horizon. EAs (and others) cannot exist apart from their wider culture and so the scriptural reflection on these scripts provides new insights within the contemporary horizon.

15.2 Further Research

With the development of new relationship and sex scripts within the contemporary horizon, as well as changing ideas about sexuality and gender, there are many potential opportunities for further research. Firstly, this thesis has primarily focused upon premarital relationships amongst EAs. This means that other age groups, and other relationship stages (e.g., divorced, widowed etc.) have sex and relationship scripts that can be considered in light of the values. Secondly, other texts in the HS will potentially have different insights to offer about contemporary scripts, and so they could be considered independently and in light of this research. Thirdly, a type of script that has not received any much attention here are the various forms of Consensual Non-Monogamy, being another type of script practised amongst EAs.²¹⁶³ Witte notes that now that Same Sex Marriage is largely normalised within much of Western Society, the issue of the recognition of polyamorous marriage by the state is a debate potentially waiting to happen.²¹⁶⁴ How theology makes sense of this in the light of the contemporary world is another question to be explored. Fourthly, taking the first, second and third potential opportunities for further research into account, as this thesis has sought to provide a framework for a 'Theology of Dating', there is scope for a more formal and generalised

²¹⁶³ Olmstead, pp. 783-784 notes that Consensual Non-Monogamy includes 'polyamory, swinging, and open-relationships or marriages'. They are different from sex scripts because of an emphasis of these relationships can be *commitment* to multiple people.

²¹⁶⁴ Witte, p. 444.

'theology of dating' to be established, in the sense of providing a fuller vision of dating for the Christian church.

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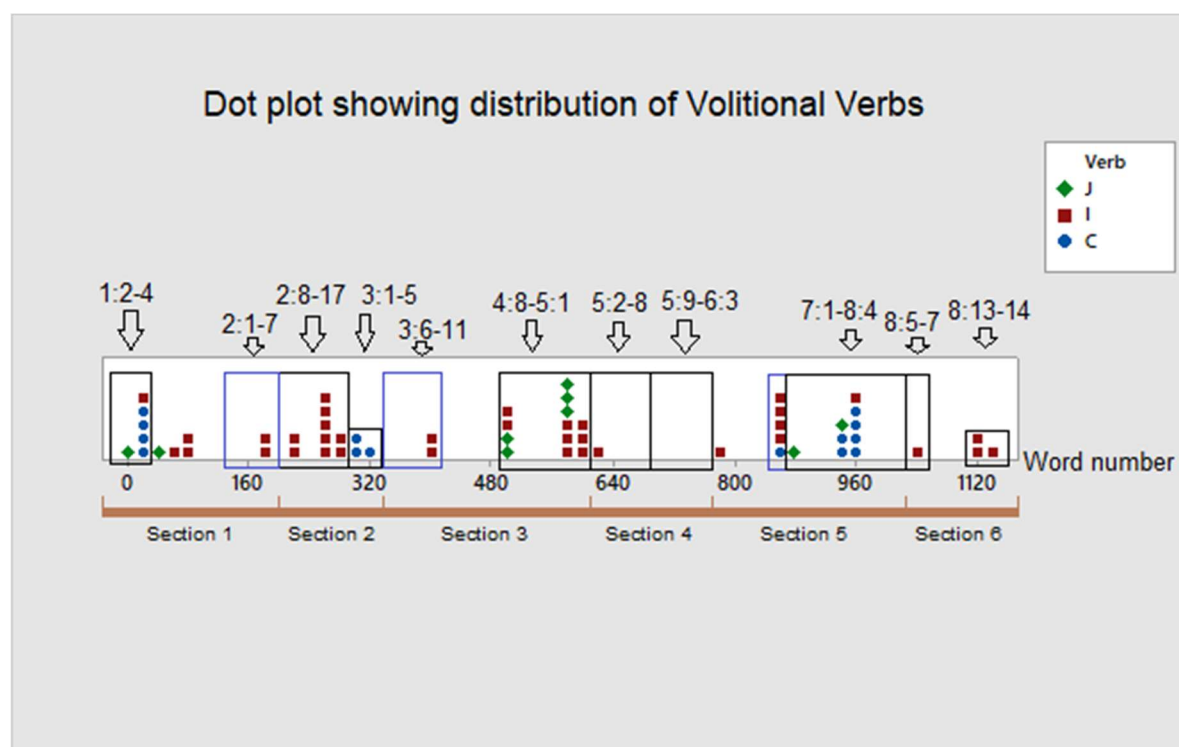
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Dot plot Showing the Distribution of Uses of Volitional Verbs in the Song



Appendix 2: Table of Uses of Volitional Verbs in the Song

Ref	Form	Person	Hebrew Word	Translation	Speaker	Addressee
1:2	J	3ms	<i>yîssāqēnî</i>	let him kiss me	FP	ML
1:4	I	2ms	<i>moškēnî</i>	draw me	FP	ML
1:4	C	1cp	<i>nārûṣâ</i>	let us flee	FP	ML
1:4	C	1cp	<i>nāgilâ</i>	we will exult	DoJ	ML
1:4	C	1cp	<i>nîsmēḥāh</i>	we will rejoice	DoJ	ML
1:4	C	1cp	<i>nazkîrâ</i>	we will extol	DoJ	ML
1:6	J	2mp	<i>tir'û</i>	gaze	FP	DoJ
1:7	I	2ms	<i>haggîdâ</i>	tell	FP	ML
1:8	I	2fs	<i>ṣē'î</i>	follow	ML	FP
1:8	I	2fs	<i>rē'îy</i>	pasture	ML	FP
2:5	I	2mp	<i>sammēkūniy</i>	sustain me	FP	DoJ
2:5	I	2mp	<i>rappēdūnî</i>	refresh me	FP	DoJ
2:10	I	2fs	<i>qūmî</i>	arise	ML	FP
2:10	I	2fs	<i>lēkî</i>	come	ML	FP
2:13	I	2fs	<i>qūmî</i>	arise	ML	FP
2:13	I	2fs	<i>lēkî</i>	come	ML	FP
2:14	I	2fs	<i>har'îniy</i>	let me see	ML	FP
2:14	I	2fs	<i>hašmî'îni</i>	let me hear	ML	FP
2:15	I	2mp	<i>'eḥēzû-lanû</i>	catch for us	FP	DoJ
2:17	I	2ms	<i>sōb</i>	turn	FP	ML
2:17	I	2ms	<i>dēmē-lēkā</i>	be like	FP	ML
3:2	C	1cs	<i>'āqūmā</i>	I ... get up	FP	DoJ
3:2	C	1cs	<i>'āsōbēbā</i>	go about	FP	DoJ
3:2	C	1cs	<i>'ābaqšā</i>	I will seek	FP	DoJ
3:11	I	2fp	<i>ṣē'ēnā</i>	come	FP	DoJ
3:11	I	2fp	<i>rē'ēnā</i>	look	FP	DoJ
4:8	I	2fs	<i>'ētî</i>	come	ML	FP
4:8	I	2fs	<i>'ētî</i>	come	ML	FP
4:8	J	2fs	<i>tābô'î</i>	come	ML	FP
4:8	J	2fs	<i>tāšû'rî</i>	descend	ML	FP
4:16	I	2fs	<i>'ûrî</i>	wake up	FP	Winds
4:16	I	2fs	<i>bô'î</i>	come	FP	Winds
4:16	I	2fs	<i>hapîhî</i>	blow	FP	Winds
4:16	J	3mp	<i>yizzēlû</i>	let ... waft	FP	Winds
4:16	J	3ms	<i>yābō'</i>	let ... enter	FP	ML
4:16	J	3ms	<i>yō'kal</i>	eat	FP	ML
5:1	I	2mp	<i>'iklû</i>	eat	DoJ	ML & FP
5:1	I	2mp	<i>šētû</i>	drink	DoJ	ML & FP
5:1	I	2mp	<i>šikrû</i>	be intoxicated	DoJ	ML & FP
5:2	I	2fs	<i>pithî-lî</i>	open to me	ML	FP
6:5	I	2fs	<i>hāsēbbî</i>	turn	ML	FP
6:13	I	2fs	<i>šûbî</i>	return	DoJ	FP
6:13	I	2fs	<i>šûbî</i>	return	DoJ	FP
6:13	I	2fs	<i>šûbî</i>	return	DoJ	FP
6:13	I	2fs	<i>šûbî</i>	return	DoJ	FP
6:13	C	2mp	<i>nehēze</i>	we may look	DoJ	FP
7:2	J	3ms	<i>'al-yehsar</i>	may it never lack	ML	FP
7:8	C	1cs	<i>'e'ēle</i>	I will climb	ML	FP
7:8	C	1cs	<i>'ohāzā</i>	I will grasp	ML	FP
7:8	J	3mp	<i>yihēyû</i>	let ... be	ML	FP

7:11	I	2ms	<i>lěkā</i>	come	FP	ML
7:11	C	1cp	<i>něšē'</i>	let us go out	FP	ML
7:11	C	1cp	<i>nālīnā</i>	let us spend the night	FP	ML
7:12	C	1cp	<i>naškīmāh</i>	let us go out early	FP	ML
7:12	C	1cp	<i>nir'e</i>	let us see	FP	ML
8:6	I	2ms	<i>śīmēnī</i>	place me	FP	ML
8:13	I	2fs	<i>hašmī'înī</i>	let me hear it	ML	FP
8:14	I	2ms	<i>běrah</i>	make haste	FP	ML
8:14	I	2ms	<i>dēmē-lěkā</i>	be like	FP	ML

All verse references refer to English translations.