DISRUPTING HEGEMONIC POWER: ROYALTY, GENDER AND THE GAZE IN THE SONG OF SONGS

by

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Abstract

The Song of Song's history of interpretation is testament to its power as a contentious text. This thesis draws upon feminist biblical scholarship, biblical masculinities studies and literary criticism to investigate how the lovers in the Song of Songs disrupt hegemonic power in three primary ways: through their appropriation of royalty, in their subversion of ancient gender expectations and in the disruptive power of their gazes. This study will show that the lovers fashion themselves as royals whilst simultaneously parodying Solomon's power as a king and as a man. Moreover, this thesis will identify how both lovers embody "femininity" and "masculinity", thereby blurring and disrupting ancient gender expectations. This investigation will conclude with a discussion of the Song of Song's prevalent male gaze and argue that a female gaze is likewise present.

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Introduction

The Song of Songs' rich imagery, poetry and characters have been the source of much interpretation since its composition.[1] Understood in a wide variety of ways from the allegorical interpretations within the Jewish and Christian traditions, to the literal meanings of the dramatic, cultic and psychological approaches, the Song naturally lends itself to multiple interpretations.[2] The Song thus remains a contentious text, continuing to confuse as much as elucidate the nature of erotic desire. This thesis examines the Song's multivalent imagery to investigate how the Song's lovers disrupt hegemonic power through their appropriation of royalty, in their disruption of gender expectations and in the disruptive power of their gazes.

The Song's presentation of the female lover has been of particular interest to feminist biblical scholars who have been keen to study a text that features a woman as its main character. As such, feminist biblical scholarship has provided rich insights into the female lover's multifaceted characterisation. The possibility of female authorship has drawn scholars such as Athalya Brenner-Idan and Carol Meyers to investigate the presence of female culture and voices in the female lover's speeches on her journey to fulfil her desire.[3] As such, early feminist scholarship on the Song has taken an idyllic, romantic view

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[1] Hereafter, I will refer to the Song of Songs as "the Song".

[2] For an overview of the Song's history of interpretation, see for example Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 20–47; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1977), 89–229; J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 73–86; J. Paul Tanner, "The History of Interpretation of the Song of Songs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (March 1997): 23–46; Jennifer Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 1–14.

[3] See for example Athalya Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*, Second Edition (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 48–51; Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 6–

of the Song, eager to see the lovers' relationship as a redemption of the Genesis 2-3 narrative and to set the female lover free from her parallel in the garden of Eden, as best illustrated in Phyllis Trible's work.[4] More recent feminist perspectives in the works of J. Cheryl Exum and Fiona Black have offered a more nuanced appreciation for the female lover's complex character and her experience of vulnerability as well as power.[5] The expanding field of biblical masculinities studies has also seen a rise in scholarship investigating how masculinities are constructed in biblical texts, and while these studies have primarily focused on biblical narratives and prophetic texts, more attention is being granted to the portrayal of masculinities in poetry, as evidenced by Martti Nissinen's study.[6] While the lovers' characterisations have been analysed at length, Solomon's portrayal in the Song has often been perceived as positive, with Annette Schellenberg's

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7; Carol Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House": Considering a Counterpart to the Israelite *Bêt 'āb*," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. David Jobling, Peggy Lynne Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), 45–46.

[4] Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (March 1973): 30–48.

[5] See for example Exum, *Song of Songs*, 25-28; 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. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24–35; J. Cheryl Exum, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Third Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 247–254; J. Cheryl Exum, "The Little Sister and Solomon's Vineyard: Song of Songs 8:8–12 as a Lovers' Dialogue," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 269–282; Fiona C. Black, "Looking in Through the Lattice: Feminist and Other Gender-Critical Readings of the Song of Songs," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, vol. 1: Biblical Books, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 211–229; Fiona C. Black, "Unlikely Bedfellows: Allegorical and Feminist Readings of Song of Songs 7.1-18," in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 104–129; Fiona C. Black, "Beauty or the Beast? The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (January 2000): 302–323; Fiona C. Black, *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009).

[6] Martti Nissinen, "Male Agencies in the Song of Songs," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 251–273.

and F. Scott Spencer's recent studies building on J. William Whedbee's work on parody to examine the mocking undertones in Solomon's appearances.[7]

Current studies on the Song provide a limited outlook on the Song's complex gender portrayals. Feminist biblical scholarship's focus on the female lover has often overlooked the male lover's equally multifaceted presentation. Moreover, the tendency to concentrate solely on the romantic, feminine portrayal of the female character has meant that these studies have often neglected the importance of imagery which does not fit into this romantic depiction. Indeed, I believe that the use of military imagery in the descriptions of the female lover is a major component of the female lover's disruption of gender expectations. Alongside this, there has been a rising interest in studying the male lover's masculinity to determine the extent to which he upholds or deviates from hegemonic masculinity, as well as exploring male masculinities in the Song more widely.[8] Likewise, the female lover's femininity has been extensively examined, but there has been a reticence in considering how the female lover may embody hegemonic masculinity while the male lover similarly embodies aspects that are perceived as illustrating femininity in the female lover. While some studies have analysed the female lover's depiction as a warrior, I believe that we can further analyse how gender hegemony is disrupted in the female lover's embodiment of military masculinity which occasionally surpasses the male

[7] Annette Schellenberg, "The Description of Solomon's Wedding: Song 3:6-11 as a Key to the Overall Understanding of the Song of Songs," *Vetus Testamentum* 70, no. 1 (January 2020): 177–192; F. Scott Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire and Emotional Refuge: Subverting Solomon's Gilded Regime," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 4 (May 2020): 667–692; J. William Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody in the Song of Solomon: Towards a Comic Reading of the Most Sublime Song," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 266–278.
[8] Most notably, J. Cheryl Exum, "The Man in the Song of Songs," in *Poets, Prophets, and Texts in Play: Studies in Biblical Poetry and Prophecy in Honour of Francis Landy*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2015), 107–124; Martti Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 251–273.

lover's.[9] Likewise, while the male gaze has been studied in feminist biblical scholarship to demonstrate its problematic effects on the female lover, little work has been done to identify how the female lover's gaze likewise affects the male lover, and how this can be perceived as disrupting the hegemonic power of the male gaze.[10] Moreover, present studies of Solomon's appearances in the Song have also often omitted the negative impact his parodic portrayal has on his hegemonic power as a ruler and as a man.

This study therefore aims to begin correcting these imbalances by asking: how do the lovers disrupt hegemonic power in the Song? I will begin to answer this question by identifying how Solomon's characterisation in the Song is parodic, and how the lovers disrupt his hegemonic power by cloaking themselves in royal imagery. I will then demonstrate that the lovers embody both feminine and masculine gender expressions, which causes a disruptive effect on the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. While the male lover's masculinity has been explored, to my knowledge the female lover's masculinity has not yet been investigated in light of the categories arising from biblical masculinities studies. As such, I will examine how the female lover occasionally acts in accordance with these categories whilst the male lover is both a hegemonic and a

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[9] See for example Carol Meyers, "Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 209–223; A more nuanced discussion of the Song's military imagery and its unconventional gender roles has been recently provided by Danilo Verde. See Danilo Verde, *Conquered Conquerors: Love and War in the Song of Songs* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2020).
[10] Exum argues that the gazes in the Song are erotic rather than voyeuristic. See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 22–24; Black, *Artifice of Love*, 195–204; David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 25–28; Donald C. Polaski, "What Will Ye See in the Shulammite? Women, Power and Panopticism in the Song of Songs," *Biblical Interpretation* 5, no. 1 (January 1997): 64–81; Donald C. Polaski, "Where Men Are Men and Women Are Women?: The Song of Songs and Gender," *Review and Expositor* 105 (August 2008): 445. Polaski also points out that when the female lover gazes at the male lover, this is expressed in masculine grammatical terms. However, he does not expand on this to suggest the impact it has on the female lover's embodiment of masculine power and her disruption of the hegemonic power of the male gaze that pervades the Song.

subversive male. This study will conclude with a discussion on how both the lovers' gazes have a disruptive power.

The length of this study has posed several limitations on the examination of how hegemonic power is disrupted in the Song. Firstly, it has not been possible to analyse the entirety of the Song's scenes to identify whether each scene upholds or disrupts power.[11] Rather, the focus is on the scenes which are most illustrative of a character's power or vulnerability. Secondly, my investigation of how the lovers' genders are disruptive is limited by its use of feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies as the scope of the study has not allowed for examination into the characters' sexualities. This therefore leaves room for gender and sexuality to be queeried further, and to expand on the Song's disruption of hegemonic gender norms. Thirdly, the Song's vivid imagery draws from a wide variety of conceptual domains. While I discuss categories such as royal, military and natural imagery, further categories can be identified in the Song's imagery and it is important to note that, as with the lovers' genders, the Song's imagery is frequently blurred and overlapped, meaning that an image can be part of multiple conceptual domains.[12] My intention is not to separate the individual conceptual domain but rather to show how the lovers uphold and disrupt hegemonic power by drawing from a range of domains. Finally,

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[11] For example, it is also possible to discuss how gender roles are upheld or disrupted in the societal expectations present in 1:6 (the female lover's brothers' anger), in 8:1-3 (the female lover's inability to show public affection for her lover), and in 8:8-9 (which can potentially be interpreted as a discussion of the female lover's chastity).

[12] Two recent studies of the Song's conceptual metaphors illustrate that a different arrangement of the Song's imagery is possible. Brian Gault focuses on the Song's body imagery, and he identifies three conceptual domains: "body as landscape", "love as intoxication" and "the object of love as a valuable object". Meanwhile, Verde's study primarily investigates the Song's military imagery, within which he identifies "four clusters of surface metaphors", namely "woman is fortified city", "man is conqueror", "woman is conqueror" and "love is strife". Brian P. Gault, *Body as Landscape, Love as Intoxication: Conceptual Metaphors in the Song of Songs* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2019), 41–42; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 31.

while this study has been informed by environmental and ecological studies of the Song's natural imagery, the scope posed by the study's length has limited the capacity to explore the environmental concerns and the relationship between human and non-humans fully. Rather, the focus of this study is to illustrate that the city/nature binary is flawed, particularly as the imagery often disrupts the binary through combining aspects of multiple landscapes.

To establish the framework for the lovers' disruption of hegemonic power in the Song, the first chapter provides a review of current literature and presents the main discussions that are pertinent to this investigation of power, royalty, gender and the gaze in the Song. Beginning with feminist biblical scholarship and with a specific focus on the works of Trible, Brenner-Idan, Meyers, Exum and Black, I will discuss the main themes in feminist perspectives on the Song, including the issues of female autonomy, female authorship and the presentation of the female body in the text. I will then introduce the more recently emerging field of biblical masculinities studies to explore how current models and methods of approaching biblical masculinities has been influenced by the works of sociologist R.W. Connell.[13] Although the field of biblical masculinities studies work on the Song is sparse, this section will establish a basis for approaching masculinities in the Song, particularly drawing on David Clines's study of King David's masculinity alongside Exum's and Nissinen's studies on the male lover's masculinity.[14] The literature review will end with an overview of current work on royalty in the Song, and a summary of positions

[13] See particularly R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); Connell then followed this influential study up with a response in R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–859.
[14] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 212–243; Exum, "The Man," 107–124; Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 251–273.

on how to interpret Solomon's appearances and determine whether they can be interpreted positively, as Exum and Jill Munro argue, or whether they should be treated as parodic, as Whedbee, Schellenberg and Spencer propose.[15] This will situate the study among current scholarship and set the framework for investigating how the lovers appropriate and disrupt royal power.

Following on from the literature review, the second chapter will outline the methodology for conducting research into the disruptive powers in the Song. I will briefly introduce the use of literary and narrative criticism and its application to the Song primarily following Robert Alter's work.[16] The following section will explain how a gender critical approach will be employed alongside literary and narrative criticism. This gender critical approach is informed by methods and approaches drawing from feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies to create an approach that encompasses their similar aims, enabling a close reading of both lovers' complex gender presentations. This section will conclude with an explanation of how the phrase "hegemonic power" will be utilised throughout this thesis and how power can be perceived in the characters' direct speeches, autonomy, the configuration of their bodies in terms of natural, military and royal imagery and in the act of gazing.

[15] J. Cheryl Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin (Song of Songs 3:6-11)," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3 (January 2003): 307; Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 41; Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody," 270; Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 178–182; Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 10–23.

[16] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990).

After setting out this methodology, I will proceed to examine and analyse power dynamics in the Song in the third chapter. This section is divided into the three ways in which I perceive hegemonic power in the Song to be disrupted. The first subsection will explore the royal imagery in the Song to argue that the lovers appropriate royal power at the expense of parodying Solomon's power. As such, the lovers create their own royal court while disrupting Solomon's hegemonic power as a ruler and as a man. With the contrast between the male lover and Solomon introduced, the second subsection will explore how gender is disrupted in the Song. This subsection will begin with an analysis of the male lover's descriptions in accordance with biblical masculinities categories through the language he uses in his speeches, his autonomy, and the descriptions of his body. My close reading of the text will suggest that the male lover is established as a peerless warrior, while he is simultaneously described in imagery that disrupts hegemonic masculinity. Following on from this examination, the latter part of this subsection on the Song's disruption of gender will provide a detailed assessment of the female lover's disruptive power using the same pattern employed to examine the male lover's power, namely through the language she uses, her autonomy, and the descriptions of her body. As with the male lover, this approach will illuminate the manners in which the female lover upholds and disrupts hegemonic masculinity. The third and final subsection will examine the disruptive power of the male gaze that prevails in the Song to investigate the female lover's place in, and response to, the male gaze.

The final chapter presents my conclusions on how the hegemonic power is disrupted and how the Song itself creates disruption through its complex characters by inviting multiple interpretations of its scenes. I will propose avenues for future work on the

Song and provide recommendations on how the Song's disruptive royalty, gender and gaze can continue to be investigated.

1. Literature Review

This section establishes current scholarship on the Song and sets out the main themes and debates which will inform my assessment of how hegemonic power is disrupted in the Song. I will begin by introducing the central perspectives within feminist biblical scholarship, with a particular focus on the issues of female autonomy, female authorship and the presentation of the female body. I will then proceed to outline the models of masculinity used in biblical masculinities studies to determine how these can be applied to the masculinities in the Song. This will be followed by a discussion of how royalty is portrayed in the Song. This final section will present Exum's argument that the male lover takes on a Solomonic guise throughout the Song and will ultimately propose that Solomon's appearances in the Song should be treated as a subversive parody that contrasts Solomon with the male lover.

1.1. Feminist Perspectives

The female lover's characterisation and the verses attributed to her have inspired an abundance of feminist studies on the Song. To effectively explore how power dynamics are upheld and disrupted in the Song, it is essential to examine several central perspectives within feminist biblical scholarship. This section will focus on the works of Trible, Brenner-Idan, Exum and Meyers as these scholars encapsulate the beginning of feminist scholarship on the Song due to their overarching aims of locating and analysing the presentations of female personas in biblical texts.[17] The rise of feminist scholarship yielded the first series

[17] For contextualising female characters in narratives and in Ancient Israelite society, see for example Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*; Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

of *A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, among which the two editions by Brenner-Idan offer important contributions to feminist scholarship on the Song.[18] There have also been two entries on the Song in *Women's Bible Commentary*, one by Renita J. Weems and another by Exum, with Exum also being the first feminist biblical scholar to publish a full commentary on the Song.[19] The tradition of feminist readings of the Song has been continued by Black; however, her work has been viewed as a resistant reading due to the new challenges raised by her application of a grotesque heuristic on the text.[20]

There are three focal points arising from this corpus of feminist scholarship which I will consider in my discussion of power in the Song. Firstly, the extent of the female lover's autonomy is often at the forefront of feminist scholarship, and this also affects whether the lovers are viewed as mutually powerful. Secondly, the interrelated issues of possible female authorship, a supposed female voice and the presence of women's culture in fragments of the Song have likewise been debated. Thirdly, while discussions of the female lover's body have not featured as prominently as the examinations of female autonomy, the descriptions of the lovers' bodies as figurations of each other's gazes have implications on who wields power in the Song, and whether female autonomy is challenged by the prevailing male gaze.

[18] Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, eds., *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, Second Edition (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

[19] Renita J. Weems, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Expanded Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 164–168; Exum, "Song of Songs," 247–254; Exum, *Song of Songs*.

[20] See Black's monograph on the Song: Black, *Artifice of Love*; for a concise summary and evaluation of feminist scholarship on the Song, see Black, "Looking in," 211–229. Exum views Black's reading as resistant as it does not accept the face value depiction of the lovers' ideal loving relationship: Exum, *Song of Songs,* 83.

1.1.1. Female Autonomy

Discussions of female autonomy are central to feminist perspectives due to the female lover's apparent freedom to move through a range of landscapes, leading to the argument that she has a large degree of autonomy. Coupled with her vocal sexual desire for her lover, the freedom of movement she is afforded is comparable to the male lover's freedom and is perceived as a rare occurrence within patriarchal society. The lovers' ability to seek each other and voice their desire has often been interpreted as a sign of mutuality between the lovers, which serves to amplify the female lover's autonomy within the patriarchal expectations of female behaviour.

Trible's article "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" marked the beginning of feminist biblical studies on the Song and prepared the ground for future feminist study.[21] Trible's reading of the Song alongside Genesis 2 and 3 as examples of depatriarchalising texts further developed the view that the Song not only illustrated humanity's return to the Garden of Eden but improved and expanded on its paradisiacal qualities.[22] This "paradise regained" perspective influenced later readings which focused on the lovers' mutuality as well as humanity's place within, and relationship to, nature. [23] Trible's depatriarchalised reading of the Song emphasised the apparent perfect harmony between

[21] By "depatriarchalizing" texts, Trible endeavours to read biblical texts without sexism. Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 31.
[22] Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 42.
[23] Among those continuing the tradition of a paradisiacal reading is Francis Landy, see Francis Landy, "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (December 1979): 513–528; Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs*, Second Edition (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). Weems is perhaps likewise influenced by the theme of "paradise regained" to read the Song as a counterpart of the Genesis story, leading her to argue for mutuality, not domination, between the lovers: Weems, "Song of Songs," 168. Exum's entry in the subsequent edition of *Women's Bible Commentary* presents a more nuanced approach of the lovers' autonomy and mutuality: Exum, "Song of Songs," 247-254.

the sexes to argue that the lovers are mutual, equal and independent.[24] However, in attempting to uphold the "paradise regained" motif of the Song, Trible is dismissive of the potential dangers the lovers encounter, particularly the foxes threatening to ruin the vineyards (2:15), the brothers' anger (1:6) and the watchmen beating the female lover (5:7). Instead, Trible overlooks these dangers by suggesting that these obstacles encourage the harmony of the lovers' love and demonstrate that there is no male dominance in the Song.[25] However, I believe Trible's argument does not give sufficient attention to the power imbalances at play in the Song and overlooks the ways in which the Song is not wholly representative of the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, Trible is less concerned with how the dynamics between the female and male lovers change throughout their interactions in the Song and how this impacts their perceived mutuality.

Brenner-Idan is one of few scholars to argue for the Song as a collection of love songs as opposed to a unity.[26] Her identification of multiple pairs of lovers in the collection leads to her assumption that there are numerous female perspectives present in the collection, making the Song a gynocentric text.[27] For Brenner-Idan, the supposed gynocentrism shifts the Song from a focus on the lovers' mutuality within Trible's "paradise regained" framework to viewing the female lover as superior to the male lover due to her being more articulate and active.[28] While a gynocentric perspective was popular in early

[24] Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 46.
[25] Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," 45.
[26] Athalya Brenner, "To See Is To Assume: Whose Love Is Celebrated in the Song of Songs?," *Biblical Interpretation* 1, no. 3 (January 1993): 265–284; Athalya Brenner, ""My" Song of Songs," in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 154–168; Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 48.
[27] Brenner, "To See," 265.
[28] Brenner, "To See," 273.

feminist scholarship, Black argues that applying labels such as "patriarchal" and "gynocentric" to biblical texts are counterproductive as they create a polarity and simplify our reading of the Song.[29] I maintain that it is possible to read the Song through either lens but doing so fails to make allowances for the tensions inherent in the text. We can better understand the Song's disruptive power when we accept that it contains both patriarchal and gynocentric elements.

Exum presents a more nuanced approach to the female lover's autonomy arguing that the female lover expresses sexuality as freely as the male lover.[30] However, the extent of their sexual freedom differs as she is bound to expectations of chastity, as seen in 8:8-9 where her brothers question her chastity.[31] Exum likewise concedes that the female lover has a certain amount of social freedom and freedom of movement, but, unlike him, she is also controlled.[32] This control is exerted by her brothers in 1:6, the watchmen in 5:7 and in her inability to kiss her lover publicly in 8:1. The lovers' autonomy further differs in the suggestion that the male lover feels his autonomy is challenged by his desire for the female lover. He is awestruck by her in 4:9 and 6:4-5 whereas she surrenders to him in 8:10 and openly speaks of how she longs for his presence (1:7; 3:1–3; 5:6). Exum argues that the female lover is able to long for him without feeling her autonomy is challenged because she has less autonomy as a woman.[33] Indeed, if their reactions to being in love does not sufficiently emphasise the lack of mutuality and the difference in their autonomies, the watchmen's abuse serves as a reminder that the female lover's autonomy is limited

[29] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 195.
[30] Exum, "Song of Songs," 249.
[31] Exum, "Ten Things," 30.
[32] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 26.
[33] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 15.

whereas there are no such limits imposed on the male lover.[34] While Exum departs from the view that the lovers are mutually autonomous, she recognises that the Song also destabilises gender expectations.[35] I will further expand on this idea in my analysis of how gender shifts and allows the lovers to assume power through the disruption of gender roles, particularly through the female lover's embodiment of masculinity.

In her summation of feminist perspectives on the Song, Black confronts the suggestion that the female lover is autonomous by highlighting scenes where the female lover lacks freedom, namely 1:6, 2:15, 5:7 and 8:10, as likewise noted by Exum.[36] Similarly, Black's in-depth analysis of the watchmen's abuse in 5:7 is unusual among scholarship which has overlooked or explained away the abuse, even within feminist perspectives.[37] I will explore the watchmen's abuse scene in detail as it presents a challenge to the female lover's autonomy and has important consequences for the Song's power dynamics. Overall, I am in agreement with Exum's and Black's caution over the female lover's autonomy and the mutuality of the lovers' relationship since the lovers' experiences within the Song's patriarchal society greatly differs. The female lover, though granted a certain degree of autonomy, is not as autonomous as the male lover. These are serious challenges to the female lover's autonomy which should not be overlooked on the basis that she is the most autonomous woman in the Hebrew Bible (HB).[38]

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[34] Exum, "Ten Things," 31.
[35] Exum, "Ten Things," 30.
[36] Black, "Looking in," 221-222. Black also highlights how early feminist readers viewed the autonomous female lover as capable of redeeming the HB from oppression and misogyny.
[37] Fiona C. Black, "Nocturnal Egression: Exploring Some Margins of the Song of Songs," in *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible – A Reader*, ed. A.K.M. Adam (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2001), 93–104.
[38] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 15.

1.1.2. Female Authorship

The female lover is the central character in the Song and the most active speaker. Brenner-Idan attributes 61.5 verses to the female lover and 40 verses to the male lover, meaning that she speaks in approximately 53% of the text, while he speaks in only 34%.[39] Despite the prominence of the female lover's speech, only some scholars, notably Brenner-Idan, Weems and Meyers, have argued for a supposed female voice and the possibility of female authorship based on presumed elements of women's culture and lived experience in the text. This perspective is best exemplified by Weems' assertion that nowhere else in the HB do we have such direct access to a woman's thoughts.[40]

A potential indicator of the presence of women's culture in the Song is the recurrent mentions of the female lover's mother and the mother's house.[41] Carol Meyers discusses the significance of the mother's house as the counterpart to the father's house, and she asserts that this demonstrates the presence of a unique female voice which uses women's lived experience in the Song.[42] The recurring presence of the mother and her house emphasise the absence of a paternal character. This is intriguing as it is the father's house which is frequently found elsewhere in the HB, and as such we would also expect the father's house to appear in the Song.[43] Yet, the only male family members that feature in

[39] Brenner-Idan assigns 6.5 verses to the chorus and states the remaining 9 verses are headings or impossible to assign to a viewpoint. This accounts for the remaining 13%. Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 48–49; Weems, "Song of Songs," 164; Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House,"" 45–46.
[40] Weems, "Song of Songs," 164.
[41] In 3:4 and 8:2 the female lover desires to bring her lover to her mother's house. Other mentions of the mother occur in 6:9 where the female lover is described as being her mother's darling, in 8:1 where she wishes her lover nursed at her mother's breast and in 8:5 where her mother is in labour. Unusually, there is also mention of the king's mother crowning him in 3:11.
[42] Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House,"" 46, 50.
[43] Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House,"" 39.

the Song are the female lover's brothers and it is noteworthy that she does not introduce them as her father's sons but as her mother's, further emphasising the mother's role in the lineage (1:6). As such, Meyers argues that gynocentrism predominates in the Song as it does in Genesis 24:28 and Ruth 1:8.[44] The recurring mention of the mother's house thus draws us into the domestic realm and allows us a brief glimpse into female lives and female power.[45] Meyers's view that the Song is gynocentric will lead her to argue that the architectural and military imagery used to describe the female lover illustrates female power in the domestic realm.[46] I will return to this argument below to discuss how the perception of the female body is affected by how we interpret this architectural and military imagery. More recently, Cynthia Chapman has argued that the mother's house functions as a place for sexual activity as well as a place where marriage is settled.[47] In the context of the Song, the mother's house provides a place for the lovers to be sexually active. Moreover, the presence of the female lover's brothers and their references to her chastity also reinforce the function of the mother's house as a place where the brothers play a key part in arranging their sister's marriage.[48] Both Meyers's and Chapman's studies provide insight into the potential role of the mother's house in the Song.

The possibility of female authorship and the presence of a supposed female voice also features in Brenner-Idan's work.[49] While Brenner-Idan distinguishes between female

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[44] Meyers notes that the commonality between these occurrences is that a woman's story is being told and the women are agents in their narrative. Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House,"" 49.
[45] Meyers, ""To Her Mother's House,"" 50-51.
[46] Meyers, "Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs," 221.
[47] Cynthia R. Chapman, *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 52-74, 79-83.
[48] Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 72-74.
[49] Brenner-Idan and van Dijk-Hemmes aim to identify female and male voices in biblical texts in their study: Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*.

authorship and a female voice, she ultimately argues the Song was written by a woman.[50] Brenner-Idan asserts that female authorship is possible on the basis that 1:2-6 (the female lover voices her desire for her lover, and proclaims that she is black and beautiful), 3:1-4 (she dreams/fantasises about her lover); 5:2-7 (she dreams of her lover visiting her in her chambers) and 5:10-16 (she describes her lover) are "so essentially feminine that a male could hardly imitate their tone and texture successfully."[51] Furthermore, Brenner-Idan claims that the female voices are stronger than the male ones, suggesting that the Song is primarily a female composition.[52] She supports this claim by identifying seriousness and lack of humour as the main characteristics of the female voice.[53] However, I do not perceive this to be sufficient for identifying an authentic female voice in the text and greater clarification is required on what constitutes a female voice besides the supposed female experience these verses allude to. Yet I believe Brenner-Idan is aware of the precariousness of her argument as she acknowledges that there is no irrefutable proof of a female voice or the influence of women's culture in the Song. [54] Rather, the aim appears to be to "read the Song *as if* it contained traces of female voices. . . not just *as if* it contained male voices (which is the biblical norm)."[55] This approach highlights the importance of the reader's interpretation and their assumptions rather than affirming the authenticity of the female voice.

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[50] Brenner and Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts,* 6–7; Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 50.
[51] Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 51.
[52] Brenner, ""My" Song of Songs," 163.
[53] Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 51.
[54] Athalya Brenner, "The Song of Solomon," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 431.
[55] Original emphases. Brenner, "Song of Solomon," 431.

I therefore concur with Exum's criticism of Brenner-Idan's argument due to the difficulties in identifying and gendering voices in the text. Moreover, as Exum argues, a good poet is able to write convincingly in different voices.[56] There is no conclusive evidence of female authorship in the Song and while tracing these voices to women's culture may be possible, this cannot be easily proven. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the female voice we encounter in the Song was likely created by a male author.[57] Nonetheless, Brenner-Idan's search for a female voice is valuable in identifying how our reading of the Song changes when we entertain the possibility that there are traces of a female voice and lived female experiences in the Song. Yet this possibility continues to be challenged. Clines argues in favour of male authorship and an implied male audience for the Song on the basis that there is no evidence to the contrary.[58] As such, the female lover's autonomy is restricted by her being a creation of the male author's imagination, specifically created to fulfil male desires and unable to escape the male gaze.[59] Clines's argument emphasises the limitations of the text: we are always only presented with a male construction of femininity and the female lover cannot have a self-identity beyond the one constructed by the male author.[60] The female lover "remains caught in her domestic setting, interminably waiting for her lover to arrive, seeking him but finding him not, calling and gaining no answer (3.1; 5.6). He has the transport (3.6-10), and he has the freedom."[61]

[56] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 66.
[57] Exum, "Ten Things," 28.
[58] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 6.
[59] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 12.
[60] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 24-25.
[61] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 27.

The issues of female authorship, supposed female voice and traces of women's culture in the Song therefore remain unresolved. This perhaps renders the Song all the more interesting as readers continually question the authenticity of the female voice they are presented with. If the reader concludes that the female voice is authentic, they must then decide the criteria for determining what categorises the voice as "feminine" and identify which verses are influenced by women's culture. For the purposes of analysing the disruption of hegemonic power in the Song, I remain unconvinced that the Song gives voice to a woman's lived experience. I will therefore approach the female voice as a characteristic of the female lover, whilst remaining cautious that we may only be presented with a female character created by a male author.

1.1.3. The Female Body

The lovers' descriptions have been given significant attention in feminist biblical scholarship due to the differing portrayals of the lovers' bodies, and what this reveals about the nature of gazing in the Song. We have more descriptions of the female lover than the male.[62] The three description songs (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]) describe the female lover using a combination of animalistic, military, architectural, and food imagery as well as references to landscapes and locations. By contrast, there is only one description of the male lover (5:10-16) and this is heavily centred on materials such as gold, silver, jewels and ivory as well as plant imagery. Brenner-Idan observes that this is unsurprising as traditional

[62] The term "*waṣf*" refers to descriptive Arabic love poetry but the form can also be seen in ancient Near Eastern literature more widely. The Song's description songs have often been designated as *waṣfs* but Black cautions us against making this connection with Arabic love poetry as the grotesque descriptions of the body in the Song contradict our expectations of beauty as described in traditional *waṣfs*. Black, *Artifice of Love*, 21–23.

waṣf poems are more concerned with female beauty and thus it is not unusual that we have more descriptions of the female than the male lover.[63]

Meyers was the first scholar to suggest that the use of architectural and military imagery to describe the female lover indicates female power by subverting gender expectations.[64] In her study, Meyers focuses on the tower imagery in 4:4, 7:5 [7:4 E] and 8:10, the warriors' shields in 4:4 and the king imprisoned in the female lover's hair in 7:6 [7:5 E]. Arguing that this imagery is exclusively applied to the female lover, Meyers claims that there is a reversal of gender roles in the Song as we would expect the military imagery to appear in descriptions of the male lover.[65] Furthermore, Meyers argues that the female lover's association with wild animals is likewise a reversal of gender roles as wild animals express aggressiveness, strength and might, which Meyers identifies as masculine qualities.[66] This has led Meyers to assume that the military and architectural imagery conveys female power in the domestic realm. While I agree that the imagery indicates strength and power, Meyers's assumption that it is indicative of domestic power overlooks the fact that the imagery is located in the public rather than the domestic sphere.[67] Conversely, Black argues that far from being a reversal of gender roles, the imagery creates a confused gender for the female lover, showing that female lover can embody masculine characteristics and her power can be located in the male realm.[68] Exum likewise disagrees

[63] Athalya Brenner, "'Come Back, Come Back the Shulammite' (Song of Songs 7.1-10): A Parody of the Waṣf Genre," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 253.
[64] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 215.
[65] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 215.
[66] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 216.
[67] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 53.
[68] Black, "Unlikely Bedfellows," 122; Black, *Artifice of Love*, 53.

with Meyers's assumption that the military imagery reflects domestic power, instead arguing that its use emphasises the female lover's erotic power.[69] Meyers's argument is undermined by her binary separation of the public and domestic spheres, especially as the female lover moves through both. The military and architectural imagery suggests that the female lover's power is not confined to the domestic sphere or to traditional gender expectations.[70]

Of the three songs describing the female lover, the final description in 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E] is the most analysed and problematised due to its portrayal of the female lover, referred to as "the Shulammite" in this song, who is often presumed to be dancing in front of an audience. Readings of this song have important implications for the debate over the female lover's autonomy: is she being objectified by the male gaze, or does she retain her sexual freedom? Brenner-Idan notes that this song is more humorous and parodic than the previous descriptions of the female lover, which is perhaps indicative of its setting in a public performance among male spectators, allowing for ribaldry and sexual humour.[71] This song is intriguing as it continues to imply the female lover is desirable while at the same time indicating that there are undesirable aspects in her performance, and reading an element of humour in this song allows the reader to reconcile this conflicting portrayal.[72] Brenner-Idan admits that this comic reading is a result of her reading the song through the male gaze, and she urges us to ponder what might happen when we read it

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[69] Exum, *Song of Songs,* 28.
[70] Verde's study of the Song's military imagery devotes a chapter to the female lover's portrayal as a conqueror. Gault's study of the Song's conceptual metaphors likewise reveals that the female lover is not confined to the domestic sphere in her self-descriptions as well as in the songs describing her body. Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 133–167; Gault, *Body as Landscape*, 59–87, 137-194.
[71] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 254.
[72] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 269-271.

through the female gaze.[73] In doing so, she raises the possibility that this song is a wedding song sung to the female lover by women, making it a parody within a parody, alluding to knowledge of male sexuality.[74] Yet while it is interesting to consider the effect of reading this song through a female gaze rather than a male one, Brenner-Idan's reading as a wedding song composed by women is perhaps too influenced by her desire to identify elements of women's culture and female influences on the song. A further criticism is posed by Black who views Brenner-Idan's female lover as a sexual object without sexual freedom, who cannot be rescued from the problematic dance.[75] However, Black suggests that the female lover's autonomy can be rescued if she is dancing for herself and not solely for her audience.[76]

In reading the descriptions of the lovers, it is beneficial to distinguish between the erotic and voyeuristic gaze as defined by Exum.[77] The voyeuristic gaze is intrusive, making the subject fully accessible to a viewer who remains invisible and inaccessible. This gaze leads to the objectification of the subject. By contrast, the erotic gaze is mutual and the individual being gazed at is not merely an object because the gaze also affects the viewer. Exum argues that this is the type of gaze we encounter in the Song as the male lover is affected by the female lover. Exum notes that while the male lover constructs her primarily through the gaze, she constructs him primarily through the voice, but both modes express their desire.[78] As shown by her description of her lover in 5:10-16, the female lover also

[73] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 272.
[74] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 274.
[75] Black, "Unlikely Bedfellows," 125.
[76] Black, "Unlikely Bedfellows," 125.
[77] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 22.
[78] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 14.

partakes in the gaze. This can be viewed as a powerful act in itself as within patriarchal society, women are often denied the ability to gaze.[79] It is also interesting that only the woman describes herself, and this raises the possibility that she has internalised the male gaze, as Donald Polaski argues.[80]

Polaski applies Foucault's concept of the panopticon to the issue of the male gaze in the Song, particularly in the watchmen's abuse scene (5:7). Polaski is not concerned with determining whether this scene forms part of a dream sequence, rather he suggests that this scene is a reflection of the female lover's internalised disciplined gaze regardless of whether the abuse actually occurred.[81] Unaware of when the male gaze is active, the female lover behaves as though she is always watched.[82] This has the effect of self-policing, even without external influence from male characters.[83] Polaski therefore argues that the female lover internalises the male gaze as a form of self-discipline, and the punishment she endures in 5:7 is testament to its power and long-term effects. For Polaski, the gaze is always male. The Song thus gives men the authority to gaze, whilst also allowing them to evade it as shown in the male lover's ability to escape the direct gaze in 5:10-16.[84] Meanwhile, whereas the female lover's gaze has the power to disturb the male lover, it is notable that her eyes are grammatically assigned the masculine rather than the feminine pronoun (6:5).[85] Despite the female lover's attempts to possess the gaze, Polaski argues

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[79] J. Cheryl Exum, "The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 89.
[80] Exum, "Ten Things," 33.
[81] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 78.
[82] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 70, 79.
[83] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 78-79.
[84] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 75-76.
[85] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 76.

that she is ultimately excluded from it. Polaski's assessment of the panoptic gaze raises another important issue: does the female lover enjoy her position in the male gaze? On the one hand, 1:6 can be perceived as evidence for her desire to evade the gaze: "Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked on me."[86] However, her request is ineffective as the gaze continues to pervade the Song.[87] On the other hand, it is possible that she takes comfort in the gaze in the description scene in 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E] and further still in her assertion in 8:10 that "I was in his eyes as one who brings peace" appears to suggest that she finds security within the male gaze.[88] The gaze is so prevalent that she may be unable to fashion herself without the identity given to her through this gaze. The possibility of an internalised male gaze will inform my later discussion considering the responses to feminist scholarship as determining whether the gaze can be erotic or whether it is inextricably voyeuristic has consequences on whether the gaze's hegemonic power is disrupted in the Song. Exum concedes that it is ultimately the reader's decision.[89]

Inherent in discussions of the gaze is the concept of whether that which is seen is deemed beautiful. Black employs the grotesque as a heuristic framework to make the Song's difficult body imagery comprehensible and reconcile it against our expectations of beauty. Originating from Renaissance art and theorised within twentieth century literary criticism, the grotesque is an artistic device which often depicts a hybridised body in a

[86] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
[87] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 74.
[88] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 80.
[89] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 23.

satirical manner, often in association with death and decay.[90] Black acknowledges the difficulty of defining the grotesque:

> I do not limit the conceptualization of it to one particular type or aspect of its varied development. Rather, it is the whole picture – playful, disconcerting, unsettling, dangerous – that makes the grotesque so appealing for the Song's descriptions.[91]

However, its recurring characteristics include depicting a hybridised, comical, dehumanised body that is in process.[92] Black argues that the grotesque is most often associated with the female body and can therefore be aptly applied to the female lover in the Song. The grotesque body's intimate connection to eating is particularly important in the Song where bodies and desire are spoken of in terms of food imagery and consumption, as best seen through the female lover's invitation for her lover to eat (4:16), and his acting on this invitation (5:1).[93] Furthermore, the grotesque hybridisation in the Song allows the reader to better interpret the shifting boundaries between humanity and nature.[94]

For Black's reading with the grotesque heuristic framework, the military imagery links the female lover to the war and death imagery that characterises the grotesque. Contrary to Meyers's argument that the military imagery signifies female power in the domestic realm, Black's reading emphasises the female lover's ability for destruction and

[90] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 66, 79. Black's use of the grotesque originates from the Renaissance art of Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Hieronymus Bosch but was also present in the novels of François Rabelais. The effects of these art forms were extensively theorised in twentieth century literary criticism by Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau and Mikhail Bakhtin who attempted to understand how the grotesque engages the audience in an unsettling experience. Black also uses the works of Margaret Miles, Mary Russo and Julia Kristeva on the female body and its participation in the grotesque.
[91] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 3–4.
[92] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 132.
[93] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 136.
[94] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 143.

political power (4:1-5 and 7:6 [7:5 E] respectively).[95] While the grotesque affects the configuration of the body, it also impacts how the gaze is perceived. Black acknowledges that the grotesque descriptions of the female body can be seen as objectifying, especially as the description of the male lover is statuesque, thereby emphasising the female lover's grotesque body.[96] Yet Black postulates that the grotesque allows the female lover to be empowered by the gaze by noting that both lovers periodically embody the grotesque.[97] Moreover, Black warns that Exum's distinction between the erotic and the voyeuristic gaze often forces the reader to prioritise one at the expense of the other, when in fact both gazes are simultaneously present; the female lover is objectified, yet she is also admired.[98] Black's application of the grotesque heuristic allows the reader to deal directly with the challenges presented by feminist scholarship whilst also providing a fresh perspective on the female body and the gaze. The grotesque enables the female lover to be powerful whilst maintaining that there are problematic aspects in the gaze. Moreover, the grotesque allows the reader to reconcile their expectations of bodily descriptions in love poetry with the difficult body descriptions encountered in the Song.

Feminist scholarship has shown an awareness of the importance of analysing the construction of the female lover in the Song. However, the extent to which the female lover is empowered or objectified by the male gaze is, as yet, inconclusive and continues to be debated. Examining which characters are empowered by the gaze is important for identifying how the hegemonic power of the male gaze is disrupted in the Song. In imposing

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[95] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 157.
[96] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 196.
[97] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 202.
[98] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 200-201; 228-229.

the grotesque on herself, it is possible that the female lover gains control of it, and uses it to empower herself. The grotesque therefore has the potential of giving the female lover greater autonomy and allows for her participation in the gaze without necessarily subjecting her to the objectifying male gaze. I will continue this discussion of the problematic gaze in my assessments of its effects over the female lover. Furthermore, I will explore the ways in which the female lover disrupts the hegemonic power of the male gaze by gazing back at the male lover.

1.2. Masculinities Studies

Rooted in psychology and social theory, and indebted to feminist theory, masculinity studies analyses the construction of masculinities in society.[99] This avenue of scholarship is best considered as a counterpart to feminist scholarship rather than a countermovement.[100] The field of masculinity studies seeks to depart from the view that masculinity is an unmarked gender and as such, "masculist interpretation shows that whether or not a particular reading explicitly deals with gender, the text can no longer be accepted as neutral."[101] Biblical masculinities studies emerged relatively recently, arising from studies such as Clines's exploration of David's masculinity.[102] Within New Testament (NT) scholarship, Stephen Moore's work on masculinity studies set the groundwork for NT masculinities, yet it is only in the last decade that masculinity studies has flourished in HB

[99] For an overview of the history of masculinity research in psychology and social theory, see Connell, *Masculinities*, 3–44.
[100] Martti Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities: Musings on Theory and Agenda," in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 272.
[101] Susan E. Haddox, "Masculinity Studies of the Hebrew Bible: The First Two Decades," *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 2 (February 2016): 201.
[102] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 212–243.

scholarship, most notably with the edited volumes by Ovidiu Creangă.[103] Biblical masculinities studies' focus on deconstructing masculinities places the male characters at the forefront of inquiries, not to overshadow the work of feminist biblical scholars in their studies of female characters, but to create a holistic perspective of how the patriarchal system constructs both femininities and masculinities. Biblical masculinities studies thus appears to be a promising tool with which to investigate masculinities in the Song alongside, not instead of, feminist biblical studies. The field of biblical masculinities studies continues to expand as our interests in the deconstruction and characterisations of masculinities become more prominent.

1.2.1. Models of Masculinity

R.W. Connell's formative study of relative masculinities has greatly impacted biblical masculinities studies by introducing four main categories of masculinity which exist in a hierarchy: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalised.[104] Hegemonic masculinities are those currently legitimised by the patriarchy, guaranteeing the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.[105] This does not mean that it is a fixed character type, rather it is always dependent on the gender relations in a specific context according to the currently accepted norms.[106] By contrast, subordinate masculinities are those expelled from the legitimacy held by hegemonic masculinity, while complicit

[103] Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, *New Testament Masculinities* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Ovidiu Creangă, ed., *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010); Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, eds., *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Ovidiu Creangă, ed., *Hebrew Masculinities Anew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019).
[104] Connell, *Masculinities*, 76–81.
[105] Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.
[106] Connell, *Masculinities*, 76–77.

masculinities benefit from the patriarchal structures and derive their legitimacy from the hegemonic structure.[107] Marginalised masculinities are those which authorise but do not benefit from hegemonic masculinity.[108] In response to criticisms over defining hegemonic masculinity and the difficulty in avoiding equating hegemony with fixed character traits, Connell and James Messerschmidt emphasise that hegemonic masculinity is not the fixed embodiment of character traits but is highly dependent on the social context.[109] They have also reiterated that these categories are not mutually exclusive and have the ability to overlap, i.e. it is possible to possess both a subordinated and a marginalised masculinity.[110] While Connell's model can be criticised for lacking a fixed definition, I believe the strength of Connell's categories lies precisely in their avoidance of a fixed definition, allowing for wider application and transmission to biblical masculinities studies to define masculinities depending on the particular context. However, future study should aim to elaborate how masculinities interact with femininities within the social context.[111]

Biblical masculinities studies can be traced to Clines's study of David's masculinity wherein he develops a model of masculinity that has since been applied to other biblical men. Clines's model begins by assuming that David reflects cultural hegemonic masculine norms of the author's time.[112] He then identifies within David's narrative the following characteristics, all of which he associates with building a masculine portrayal: being a man of valour, being a warrior (an essential characteristic of biblical masculinity), having

[107] Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.
[108] Connell, *Masculinities*, 80.
[109] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 851, 854.
[110] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 836.
[111] Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 841.
[112] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 216.

intelligent speech, beauty and being a skilled musician.[113] Clines notes the unease of biblical commentaries to associate David with beauty as this is generally seen as a female characteristic in modern gender expectations. [114] This observation is also pertinent to how the male lover's beauty can be interpreted in the Song. Clines further argues that David's hegemonic masculinity is upheld by the characterisation of David as a "womanless male", a man for whom women are marginal and sex is perfunctory. [115] Instead, male friendship is preferred, as exemplified by David's bond with Jonathan.[116] This becomes an intriguing criterion when applied to the male lover in the Song. On the one hand, the male lover displays an erotic desire for his lover that goes beyond being perfunctory and he is nowhere portrayed as forming friendships with other men, yet the female lover is occasionally marginal in his life as suggested by his frequent absence.

Scholars have found it difficult to progress beyond applying Clines's criteria to individual characters in the Bible to argue whether they uphold or deviate from this model of hegemonic masculinity. Clines's study is important for examining the portrayal of masculinity in David's narrative and how this might be used to gain further insight into biblical masculinities more generally, but we must be careful not to be misled into comparing other male characters against these specific criteria and perceiving deviation from the categories as a lack of masculinity. Following on from the above argument that hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed category, we must likewise recognise that there can be conflicts even within an individual's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, as is the

[113] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 216, 225.
[114] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 239.
[115] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 225.
[116] Clines acknowledges the possibility of reading David and Jonathan's relationship homoerotically but ultimately hesitates to read it in this way. Clines, *Interested Parties*, 240.

case in David's narrative.[117] Excessive emphasis on how well any single individual fits into a certain category can lead to a dangerous exaggeration of the binary separation of male and female, falling into the trap of essentialism. I therefore concur with Susan Haddox's critique that Clines assumes certain characteristics are normative of ancient Israelite masculinity.[118]

In her review of biblical masculinities studies, Haddox succinctly defines hegemonic masculinity as the "specific gender construction that is dominant in cultural and political power structures."[119] Like Clines, Haddox identifies military might, honour and virility as categories of biblical hegemonic masculinity.[120] However, Haddox also expands the criteria to include bodily integrity (the ability to defend one's body against penetration by weapons, corporal punishment or sexual penetration), provisioning for one's household and occupying the gendered public space while women occupy the interior space.[121] Haddox's observation that male bodies elude the gaze reveals that masculinity is unmarked in patriarchal texts.[122] This has significant implications for how the gaze is perceived in the Song, as discussed above in relation to feminist scholarship. The male lover's body is described in 5:10-16 in what appears to be a rare exception wherein the male body does

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[117] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 215. Indeed, the overlap of conceptual domains throughout the Song illustrates that its metaphors are also not strictly fixed categories. See for example Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 50, 61, 67, 78, 144-145, 167.
[118] Haddox argues that "by focusing on particular persons, Clines (1995) obtains particular masculinities. . . . Thus, one must take care in assuming their characteristics are normative for masculinity in ancient Israel. Clines does not address the issue of whether these traits are primarily masculine or if they are general human traits in ancient Israel. It is not necessary for the traits to be absent in females for them to form an important part of the masculine ideal, but later scholars who use his schema tend either to assume they are uniquely masculine or to question them as components of masculinity if women also demonstrate the traits." Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 190.
[119] Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 179.
[120] Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 180–181.
[121] Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 180–182.
[122] Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 185.

not elude the gaze. However, it is important to note that the description relies on the female lover recalling his body from memory and his body is not directly on display.

In theorising on biblical masculinities, we must be cautious of applying modern methodologies to ancient texts.[123] Current studies have focused on categorising individual men's masculinities against a particular model, yet we must remain mindful of generalising HB masculinities as this risks overlooking its multifaceted nature against the social construction of masculinities more widely.[124] Moreover, there is disproportionate attention given to biblical masculinities, with most studies focused on the biblical narratives and prophets, and I concur with Nissinen that biblical masculinities studies needs to incorporate the Psalms, Qohelet and the Song in future studies as they will offer distinct insights into the variety and complexity of masculinities.[125] While the models proposed by Connell, Clines and Haddox can aid in navigating masculinities in the Song, it is important to recognise that the theoretical basis for biblical masculinities studies is yet to be broadened.[126]

1.2.2. Masculinities in the Song

To my knowledge there are only two studies which directly engage with masculinities in the Song at the present time: Exum's chapter on "The Man in the Song of Songs" and Nissinen's chapter on "Male Agencies in the Song of Songs."[127] Yet while both discuss the male lover's masculinity at length, with Nissinen extending his discussion to include the

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[123] Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 273.
[124] Susan E. Haddox, "Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 3; Exum, "The Man," 119.
[125] Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 280.
[126] David J.A. Clines, "Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 238.
[127] Exum, "The Man," 107-124; Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 251–273.

other men in the Song, neither discuss how the female lover can likewise be perceived as fulfilling the criteria of hegemonic masculinity. Danilo Verde's recent monograph examines the use of military imagery to depict both lovers as conquerors and his examination of the female lover as a fortified city and as a conqueror serve a necessary contrast to romantic readings of the Song which prioritise metaphors of love over metaphors of war.[128] While Verde's study challenges assumptions of gender in the Song, he does not explicitly evaluate the lovers against the categories of biblical masculinities studies to argue that the female lover fulfils certain categories better than the male lover. As such, this leaves room for the female lover's masculinity to be discussed further and my examination seeks to broaden the framework for masculinities in the Song to include the female lover.

Exum's study of the male lover focuses on the portrayals of his personality presented in the lovers' speeches.[129] Exum argues that the male lover depicts himself as a skilled poet who has travelled widely and does not encounter obstacles.[130] Most pertinently, Exum suggests that the male lover appears ambivalent about the effect the female lover has on him and perceives her to be his private domain, likened to a locked garden (4:12-15; 5:1) for which he does not require permission to access.[131] By contrast, the female lover perceives her lover as a romantic suitor, mutually committed to her love of him. Although Exum is critical of measuring individual characters against a specific model of hegemonic masculinity, she applies Clines's criteria to her enquiry into the male lover's masculinity, adding self-control as an additional category.[132] Like Clines, Exum argues that

[128] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 45-101, 133-167.
[129] Exum, "The Man," 108.
[130] Exum, "The Man," 112.
[131] Exum, "The Man," 113-115.
[132] Exum, "The Man," 119.

being a warrior is associated with masculinity. While she observes that the male lover does not fight in battle, she maintains that his use of military imagery to describe the female lover and his adoption of the Solomonic guise, which I will discuss in greater detail below, suggests his portrayal meets this criterion.[133] However, this argument assumes that the figure of Solomon is portrayed by the male lover. In my discussion of royal imagery, I will argue that Solomon and the male lover are separate characters and that the references to Solomon and his military strength can be viewed as parodic and, hence, an undesirable characteristic.

Exum further argues that the male lover upholds the hegemonic criteria of physical strength through his association with hard materials. His portrayal also displays features of the category of competitiveness needed to maintain his royal status. While Exum's argument for competitiveness is based on conflating Solomon with the male lover, I argue that this criterion is met even if the male lover is not identified with Solomon, as there is still a level of competition indicated by the female lover's assertion that he is above other men (5:10). Exum argues that the male lover deviates from current hegemonic criteria through his association with the female lover (c.f. Clines's category of the "womanless male") which Exum perceives as a vulnerability, a "chink in his masculine armor."[134] Overall, Exum's study presents a good basis for exploring the male lover's masculinity. Exum has laid the groundwork for future studies to explore how depictions of masculinity differ depending on who portrays the masculinity, as in the case of the differing perspectives of the male lover's masculinity shown in the lovers' speeches.

[133] Exum, "The Man," 120-121.
[134] Exum, "The Man," 124.

Influenced by Connell's work and definition of hegemonic masculinity as comprising hierarchical power relations which I have outlined above, Nissinen offers the most developed exploration of masculinities in the Song to date.[135] As with Connell's model, the idea that masculinities are relative is likewise central to Nissinen's work.[136] While steering away from offering a clear definition of masculinity, Nissinen notes that there are different portrayals of masculinities in the Bible which are not all appreciated equally.[137] A man's social status and role within society impacts his place on the relative masculinity spectrum as, for example, a king holds greater hegemonic masculinity than a servant.[138]

Nissinen introduces three types of male agencies in the Song: hegemonic agency represented by Solomon, parental agency represented by the female lover's brothers and the "ideal lover's agency" represented by the male lover.[139] Beginning with Solomon's hegemonic masculinity, Nissinen argues that Solomon is the archetype of hegemonic masculinity through his association with military symbols and his supreme royal authority.[140] Within the masculinities framework adapted from Connell, Solomon's male retinue of soldiers, servants and watchmen act in accordance with the model of complicit masculinity as they uphold Solomon's hegemony and their power is dependent on Solomon's position.[141] And yet, they are also subordinated to him, as they cannot achieve equal status with Solomon. Nissinen interestingly notes that while the Song presents the

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[135] Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 275.
[136] Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 274.
[137] Martti Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *Being A Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 222.
[138] Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities," 238.
[139] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 265–267.
[140] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 266.
[141] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 254–257.

reader with the paradigm of hegemonic masculinity, the Song also reveals its disapproval of this model by parodying and ridiculing Solomon and his retinue: the soldiers cannot capture the female lover's fortress, the watchmen's abuse is perceived as a misuse of authority and Solomon becomes "degraded into a rich man whose agency is similar to that of a brothel-keeper."[142] While I concur with Nissinen's observation that hegemonic masculinity appears to be objectionable in the Song, I believe Nissinen's inference that the Song depicts the abuse committed by the watchmen as a misuse of authority is unfounded as the Song offers no judgement of the watchmen's actions nor are they subject to the ridicule that the soldiers face.[143] I suggest, rather, that the watchmen pose a real threat to the female lover, even if it is only temporary.

The second type of masculinity is illustrated by the female lover's brothers who embody parental agency in the Song. As discussed in the outline of feminist perspectives, the absence of a paternal figure in the Song is noticeable, particularly as this lack of paternal presence emphasises the role of the maternal figure. Nissinen's second category of male agency allows for the presence of the brothers in the Song, who uphold a parental agency in the father's absence. Their agency is more subtle than the hegemonic agency embodied by Solomon as their status is not upheld solely through wielding power over their sister by issuing commands and instructions. Rather, Nissinen suggests that the mutual connection between the siblings allows the female lover to negotiate her position

[142] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 254.
[143] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 256–257.

within the family.[144] For Nissinen, these two types of male agencies serve to highlight the male lover's "ideal lover's agency" as the preferred male agency in the Song.

In his embodiment of the "ideal lover's agency", the male lover fulfils some of the criteria of hegemonic masculinity as he is characterised through the female lover's speeches as having great sex appeal and appearance. In the description in 5:10-16, he takes on a statuesque, superhuman, quasi-divine quality.[145] However, the Song refrains from revealing the physical attributes that enable the male lover to embody this ideal masculinity.[146] On the other hand, the male lover's actions and personality do not always align with the model of hegemonic masculinity. Nissinen argues that he is nowhere shown as asserting authority over the female lover, or as an aggressor, unlike the watchmen.[147] On the contrary, he is portrayed as a gentle and sensitive lover, characteristics which are more closely linked with subordinate masculinity. Yet I argue that this may be an oversimplification of the male lover's authority over the female lover, as the locked garden metaphor in 4:12 could be interpreted as the male lover displaying a level of control over the garden (which is synonymous with the female lover's body) that only he has access to. Nissinen's category of "ideal lover's agency" allows for a model of ideal masculinity which utilises characteristics of hegemonic masculinity yet also disrupts them. The male lover has freedom of movement, does not have familial ties and does not submit to the authority of others but he also deviates from the hegemonic category in the way he interacts with his lover. The strength of this new category lies in its proving that the models of masculinity

[144] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 266.
[145] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 262.
[146] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 261.
[147] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 263.

presented by scholars such as Connell, Clines and Haddox can be adapted to provide new insights into how masculinities are presented.[148] The crux of Nissinen's argument is that the Song promotes the male lover's "ideal lover's agency" over hegemonic or parental agency as a model the male audience should aspire to. As such, Nissinen poses an important question which remains unanswered: is the "ideal lover's agency" portrayed as a fantasy, or intended to represent a reflection of the real experience in the male private life?[149]

While Exum's and Nissinen's studies have opened an avenue for exploring the Song in light of biblical masculinities studies, the study of masculinities in the Song remains underdeveloped and requires further investigation. I will thus evaluate whether Nissinen's category of the "ideal lover's agency" is a fitting model to apply to the male lover.[150] Moreover, it is also necessary to expand upon the models of masculinity which have greatly influenced studies to date. The aims of both biblical masculinities studies and feminist biblical scholarship in the exploration of the Song, a text which notoriously challenges boundaries and binaries, are to understand how gender is constructed. However, these approaches risk overlooking the crucial point that gender boundaries are also challenged within the text. In fact, it is through this disruption of gender binaries that the Song is able to use the imagery of doves and gazelles for both the female and the male lover. The field of biblical masculinities studies needs to advance beyond measuring characters against established fixed criteria of masculinity as this risks overlooking how masculinities and

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[148] Stuart MacWilliam, "Final Reflections on Hebrew Masculinities Anew," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 300.
[149] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 269.
[150] Ovidiu Creangă, "Introduction," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 9.

femininities interact and adapt. Apart from the issues arising from applying fixed models of masculinity to ancient texts, my main criticism of current work on masculinity in the Song is that it has often excluded discussions of the female lover's masculinity, particularly in comparison to the male lover's masculinity. I believe, therefore, that Nissinen's question persists: "who is the *man* in the Song of Songs?"[151] My response is to examine how both the male and female lovers are the "man" in the Song, if by "man" one means acting in accordance with the categories of hegemonic masculinity arising from biblical masculinities studies.

1.3. Royalty

In my discussion of royalty in the Song, I evaluate Solomon's character solely as he is presented in the text and not as a historical figure. Moreover, I perceive Solomon and the male lover as two separate characters in the Song. As such, in my reading of Solomon's characterisation, the dates of Solomon's reign and the debate surrounding the authenticity of the Solomonic attribution are extraneous and will not form a part of my investigation. Rather, I will examine how the figure of Solomon and his royal court allow the lovers to appropriate aspects of royal power whilst also rendering Solomon as a parodic character whose hegemonic power is disrupted by the lovers. In my analysis, I will be focusing on the wedding procession/coronation (3:6-11) and Solomon's vineyard (8:11-12) as these provide the most comprehensive characterisations of Solomon. However, royal imagery is abundant throughout the Song. For example, the female lover is compared to other queens (6:8-9), to Solomon's curtains (1:5), or else she is referred to as a "noble woman" (7:2 [7:1

[151] Original emphasis. Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 280.

E]). Likewise, numerous luxurious materials which are often associated with royalty frequently pervade the lovers' descriptions of each other, evoking grandeur, wealth and exuberant textures, scents, and colours. The persistent use of royal imagery, even when not explicitly used with reference to Solomon, emphasises the extent to which the lovers disrupt Solomon's rule by appropriating royal power for themselves.

1.3.1. A Solomonic Guise

On first reading, it would appear that the lovers are synonymous with Solomon and his bride. However, on closer reading, the verses which mention a "king" do not always mention Solomon by name and it is therefore pertinent to ask whether the king is synonymous with Solomon or whether he is a separate character (1:4, 12; 7:6 [7:5 E]). If we are dealing with separate characters, as I will argue, can the references to Solomon be read positively or does he feature merely as a comparison of royal masculinity to be disrupted by the lover-king's ideal masculinity that draws on Nissinen's category of "ideal lover's agency"?

Using the idea of the "Solomonic guise", Exum argues that the male lover takes on the role of Solomon as part of the Song's conjuring act.[152] Exum rightly points out that we only ever encounter the literary fiction of Solomon. However, Exum conflates the instances where the male lover is identified as a "king" with adopting a "Solomonic guise" (1:4, 12; 6:8-9; 7:6 [7:5 E]), despite there being no explicit connection between the "king" and the literary figure of Solomon in these verses. Instead, Exum argues that all references to kingship inform part of the royal fantasy where the female lover conjures her lover as a

[152] Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin," 302.

king, even when she does not explicitly become his queen.[153] In her analysis of 8:8-12 and the debate surrounding Solomon's vineyard, Exum notes that this is a sexual comparison between the man's lover and Solomon's wives and concubines. Yet Exum argues that this does not parody or criticise Solomon as this would be inconsistent with Solomon's positive portrayal in 3:6-11.[154] However, I question Exum's implicit assumption that 3:6-11 does not parody Solomon on the basis that the attitude to Solomon does not evolve throughout the course of the Song. Furthermore, the vineyard comparisons in 8:11-12 can be understood as showing that the male lover and Solomon are separate figures as the male lover competes with Solomon.[155] My main critique of Exum's reading of the royal imagery as a "Solomonic guise" is that it does not allow for the possibility that the female lover's "king" and Solomon are separate characters. Leading on from this, a parodic reading of Solomon is incompatible with the idea of a Solomonic guise, as the Solomonic guise relies on a positive association with Solomon's royalty. Instead, I argue that the Solomonic guise is a limited perspective on the effect the royal imagery has on the lovers' power: the Song can parody Solomon while simultaneously appropriating the luxurious features that made him powerful. Reading the Song in connection to wisdom literature, Katharine Dell argues that the link between Solomon and the "king" are possibly later inclusions, which would explain the inconsistent identification of the "king" with Solomon or the male lover.[156] I also concur

[153] Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin," 307. Verde on the other hand argues that the epithet "the Shulammite" in 7:1 [6:13 E] may be presenting the female lover as a queen as the name can be read as a counterpart to "Solomon". Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 157.
[154] Exum, "The Little Sister," 279.
[155] Exum, "The Little Sister," 281.
[156] Katharine J. Dell, "Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 24. See also Dell's discussion of the references to the "king" as representing the lovers' roleplay in Katharine J. Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom' and Its Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 46–48.

with Dell's observation that the separate images of the king and the shepherd indicate that the male lover cannot be identified with Solomon.[157] If the male lover disguises himself as Solomon, this proves to be a thinly veiled disguise at best and we may ask whether it intends to portray Solomon positively or whether it is disruptive from the beginning.

Among the first scholars to comment on the purpose of the Song's royal imagery, Munro observes how the royal imagery is particularly associated with the male lover but, as the Song progresses, it becomes more associated with the female lover, arguing that 7:6 [7:5 E] is a point of reversal where the king is made powerless by her hair and she gains control over him.[158] The female lover progresses from being vulnerable in 1:6 (as interpreted by Munro) to possessing what Munro terms "quasi-queenship" later in the Song.[159] Munro interestingly perceives the military imagery as a royal aspect when applied to the female lover, and notes that the male lover's royalty is shown through the intimacy of scent, food and drink.[160] Like Exum, Munro too views the references to Solomon as positive but does concede that 8:11-12 is a more negative portrayal. An important distinction is that whereas Exum interpreted the speaker of 8:12 to be the male lover speaking, Munro argues the female lover may be the speaker. While this would change the focus of this scene from a competition between the male lover and Solomon to a competition between the female lover and Solomon, it does not change the negative connotations of Solomon's vineyard. For Munro, the lovers distance themselves from the

[157] Dell, "Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?," 11–13.
[158] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 36.
[159] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 37.
[160] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 42.

Solomonic disguise.[161] The wealth, splendour and even the daughters of Jerusalem are representative of this court imagery, but Munro argues this is ultimately denounced.[162] I believe Munro's reading allows for a parodic reading of Solomon where the lovers are perceived as disrupting Solomonic rule even while they engage in the royal court.

1.3.2. A Subversive Parody

Influenced by Brenner-Idan's comic reading of the "dancing Shulammite" in 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E], Whedbee highlights the parodic potential of the Solomonic references. Although he identifies the female lover as "the Shulammite" despite this term only appearing in verse 7:1 [6:13 E], Whedbee observes that her centrality in the Song renders the royal figure subordinate. As with Exum's reading, Whedbee likewise conflates the male lover with Solomon, however he acknowledges the satiric value in the royal pomp, parodying Solomon and his relationships with women by having him fall in love with one woman above all others.[163] Interestingly, as Whedbee reads Solomon to be the male lover, it is Solomon who takes on the disguise of the shepherd, gazelle and stag rather than the male lover taking on the guise of Solomon, as Exum proposes.[164] Furthermore, Whedbee argues that Brenner-Idan has limited her comic reading of 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E] by neglecting to discuss how male dominance is subverted by the female dancer.[165] While there are several

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[161] Munro notes that "by deliberately distancing Solomon from the lovers towards the end of the Song, it becomes apparent that, in the end, the metaphor of kingship is inadequate to describe this great love. Love is not for sale, even to the most rich and powerful." Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 42.
[162] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 42.
[163] Whedbee points out the parody in the Song's characterisation of Solomon: "How comically ludicrous that Solomon, a legendary possessor of a huge harem, is portrayed as an outsider looking in (5.2) *or* as one whom the woman commands to flee away at the end of the Song (8.14)!" Original emphasis. Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody," 269.
[164] Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody," 276.
[165] Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody," 274.

aspects I disagree with in Whedbee's reading, such as the conflation of the lovers as Solomon and "the Shulammite", it establishes the foundations for a fully parodic reading of Solomon which is not only confined to the comparisons of the vineyards in 8:11-12.

There has been a recent resurgence in parodic readings of the Song's royal imagery, as illustrated by Schellenberg's and Spencer's studies. Schellenberg's article focuses on the wedding/coronation scene (3:6-11) and suggests that 3:6, which has often been understood as referring to the appearance of Solomon's litter, should be considered separately from 3:7-11 as it refers to the female lover as opposed to Solomon's litter.[166] Schellenberg therefore argues that 3:6 and 3:7 potentially originated from different songs, a suggestion which may explain the lack of cohesion between the two.[167] Whereas Exum and Munro perceived 3:6-11 as a positive portrayal of Solomon, Schellenberg argues that this scene has mocking undertones: the overprotected palanquin is ridiculous and pretentious.[168] The reference to Solomon building his palanquin in 3:9 mocks his skill as a master builder by depicting him building on a much smaller scale.[169] There is also a satirical tone to the bride's mysterious absence from her own wedding while other women are mentioned, which could be interpreted as mocking Solomon's many wives.[170] Moreover, Schellenberg provides an intriguing explanation for the mother crowning the king, a part of the wedding ceremony which is often overlooked by commentators who perceive this

[166] This is often translated as "What is that coming up from the wilderness?" but it is more accurately translated as "Who is that?". Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 185.
[167] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 189.
[168] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 180.
[169] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 180.
[170] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 181–182.

as a poetic creation.[171] Instead, Schellenberg suggests that the mother crowning Solomon is a possible mockery of the historical event of Bathsheba helping Solomon become king.[172] On this basis, and that of the vineyard comparisons in 8:11-12, Schellenberg argues that Solomon and the male lover are separate characters.

More recently, Spencer's examination of the royal imagery as political satire incorporates Whedbee's idea of comedy, Brenner-Idan's view of parody and Black's heuristic of the grotesque. Spencer differentiates between Solomon and the male lover (whom he calls the "shepherd-king"), as Dell and Schellenberg also noted. Unlike previous scholars, Spencer detects the lovers' discomfort in the royal court from the beginning of the Song as the lovers are more suited to the natural environment. As persuasively summarised by Spencer, the female lover prefers her "green" king (1:16) over the "golden" one (Solomon).[173] In contrast to Exum's Solomonic guise, Spencer argues the purpose of the royal imagery is its appropriation into the lovers' romantic fantasy: "they co-opt cult and court imagery to serve their own eco-erotic devotion far removed from temple and palace."[174] The wealth and ornaments therefore become products of passion, symbolising genuine love rather than material possessions.[175] Significantly, Spencer argues that there is a sense in the Song that the lovers are attempting to escape the Solomonic regime, and this is most noticeable in the female lover's seeking refuge away from masculine power.[176]

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[171] This is not an adequate explanation on the commentators' part as the whole Song is a poetic imagination, as Exum points out. "One often finds among commentators a tendency to ascribe to poetic imagination what they cannot 'explain' in the text in any other way, as though poetic imagination did not shape everything in the poem." Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin," 306.
[172] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 182.
[173] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 12.
[174] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 13.
[175] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 13.
[176] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 15.

This is an interesting line of argument in Spencer's article, and I will take this idea further to argue that the female lover wishes to specifically escape the hegemonic power embodied by Solomon and his retinue rather than the ideal masculinity embodied by male lover, as previously discussed in relation to Nissinen's model of the "ideal lover's agency".[177] To this effect, her assertion that "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16) is an act of defiance against Solomon as she is seeking emotional refuge "*from* antagonistic, androcentric, autocratic, regimes, like Solomon's."[178] The country maiden gains queenly status and the king becomes a captivated lover and an interesting comparison can be made to Munro's argument that the female lover gains her status precisely as the king becomes captivated. Yet by 8:11-12 the female lover does not play with the monarchic imagery as a conjuring act, she now speaks of Solomon as a problematic figure whose wealth and royal power are undermined through the lovers' enduring love.[179] As such, I concur with Spencer that "the Song has appropriated a royal fiction and Solomonic figuration, not merely to enhance the inestimable worth of the couple's love, but also to *distance* their relationship—to carve out safe spaces, emotional refuges—from oppressive Solomon-type realms."[180]

Through combining the models of masculinity and satirical readings of the royal imagery, I will examine how the hegemonic power of a monarchic patriarchal society imbues power into the lovers as they appropriate and disrupt the power and luxury of Solomon's royal court. During the course of the Song, the lovers seize elements of royal

[177] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 15.
[178] Original emphasis. Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 16.
[179] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 21.
[180] Original emphasis. Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 23.

power and appropriate them into the natural world to create their own royal court. Ultimately, Solomon's hegemonic royal power is reduced to a parody and his masculinity is deemed undesirable in comparison to the male lover's peerless masculinity.

2. Methodology

Having discussed and reviewed a few of the varying interpretations of the Song, I will now explain my approach to examining power in the Song. In this section I will discuss my approach to the text in terms of literary and narrative criticism, as well as the underpinning methodology of gender criticism which draws on the well-established field of feminist biblical scholarship and the relatively more recent field of biblical masculinities studies. I will conclude with a summary of my definitions and approaches to what constitutes power in the Song.

2.1. Approaching the Text

My primary methodology involves applying literary and narrative criticism to the Masoretic Text. In my reading of the Song, I utilise commentaries, dictionaries and secondary literature to elucidate the meanings of numerous *hapax legomena*, obscure phrases and other challenging aspects of the text where it is possible to do so. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations are my own. The Song's rich history of interpretation evidences its endless interpretive possibilities. As such, my suggestions and interpretations are made with the awareness that a significant part of the Song's allure is its ability to be read and interpreted from multiple perspectives, allowing for countless readings of the text. I am thus conscious that my reading of moments which uphold or disrupt hegemonic power in the Song is likewise only one of its possible readings.

Before introducing the literary and narrative works that influence my methodology, it is important to briefly discuss the Song's form. It is difficult to ascertain whether the Song is a unity or a collection of songs, and commentators have made compelling arguments for

both scenarios.[181] To a certain extent, however, this question is beyond the remit of my examination. I will approach the Song as it appears in the Masoretic Text, with an awareness that while it may have initially been composed as separate poems, its redactors have maintained a degree of cohesion in the Song in such a way that it is no longer always possible to clearly demarcate the separate poems. As Verde notes, this brings the Song into a category where it should be regarded neither as a unity nor a collection: "the Song rather seems to be a compilation of several cleverly organized love poems sharing refrains, motifs, metaphors, vocabulary, and subtle cross-references."[182] The Song as we have it in its final form contains recurrent themes and relatively consistent characterisations, suggesting that the redactors, if not necessarily the author(s) themselves, wished to retain and emphasise the common aspects of the different songs, drawing on similar experiences of nature, cities, royalty and the military world.

In employing literary and narrative criticism on the Song, I primarily draw on the works of Robert Alter. Briefly explained, literary criticism is the act of reading biblical texts as works of literature to identify how language operates.[183] As Alter and Frank Kermode summarise in their seminal *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, a literary approach elucidates the intricacies of the biblical texts through the use of linguistic properties such as syntax,

[181] Brenner-Idan maintains that the Song is a collection of songs, while Exum, Andruska and Longman argue for the Song's unity. Most commentators point out the difficulty in categorising the Song as either a collection or a unity, so Verde, Fox, Landy. Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 48; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 33–37; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 33–35; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 54–56; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 36–37; Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 209–222.
[182] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 37.
[183] Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, "General Introduction," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 3–5.

grammar and vocabulary as well as through genre, style and imagery.[184] Above all, a literary approach is cognisant that the biblical author makes "constant artful determinations."[185]

A focus on narrative may seem an unusual methodology for the Song. However, while the Song falls under the category of poetry, it contains narrative elements which allow for investigation into literary aspects that concern the narrative critic. Alter argues that there is an "implicit narrativity of parallelism" in the Song and notes that it contains "striking narrative elements."[186] The categories of narrative and poetry are thus not entirely distinct, and while the Song does not contain a linear narrative, it does contain narrative moments which are often repeated, as exemplified in the recurring seeking motifs in 3:1-4 and 5:2-7. As Alter summarises, only through a close reading of the poetry can we "recover a sense of the intricate artistry of the poems."[187]

Exum, too, has drawn attention to how scholars have tended to read narrative development into the Song as a way of making sense of the recurring language, themes and characters despite the discontinuous form of poetry.[188] Likewise, in her comparative study of the Song of Songs and wisdom literature, Jennifer Andruska has noted the Song's narrative dimensions as contributing to the creation of the lovers' consistent characterisations.[189] As such, in reading the Song closely and employing literary and

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[184] Alter and Kermode, "General Introduction," 5.
[185] Robert Alter, "Introduction," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 21.
[186] Robert Alter, "The Poetic and Wisdom Books," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 237–239.
[187] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, ix.
[188] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 42–45.
[189] Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 18. Most current studies on literary approaches to the Song focus on what constitutes the "wisdom literature" category, whether this still remains an accurate designation, and where the Song finds itself within this broad category. See for example Mark R Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?: New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2015); Dell, *The*

narrative criticism, I perceive the Song as bringing together poetic form, imagery and narrative to build complex characters, providing insight into their individual moments of power and vulnerability.

2.2. Gender Criticism

My investigation into how the lovers are presented in the Song and how they disrupt hegemonic power employs feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies. The combination of these approaches leads to a wider gender criticism of the Song, which I find particularly apt for the lovers as they embody and blur genders, simultaneously fulfilling and disrupting the ancient gender norms such that there is no neat divide between the "feminine" and the "masculine". I perceive both feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies as counterparts whose overarching aim resides in questioning the construction of gender.[190]

Literary and narrative criticism underpin much of feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies. Within feminist biblical scholarship, literary criticism allows the feminist reader to interpret and rediscover the text and its female characters. In the introduction to her book *Texts of Terror*, Trible views literary criticism as an intrinsic reading of a text in its final form, arguing that "for this study, accent is upon the inseparability of form, content, and meaning; the rhetorical formation of sentences, episodes, and scenes as well as overall design and plot structure; and the portrayal of characters, most especially

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Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom'; Will Kynes, *An Obituary for 'Wisdom Literature': The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Will Kynes, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[190] I thus follow scholars like Nissinen who argue that biblical masculinity studies is a counterpart rather than an opposition to feminist biblical scholarship. Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 272.

the violated women."[191] In another work, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Trible rightly summarises the literary approach as revealing the clue that is already present in the text.[192] Yet literary criticism is by no means the only methodology in feminist biblical scholarship, and often feminist biblical scholars apply a range of other methodologies including historical, sociological and archaeological perspectives.[193]

As I will examine how hegemonic power is disrupted in the Song, I am particularly drawn to Alice Bach's idea of women experiencing narrative power, which Bach applies to her analysis of David's wives.[194] Likewise, Bach's statement that "a feminist reading intent on restoring dimension to flattened characters must account for pieces that do not fit" can be taken as a guiding principle for approaching the female lover in the Song.[195] When measured against other biblical women who are accorded minimal attention, the female lover does not appear to be a flattened character. However, I argue that it is nonetheless necessary to restore the female lover to a fuller dimension as the scholarly perception of her as the archetypal female lover in an Edenic setting has thus far overlooked aspects which make her a more complex character, namely her portrayal as a warrior and the power of her gaze. Feminist readings of the female lover abound, but the tendencies to view the lovers' relationship as mutual and the female lover as autonomous have occasionally led feminist biblical scholars to overlook the nuanced ways in which the

[191] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3-4.
[192] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 8.
[193] Pamela J. Milne, "Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 40.
[194] Alice Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 29.
[195] Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 34.

female lover both acts within, and disrupts, ancient gender norms. As discussed in the literature review, the works of Brenner-Idan, Exum and Black substantially feature in my own reading of the Song from a feminist perspective, particularly in discussions of female autonomy and the effect of the male gaze.[196]

Biblical masculinities studies shares similar concerns to those raised by feminist biblical scholars. Androcentrism, patriarchy and masculine hegemony negatively impact men as they do women.[197] As such, the central aim of biblical masculinities studies is to deconstruct and reconstruct the male gender as it is presented in biblical literature.[198] In the Introduction to *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, Creangă notes that "we also would benefit greatly from understanding better the power dynamics and management of control surrounding male hegemonies and their sub-categories ('women' and 'other' men) as we see them articulated in most biblical texts."[199] In part, my examination of both the female and the male lovers' masculinities, as well as the interactions between the female lover and other men who hold power, seeks to enhance this understanding of power dynamics in the Song. Creangă's call to examine the gender of men in the Song has partially been answered in recent years as several studies have investigated the male lover's masculinity.[200] However, there cannot be a comprehensive understanding of masculinities in the Song without consideration of the female lover's masculinity, a common oversight which my examination begins to rectify.

[196] See Literature Review, pp.10-27.
[197] Ovidiu Creangă, "Introduction," in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 6.
[198] Creangă, "Introduction," in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, 4.
[199] Creangă, "Introduction," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, 3.
[200] Creangă, "Introduction," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, 9.

Both feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies acknowledge the need to be interdisciplinary.[201] Feminist and masculinist criticisms do not eliminate the need for further methodology. Rather, a feminist or masculinist perspective provides most fruitful understandings when both are seen as part of a wider critique of gender, as well as adopting methodologies such as literary criticism and comparative historical methods, particularly in situating biblical masculinity in its ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context. In employing both feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies, I acknowledge that both methodologies have their limits, yet combining both fields provides the tools to better deconstruct and reconstruct the lovers' genders.

Drawing on the two fields would lead us closer to Deryn Guest's call for a move to genderqueer criticism.[202] If we are to gain a greater understanding of gender, we need to stop thinking in terms of gender reversals and question the binary division of gender.[203] Guest suggests that "within a genderqueer framework, masculinity studies would look at examples of female masculinity as part of its remit and subvert the all-too-easy connection between masculinity studies and men."[204] Of particular importance to my analysis of the Song is Guest's recommendation for female masculinity to be investigated.[205] Since *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* was published in 2012, the scope of genderqueer studies is widening in its inclusion of women's masculinities and men's femininities. Scholars have

[201] Athalya Brenner, "On Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Feminist Woman: Introduction to the Series," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 17; Creangă, "Introduction," in *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, 8.
[202] "*Genderqueer* criticism is proposed as a more useful and accurate term, bringing together, as it does, the connections of gender and sexuality in a rich field of analysis." Original emphasis. Deryn Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 43.
[203] Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*, 43.
[204] Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*, 142.
[205] Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*, 125.

begun to question masculinity as a marked category in the studies edited by Creangă, but there is still a way to go with regards to looking beyond our own categories of masculinities and femininities and applying them to biblical texts. These categories hinder as much as they help in assuming an extent of binary gender – characters are often either hegemonically masculine or not, acting within or subverting the expectations of the male and female gender norms. When examining gender in the Song, it appears blurred and contradictory at times. The lovers are simultaneously upholding hegemonic masculinity whilst also deviating from it. The lovers are both feminine and masculine; but as complex characters, they disrupt the binary division: they are neither feminine nor masculine.

2.3. Discussing Power in the Song

In my application of literary and narrative criticism, as well as the gender criticism influenced by feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies, I have identified that power is presented in the Song through the use of language in direct speech, the extent of autonomy and in the ways in which the lovers' physical attributes draw from the natural, royal and military worlds.

The issues of autonomy and the significance of language, particularly with regards to the possibility of a female voice in the Song, are well-established in feminist biblical scholarship. The lovers' differing freedom of movement has been especially important in determining the characters' power, with the male lover perceived as more powerful for his ability to evade capture, while the female lover is caught by the watchmen (5:7). As noted above, the fact that the female lover in the Song is given a voice, let alone a substantial part of the dialogue, has particularly drawn the attention of feminist scholars. The Song

presents a female lover whose characterisation through dialogue can be more easily examined than her female counterparts in other HB texts. The wide range of linguistic techniques employed by the female lover thus plays an important role in expressing her power.

The connection between military strength and power is well-attested within masculinities studies, which draws on the experiences of warfare in the ANE context and often regards being a warrior as the principal category of masculinity, as illustrated by Clines's categories. The assumption that military strength and characters' embodiment as warriors exhibits power is compelling. In my analysis of military imagery in the descriptions of the lovers, I build on Chapman's seminal monograph *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* as well as Verde's recently published *Conquered Conquerors: Love and War in the Song of Songs* to elucidate the connection between Assyrian and Israelite military masculinity, and the significance of military metaphors respectively.[206] As Chapman and Verde point out, war imagery not only emphasises masculinity, but is often inextricable from royalty.[207]

Within masculinity studies, the phrase "hegemonic masculinity" denotes the dominant cultural construction of masculinity which always exists in a hierarchical relation to other constructions of gender (subordinated, complicit, marginalised masculinities and

[206] Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004); Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*.
[207] Chapman states that "thus royal masculinity is first and foremost associated with strength and heroism." In his analysis of Pharaoh's mare in Song 1:9, Verde argues that "the conceptual domain military cavalry, therefore, is not to be considered either opposed or an alternative to the conceptual domain royalty, but rather as part of it." Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 23; Original Formatting. Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 139.

femininity) and upholds patriarchy.[208] However, due to the prominence of royal imagery in the Song, and the inextricable connection between Solomon's dominant power as a man and his power as a sovereign, I use the phrase "hegemonic power" to encompass both gendered and royal hegemony. Moreover, the act of gazing in the Song is predominantly, though not exclusively, a powerful act of masculinity. The ability to gaze on another while avoiding the gaze indicates a privileged position in the hegemonic gender hierarchy and social order, which is best exemplified in the female lover's repeated subjugation to the male gaze (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]) in contrast to the male lover's repeated evasion of the gaze (3:1; 5:6). As such, I perceive the act of gazing as illustrative of the onlooker's hegemonic power through their ability to dominate and objectify the subject of the gaze.

The concept of the male gaze was coined by Laura Mulvey in her application of psychoanalysis and feminist film criticism to investigate the presence of the male gaze in the visual language of Hollywood films.[209] While Mulvey's work has generated a wealth of studies on the male gaze within literature more broadly, its application within biblical studies has also garnered criticism. Jennifer Glancy has argued that the concept of the male gaze cannot be seamlessly applied to any text as this fails to account for the differences

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[208] See for example Connell, *Masculinities*, 77; Haddox, "Masculinity Studies," 179. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." In her overview of biblical masculinities studies, Haddox describes hegemonic masculinity as "the specific gender construction that is dominant in cultural and political power structures. Even if no actual men embody that form of masculinity, the combination of traits still dominates as the ideal masculinity because of its association with power. Thus, a particular gender construction is imitated and propagated by those who seek to rise in the hierarchy of status and power. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity is not stable, but is continuously shaped by competing subversive masculinities and the political tensions these represent. Nor can masculinity be defined simply in a dichotomy with femininity, but rather it is expressed along a continuum that must be continually contested with other men, according to the characteristics of the current hegemonic norms."

[209] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

between the mediums of visual culture and the text.[210] Moreover, such approaches treat the concept of the male gaze as ahistorical, failing to recognise that visual cultures are dependent on historical contexts.[211] Indeed, the male gaze which Mulvey explores in Hollywood films cannot be separated from its twentieth century historical context.[212] Yet Glancy allows that we can adapt our use of the concept by understanding the historicity of vision and searching for the "visual cues" within the Bible.[213] She proposes that the concept of the disciplinary gaze within Foucault's and Sartre's works would be more beneficial for biblical studies than the gendered gaze of feminist film criticism.[214]

My examination of the male gaze in the Song likewise encapsulates its disciplinary dimension. However, the disciplinary gaze is articulated on gendered lines as it affects the female lover more than the male lover. Glancy argues that "we cannot map verbal imagery seamlessly onto a visual landscape. However, at times textual interpretation involves us in a process of imagination that draws inevitably on visual images."[215] The Song's frequent and vivid descriptions of the lovers' bodies prompt us to engage in the visuality of the text, and to situate the act of gazing in its specific historical context.[216] As such, the concept of the male gaze provides a useful framework for analysing the act of gazing in the Song and

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[210] Jennifer A. Glancy, "Text Appeal: Visual Pleasure and Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 82 (1998): 63-78.
[211] Glancy, "Text Appeal," 64.
[212] Glancy, "Text Appeal," 69-70.
[213] Glancy, "Text Appeal," 73.
[214] Glancy, "Text Appeal," 73.
[215] Glancy, "Text Appeal," 75.
[216] Attempting to place the Song in a specific context, Clines has proposed that the Song may have been part of a competition to find the best song. Brenner has suggested the Song may have formed part of wedding ceremonies. Both suggestions would point to a strong visual element to the Song as it would be performed. Clines, *Interested Parties*, 100; Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 274.

understanding that its eroticism extended beyond the oral and textual language and takes on a visual dimension.

Laura Quick's recent article explores the concept of the female gaze in Oholibah's gazing at the carved Chaldean officers in Ezekiel 23.[217] Quick argues that rather than empowering her by making her an object of the erotic gaze, Oholibah's participation in the gaze masculinises her whilst simultaneously emasculating the Chaldean officers.[218] Her participation in the female gaze thus others her from the audience and testifies to the magnitude of her crimes. Quick's assessment of Oholibah's female gaze has consequences for how one might approach the female lover's gaze in the Song. Quick notes that while the female lover gazes at her lover, her description casts him more as a statue than as a human body. As with Oholibah's gaze, it appears that the audience is removed from the female lover's gaze, thus causing a potentially othering effect. So, too, can be said of the gaze's masculinising effect. By gazing at her lover, the female lover participates in a masculine act, and the male lover's desire to evade the gaze may be indicative of a fear of being emasculated by the objectifying power of her gaze.

In comparison to these markers of hegemonic power, vulnerability can be perceived when a character lacks autonomy and freedom of movement, when their hegemonic position is undermined, as well as in the inability to express oneself

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[217] Responding to Glancy's critique that the concept of the gaze is ahistorical, Quick notes that "while the value for biblical studies of the use of the gaze as an ahistorical concept has been rightly criticized, the studies on the above texts [the treatment of naked female bodies in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, or the motif of women bathing in the stories of Bathsheba and Susanna] suggest it is nevertheless a fruitful analytical category in order to explore the representation of acts of seeing in biblical literature." Laura Quick, "Art, Aesthetics and the Dynamics of Visuality in Ezekiel 23," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 21, Article 1 (May 2021): 1-23, pp.10-11.

[218] Quick, "Art, Aesthetics and the Dynamics of Visuality in Ezekiel 23," 12.

persuasively or protect oneself from harm. Moreover, being exposed to the hegemonic power of another's gaze makes the subject of the gaze vulnerable as it allows them to be objectified. Both lovers are portrayed in ways that indicate their power or vulnerability at different stages in the Song. More interestingly, however, there are occasions within the same verse where the power relations are ambiguous, and the reader could easily interpret a moment of vulnerability instead of a moment of power, as is the case with the images of the trapped dove (2:14) and the locked garden (4:12). By drawing upon literary and gender criticism, I will examine how power is portrayed in the text in accordance, yet also at odds with, ancient gender expectations.

3. Examining Disruptions

In this section I will examine four ways in which hegemonic power is expressed and disrupted in the Song. My investigation begins with the lovers' appropriation of royal power which simultaneously mocks Solomon's hegemonic power as a monarch and builds on current parodic readings of Solomon's appearances in the Song.[219] I will then individually analyse how the male and female lovers' powers are expressed through the language used in direct speeches, their autonomy and the descriptions of their bodies to illustrate how they are portrayed in accordance with hegemonic gender norms. My analysis concludes with a discussion of the male gaze which prevails throughout the Song to assess its effects on the female lover's power. Finally, I explore how a female gaze likewise affects the male lover in the Song. As noted above, I will employ literary and gender criticism throughout my analysis to elucidate how power, vulnerability and gender interact.

3.1. Disrupting Royalty

In this section, I will explore how the lovers appropriate royal imagery in light of Spencer's argument that "the Song couple happily exploits royal images for their own passionate purposes."[220] The "royal fiction", a term used by Tremper Longman and Exum to refer to the royal imagery in the Song commences with the superscription שיר השירים אשר לשלמה "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1). As Exum notes, this superscription creates a backdrop for the lovers' royal fiction: "The association with Solomon at the very beginning encourages readers to think of Solomonic attributes or Solomonic splendor

[219] Whedbee, "Paradox and Parody," 266–278; Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 177–192; Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 667–692.
[220] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 5.

when a king is mentioned or regal imagery appears."[221] The subsequent luxury is immediately reminiscent of Solomon's wealth.[222] Similarly, Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch view the superscription as an invitation for the reader to enter the royal court.[223] The superscription primes the reader to enter the royal fiction with their existing expectations of royal luxury and wealth, allowing the Song to be vividly imagined.

The figure of Solomon and the royal power he represents within the Song is used to enhance the lovers' power, although this is quickly undermined by the parodic and mocking undertones in his appearances. With his royal power appropriated by the lovers, by the end of the Song Solomon's power is disrupted by the lovers. To illustrate how royal power is appropriated while Solomon himself is mocked, I will begin by examining the verses where the lovers exploit the royal imagery: the male lover is fashioned as a king in 1:4, 1:12 and 7:6 [7:5 E], and while the female lover is never explicitly identified as a queen, she appears as a noble woman (7:2 [7:1 E]), standing out among queens (6:8-10) despite the lower social status she seems to hold (1:5-6). The lovers' appropriation of regal materials begins in 1:9-11 and carries on throughout the Song.[224] I have isolated the instances where Solomon is mentioned directly (3:7-11 and 8:11-12) and I will examine

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[221] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 90. For a further investigation of the Solomonic attribution, see Dell, *The Solomonic Corpus of 'Wisdom'*, 45–48.
[222] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 89.
[223] Ariel A. Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 10.
[224] Verse 6:12, translated in the NRSV as "Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince" may be a further example of the royal fiction but for the purposes of my examination of royal power, I have omitted the verse from my discussion as it is too corrupt to offer a clear indication of its meaning. מרכבות עמי־נדיב can be translated as "in a chariot with a nobleman" or it can be taken as a proper noun to refer to Amminadib. Verde discusses the significance of military chariots for the Song's overall use of military imagery in his interpretation of the verse as referring to Amminadib. For a detailed discussion, see for example Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 120–122; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 222–225; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 585–589; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 193–195.

how these scenes mock, parody and undermine Solomon's power. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on the effect the lovers' appropriation and disruption of Solomon's hegemonic royal power has on Solomon's masculinity in the Song.

3.1.1. Appropriating Royal Power

The lovers appropriate royal power most noticeably in their use of royal titles and comparisons to royal personages. Power is first appropriated in the female lover's assignation of her lover as מלך "king". As I have discussed in the above literature review, I argue for a separation of the male lover's character from King Solomon's. Consequently, where there is reference to "a king" or "the king" and not specifically to Solomon or King Solomon, I take these to refer to the male lover as in הביאני המלך חדריו "The king has brought me into his chambers" (1:4), עד־שהמלך במסבו "While the king was on his couch" (1:12) and מלך אסור ברהטים "a king is held captive in the tresses" (7:6 [7:5 E]). These instances where מלך is used with a definite article, and one occasion (7:6 [7:5 E]) without the definite article, stand in contrast to direct mentions of King Solomon as המלך שלמה (3:9; 3:11). As Bloch and Bloch argue, "king" appears to be an epithet for the male lover and not for Solomon.[225] Likewise, Michael Fox states that "king" in this context is used as an affectionate term, as in 1:12.[226] Yet the separation of the male lover and Solomon also allows for the kings to be opposed, which leads Spencer to argue that the male lover as "shepherd-king" subverts Solomon.[227] This repeated royal assignation legitimises the royal

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[225] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 138.
[226] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 105.
[227] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 12.

fiction by confirming the male lover's role as king, whilst also disrupting Solomon's power by inviting comparison between the two kings.

The female lover likewise appropriates royal power despite not being explicitly named "queen". She first appropriates power with her assertion שחורה אני ונאוה בנות ירושלם כאהלי קדר כיריעות שלמה "I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon" (1:5). This verse presents interpretational challenges and scholars' interpretations are often clouded by their assumptions of race, beauty and desirability.[228] The first part of the verse, שחורה אני ונאוה, "I am black and beautiful", has garnered the most debate due to the possibility of translating ו as "and" or "but", significantly altering the verse from a proclamation of beauty to an apologetic assertion that she is "black but beautiful."[229] Aside from the debates over translation, there is consensus that darkened skin in this verse symbolises the female lover's lower social

[228] The verse is likewise of relevance to modern readers, particularly in light of decolonising our racist readings of texts and proclaiming black beauty as desirable. I am indebted to Siam Hatzaw for her paper "'I am dark but beautiful': The Politics of Desire for Black and Brown Bodies," presented at the Divine Bodies Conference, University of Glasgow Theology and Religious Studies (conference held online), 1st April 2021 for illustrating the important connection between our perceptions of race and beauty.

[229] This is debated at length in most commentaries. Exum, Bloch and Bloch, Pope, Landy and Davis translate the verse as "black and beautiful". Longman and Fox are among the few that argue for the "black but beautiful" translation. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 97; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 47; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 291; Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 136; Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 243; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 95; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 100. In her work on reimagining Hagar as a Black woman, Nyasha Junior explains that "ancient peoples made color distinctions in both neutral, positive, and negative ways, but those distinctions do not align with contemporary racialized categories." Junior's explanation serves as a reminder that we must be wary of how our own translations are contextualised within the history of racism, as well as reminding us of the difficulty in separating our own modern assumptions of race from ancient attitudes to race. I am thus in agreement with Wilda Gafney's caution that it is not possible to separate translation from interpretation, especially in the context of the Song's rich history of interpretation. As Gafney argues "the translation/interpretation binary presumes that texts have meaning apart from their readers and that it is possible to read without constructing meaning and that the reader has no impact on the text she is reading. Rather, I hold that interpretation and translation are not polar opposites but two sides of the same coin." Nyasha Junior, *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7, Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 282.

status as her darkened skin is caused by her labouring in the fields, and is not necessarily referring to her natural skin colour.[230] For the purposes of my discussion, I argue that the female lover's dark skin draws on royal power in its comparison to Solomon's tent curtains. Little is known about the tribes of Kedar, and the female lover's comparison כאהלי קדר "like the tents of Kedar" probably serve as a word play on the root קדר meaning "to be dark".[231] Bloch and Bloch argue that Kedar is also connected to opulence.[232] The reference to כיריעות שלמה "like the curtains of Solomon" proves more challenging as it could be an emphasis on the female lover's darkness rather than her loveliness.[233] Brian Gault and Ellen Davis contend that the tents of Kedar correspond to her darkness while Solomon's tent curtains correspond to her beauty.[234] Exum, on the other hand, explains that both similes refer to darkness and beauty.[235] Although Davis associates the reference to Kedar with darkness, she observes that the Kedarites are also a powerful tribe in Isaiah 21:16-17.[236] I agree with Exum that this verse should be read as a continuation of the royal fiction.[237] The female lover's association with Solomon's tent curtains, regardless of whether שחורה אני ונאוה is translated "black and beautiful" or "black but beautiful", creates a positive association with royal imagery and royal beauty, allowing her to appropriate the symbolism of Solomon's tent curtains for her self-description.

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[230] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 139; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 96; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 104; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 101; Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 136; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 244.
[231] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 319; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 97; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 101; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 104.
[232] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 140.
[233] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 97; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 102.
[234] Gault, *Body as Landscape*, 73; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 244.
[235] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 105.
[236] Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 244.
[237] Exum notes that "the tents of Qedar, the curtains of Solomon, the chariots of Pharaoh, the vineyards of En-gedi are not just any tents, curtains, chariots, and vineyards, but special ones associated with the richest and most illustrious of rulers." Exum, *Song of Songs*, 101.

Shortly after this scene, the female lover is compared to Pharaoh’s mare לססתי ברכבי פרעה דמיתיך רעיתי נאוו לחייך בתרים צוארך בחרוזים תורי זהר נעשה־לך עם נקדות הכסף “I liken you, my love, to a[238] mare among Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you ornaments of gold, with studs of silver” (1:9-11). The image of a mare pulling chariots is striking and unusual in the wider ANE context where chariots were pulled by stallions.[239] I argue that this reversal from a stallion to a mare, and thereby from masculine to feminine, is indicative of the female lover’s power to disrupt the hegemonic masculinity of the battlefield. I will limit the present examination to the royal aspect of the imagery as I will return to this comparison in greater depth to consider its implications on the female lover’s autonomy and her embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. With reference to the royal imagery, Longman notes a connection between Pharaoh’s mare and opulence.[240] Similarly, Francis Landy observes that she is an adornment in the king’s court.[241] Munro argues that this imagery illustrates the female lover’s nobility and pride.[242] Indeed, the following verses describe her lavish ornaments, befitting her portrayal as Pharaoh’s mare.[243]

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[238] Most commentators take the suffix י to be an archaic genitive case ending, thereby translating as “to a mare” rather than “to my mare”. Bloch and Bloch argue that the suffix should be kept, and that the verse is a parallel to יונתי “my dove” in 2:14, where most commentators keep the first person singular suffix. I have followed most commentators in translating “to a mare”. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 102; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 99; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 105; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 144; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 127.

[239] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 338.

[240] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 103. Parallels can also be drawn with the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, particularly as the mention of horses, Egypt and wives in verses 16-17 reinforces the association of these symbols with royal status and wealth.

[241] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 169.

[242] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 38.

[243] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 109.

The royal grandeur invoked by Pharaoh's mare marks the beginning of the lovers' appropriation of royal materials and ornaments. זהב "gold" and כסף "silver" are precious materials often associated with royalty. Elsewhere in the Song, מעצי הלבנון, literally "from trees of Lebanon", referring to Lebanon cedar (3:9) and ארגמן "purple", referring to purple dye (3:10; 7:6 [7:5 E]) are likewise connected with royalty due to their rarity and cost.[244] The combination of שמן "anointing oils" (1:3) and the abundance of spices such as myrrh, frankincense, nard and cinnamon (4:14; 5:13) is a further indication of wealth and luxury associated with royalty. Likewise, the jewels and ivory which compose the male lover's body in 5:10-16 connote great value and are thus indicative of the male lover's royal grandeur. These symbols are therefore intimately connected with wealth and power, connotations still held by modern readers. Yet, it is important to recognise that within the Song, these materials and ornaments are not confined to the courtly realm; the lovers appropriate them into the natural landscape.[245] In doing so, the lovers disrupt the expectations of royal power. The royal bedchambers are thus not located in the palace as one would expect, but in nature; their couch is green and the beams of their house are made of cedar (1:16-17). This blurring of the courtly and natural realm suggests that the lovers' bodies, decorated with royal imagery, become embodiments of royalty in themselves. Once the lovers use the royal ornaments, they can almost be discarded as they have served their purpose: the ornaments have merged with the bodies, the lovers have become royal and through their movement from the city to the natural landscape, they take that royalty with them.

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[244] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 137.
[245] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 49–50.

Like 1:5 and 1:9, 6:8-10 indicates the female lover's status, elevating her to the rank of queenship despite not being explicitly identified as "queen":

> ששים המה מלכות ושמנים פילגשים ועלמות אין מספר אחת היא יונתי תמתי אחת היא לאמה ברה היא ליולדתה ראוה בנות ויאשרוה מלכות ופילגשים ויהללוה מי־זאת הנשקפה כמו־שחר יפה כלבנה ברה כחמה אימה כנדגלות
>
> There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her. The maidens saw her and called her happy; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her. 'Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?'[246]

These verses form part of the royal fiction, wherein she stands out among queens, concubines and young women.[247] Her inimitability is highlighted by her appearing distinguished even among royalty.[248] Her association with the moon and sun in 6:10 possibly even raises her to divine status, and commentators have noted a connection to ANE deities.[249] The comparison to sixty queens and eighty concubines is reminiscent of Solomon's harem in 1 Kings 11:3: "Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines" but the number notably falls short.[250] Longman argues that this should be perceived as a parallelism, and Exum sees a poetic connection between the sixty queens and sixty warriors (3:7).[251] André LaCocque detects a mocking aspect in the comparison: "The numbers are ostensibly in praise of Solomon's grandeur, but the truth of

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[246] Following the NRSV translation.
[247] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 181; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 221.
[248] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 182; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 190.
[249] Davis notes the connection to Astarte while Pope notes the connection to the Mesopotamian lunar and solar deities Sin and Shamash. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 286; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 572.
[250] NRSV translation. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 567.
[251] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 181; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 221.

the matter is that the poem derides the great king."[252] I suggest that while this could be seen as mocking or undermining Solomon, this does not negatively impact the female lover, who remains unique among these women thereby appropriating royal power and elevating her own status.

Similarly, 7:2 [7:1 E] identifies the female lover as a בת־נדיב, which the NRSV translates as "queenly maiden", yet the phrase can be literally translated as "daughter of a noble."[253] Commentators' translations vary from noble daughter[254], noble woman[255], prince's daughter[256], nobleman's daughter[257] to queenly maiden[258] but they all retain the sense that she is a noble woman. Although this designation only appears once, Longman argues that it should be understood as a counterpart to the male lover's designation as "king" emphasising that "they are regal in each other's eyes."[259] While it is unclear whether the verse is referring to her noble birth or her noble character, the reader is to understand that "she belongs to the aristocracy of lovers."[260] A later verse refers to her captivating the king with her purple hair (7:6 [7:5 E]). The connection between purple and royalty, as discussed above, allows her to appropriate queenly status and demonstrate that she is a natural aristocrat.[261] These verses therefore confirm her place in the royal court.

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[252] André LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998), 132.
[253] נדיב also occurs in 6:12. If עמי־נדיב is understood as "nobleman" then this further emphasises the lovers' connection to nobility in their royal fiction.
[254] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 189.
[255] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 211; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 154.
[256] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 593.
[257] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 99.
[258] Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 287.
[259] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 194.
[260] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 155. Also discussed by Pope, see Pope, *Song of Songs*, 615.
[261] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 196; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 292.

While the Song depicts the lovers' appropriation of royal power by associating themselves with the luxury and wealth of the royal court and positively designating themselves "king" and "noble woman". The text also disrupts Solomon's hegemonic power by creating a comparison between him and the lovers, casting a mocking tone over Solomon's appearances.

3.1.2. Mocking Solomon's Power

Following the debate of whether Solomon's character and power is being mocked in the Song as explored in the literature review, I argue that the inclusion of Solomon serves as both an appropriation of royal power for the lovers, as well as a parody intended to subvert the figure of Solomon, disrupting his hegemonic power as a ruler and as a man. Solomon appears in only two scenes, that of his wedding/coronation (3:7-11)[262] and in the comparison of the vineyards (8:11-12).

3:7-11 describes Solomon's procession through the city, surrounded by soldiers and detailing his luxurious palanquin, ending with Solomon's mother crowning him on his wedding day. The scene continues the royal fiction, but is notably different for its direct mention of Solomon rather than alluding to the male lover as "king". Commentators note that the palanquin made of precious materials, accompanied by a retinue of soldiers twice as large as David's retinue (c.f. 2 Samuel 23:18-19, 23), is a symbol of power, evoking

[262] Following Schellenberg's argument, I have excluded 3:6 from this scene on the basis that מי זאת should be translated as "Who is this?" and not "What is this?" which does not fit with the appearance of Solomon's litter in the succeeding verse (3:7) and should therefore be regarded as separate from the wedding/coronation scene. Moreover, the phrase cannot be reconciled with Solomon as it refers to a woman. Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 185. Most commentators translate this verse as "Who is this?", with Longman and Exum being the notable exceptions with their translation as "What is this?" Pope, *Song of Songs*, 412; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 119; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 69; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 260; LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 96; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 132; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 138.

Solomon's wealth and grandeur. [263] It could thus be viewed as punctuating the momentous wedding in a splendour befitting the royal couple; yet on further reading, the subtle details of the ceremony reveal that a mocking undertone pervades the scene. Solomon's retinue appears excessive in the context of a wedding procession, indicating unease and even seeming a ridiculous overreaction, urging the reader to wonder why such excessive protection is necessary.[264] The palanquin itself is inlaid with אהבה (3:10), normally translated to "inlaid with love"[265] but some scholars contend this is an error in the MT, and should be rendered אבנים "precious stones"[266]. It is also possible that אהבה is a homonymic noun, drawing on the Arabic ʾihāb "leather" to create an intentional wordplay between "love" and "leather".[267] This reading thus hints both at Solomon's numerous relationships and the palanquin's materials.[268] Taking the significance of this verse further, I concur with Spencer that the suggestion of love, while somewhat misplaced in this context of royal

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[263] The scene has two different words to refer to Solomon's bed/palanquin. The first is מטה, translated as "litter" in the NRSV (3:7) while the second אפריון is a *hapax legomenon*, widely understood as a palanquin (3:9). The word may be a loan word from Old Persian *upariyana* 'litter-bed' (HALOT) or from Sanskrit *paryanka* (Gordis). Schellenberg notes that the מטה in 3:7 is an ordinary bed, not a throne. Exum argues that מטה could be a bed, couch, or litter. "אַפִּרְיוֹן," *HALOT Online*, accessed November 18, 2021, https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/search#dictionary=halothebrew&id=ALEPH.747; Robert Gordis, "A Wedding Song for Solomon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63, no. 3 (September 1944): 263-270, pp.270; Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 179; Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin," 310–311. For further discussion see Pope, *Song of Songs*, 431; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 125–126; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 136.

[264] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 147–148; Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 179–180.

[265] The love indicated by the use of אהבה is wide ranging but Gerhard Wallis argues that its use in the Song connotes erotic, sensual love. Gerhard Wallis, "ʾāhabh," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 108.

[266] Fox translates this as "stones" and Exum translates to "precious stones" while Longman retains אהבה as "love". Fox, *Song of Songs*, 126; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 150; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 138.

[267] The Arabic ʾihāb "leather" is also used in Hosea 11:4. Likewise, G.R. Driver argues that אהבה cannot mean love since this verse is referring to the royal materials which make up the palanquin, and thus "leather" is more suitable in this context. "II אַהֲבָה," *HALOT* Online, accessed November 18, 2021, https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/search#dictionary=halothebrew&id=ALEPH.179; G.R. Driver, "Supposed Arabisms in the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 55, no. 2 (June 1936): 101-120, pp.111.

[268] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 181.

materials, undermines Solomon's power.[269] The dichotomy of military power and hard materials on the one hand, and love on the other disrupts the flow of the procession and quickly casts it into a parodic light, thereby also disrupting Solomon's power.

Solomon's crowning by his mother צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעטרה שעטרה־לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו "Come out and look, daughters of Zion, at King Solomon, at the crown[270] with which his mother crowned him in the day of his wedding, and in the day of the joy of his heart" (3:11) has been heavily debated in light of the absence of mothers crowning their sons in the HB. Most commentators state that the verse is a poetic flourish rather than a historical reality, imbuing the wedding ceremony with elements of royal power.[271] Indeed, Solomon's mother's place in the ceremony is not incongruous once we consider the recurrence of maternal figures in the Song and can be viewed as a counterpart to the female lover's mother. Bloch and Bloch argue that this verse may have been part of a Solomonic legend, paying tribute to Bathsheba's involvement in his ascendancy.[272] However, I counter, in concurrence with Schellenberg, that this verse is a continuation of the mocking undertones present earlier in the scene. Solomon is mocked for his excessive retinue, his multiple love affairs and here he is mocked for being a

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[269] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 19.

[270] Fox explains that עטרה may be a crown or a wreath. Fox, *Song of Songs*, 127.

[271] Fox argues the crowning is a continuation of the royal fiction. "The Shulammite is speaking about this wreath as if it were a royal crown or a chaplet worthy of a king, and not just any king, but King Solomon himself, and not King Solomon on an ordinary feast day, but King Solomon on the very day of his wedding! My beloved and I - the Shulammite implies - are like the king and queen on their wedding day, reclining in a splendid royal pavilion." Fox, *Song of Songs*, 127. See also, Longman, *Song of Songs*, 139; Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 72.

[272] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 166.

"mama's boy".[273] This serves as a reminder that, for all the royal splendour and pomp of the ceremony, he ultimately owes his royal power to his mother.

While some scholars maintain that 3:7-11 offers a positive portrayal of Solomon, there is general agreement that the comparison of vineyards in 8:11-12 presents a distinctly negative depiction.[274]

> כרם היה לשלמה בבעל המון נתן את־הכרם לנטרים איש יבא בפריו אלף כסף כרמי שלי לפני האלף לך שלמה ומאתים לנטרים את־פריו
>
> Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-hamon; he gave the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is for myself; the thousand pieces are for you Solomon, and two hundred are for the keepers of its fruit.

The difficulty in interpreting this scene results from the inability to discern which lover is speaking. Of those arguing that the male lover is the speaker, Exum observes that this places the male lover in competition with Solomon, thereby answering the female lover's dilemma in 1:6 with an affirmation that he will tend her vineyard.[275] Moreover, Fox argues that

> It would not make sense for the girl to declare that she prefers her own body to Solomon's vineyard or to say that her body is 'before' her. Furthermore, the speaker's possession of a 'vineyard' is parallel to Solomon's possession of a vineyard, and if 'vineyard' represents a female, only the boy can be said to possess a 'vineyard' in the same way that Solomon does.[276]

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[273] Schellenberg, "Solomon's Wedding," 182.

[274] Exum and Munro are among those arguing for a positive portrayal of Solomon in 3:7-11, but Munro notes that this changes in 8:11-12. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 149; Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 41; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 133; Stefan Fischer, "Friction in the Fiction of Solomon in Song of Songs," *Journal for Semitics* 23 (January 2014): 680.

[275] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 260.

[276] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 174.

However, while the vineyard is a recurrent metaphor for the female lover, the phrase כרמי "my vineyard" only occurs here in 8:12 and in 1:6, where she is clearly the speaker and "my vineyard" refers to her own body. The ungendered לפני is inherently ambiguous[277] and it is equally possible that the female lover is the speaker. Based on the only other occurrence of כרמי "my vineyard" in the Song (1:6) and the context in which it is used in 8:12, I argue that the female lover is the speaker.[278] This change of speaker has vital implications for the female lover's autonomy. The female lover asserts her independence from Solomon, and even from the male lover, effectively stating that "she will be *no kept woman* by brothers, guards, or even her lover – and certainly not by any Solomon-like, harem-hoarding monarch," thereby disrupting Solomon's hegemonic power by refusing to be his possession.[279]

Despite the debate over which lover speaks, I argue that this verse nevertheless undermines Solomon's power. The mocking undertones of the scene are present in the introduction of Solomon's vineyard at Baal-hamon in 8:11, בעל המון being a play on words meaning "owner of wealth" or "husband of multitude".[280] Moreover, the reference to a "thousand pieces of silver" potentially alludes to Solomon's thousand wives and as such "this sentence makes fun of the great king, who possessed so many women that he could

[277] This ambiguity has generated varying translations of לפני, which is rendered "before me" (ASV, ESV, KJV, YLT), "at my disposal" (NASB, ISV) and "mine alone" (CEV).
[278] NRSV translates כרמי שלי לפני as "my vineyard, my very own, is for myself". LaCocque and Spencer likewise argue that the female lover is the speaker in this verse. LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 186; Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 21–22.
[279] Original emphasis. Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 21–22. See also: Longman, *Song of Songs*, 218; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 690.
[280] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 260. Pope has "lord of a crowd" and Fox has "possessor of wealth". Pope, *Song of Songs*, 686; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 174.

not keep their "fruit" to himself."[281] This scene therefore undermines Solomon's power as a royal and as a lover. The lovers, who earlier appropriated and exploited the royal imagery associated with Solomon's wealth, now distance themselves from Solomon.[282] In line with Munro's argument, it can be suggested that the lovers ultimately reject the language of kingship as inadequate for describing their love.[283] However, I argue that the lovers' use of royal imagery acts on a more disruptive level as through appropriating Solomon's precious materials and invoking his royal court, they ultimately leave Solomon powerless. Moreover, the female lover's declaration that her vineyard is for herself (8:12), asserts her autonomy and undermines Solomon's hegemonic masculinity by showing him as incapable of conquering her.

Upon first reading, Solomon's appearances in these two scenes may be regarded as positive enforcement of the royal imagery. Yet, as I have shown, a mocking undertone can be detected in the wedding/coronation ceremony (3:7-11) and in the vineyard competition (8:11-12) that mockingly exaggerates Solomon's power as a monarch and as a lover.

3.1.3. Conclusions

A parodic reading of 3:7-11 and 8:11-12 has significant implications for Solomon's characterisation as a powerful monarch and as a model of hegemonic masculinity. Returning to Spencer's proposal that the lovers use parody to seek refuge from Solomon's power, the opposition of the lovers' appropriation of royal power stands in sharp contrast to the very source they draw their power from.[284] Even if the wedding procession of 3:7-

[281] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 175. See also: Pope, *Song of Songs*, 691; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 220.
[282] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 42.
[283] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 145.
[284] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 23.

11 is read positively, this perception changes by 8:11-12 where a clear separation between the lovers and Solomon is enforced, showing that Solomon's court has served its purpose in elevating the lovers to monarchic status and Solomon himself is no longer needed to uphold the royal power. Moreover, a mocking tone underlines the Song's superscription in 1:1 upon rereading it in light of Solomon's parodic appearances in the Song. The reader is invited into Solomon's royal court to partake in the lovers' royal fiction, only to have Solomon himself subverted and the lovers appropriating his power to create their own royal court in the natural landscape.

I have argued that Solomon's hegemonic masculinity, seemingly enforced by his retinue of soldiers, his position as king and his expansive harem of wives and concubines, is disrupted by the lovers through being mocked and undermined.[285] In appropriating his royal imagery and then through mocking the aspects which legitimise his rule and status as a hegemonic male, the lovers effectively strip Solomon of his power and cast his masculinity as undesirable. As Spencer summarises: "as the Song appropriates these raw royal resources, these perishable stockpiles of wealth and armaments, it transforms them into products of perduring passion and tenderness, converting Solomon's brittle gold into the currency of genuine love."[286] The female lover distances herself from Solomon's rule, firstly by not partaking as Solomon's bride in the wedding ceremony of 3:7-11 and then by asserting autonomy over her own body (her vineyard) in 8:11-12. Simultaneously, she makes her lover "king" and openly declares her preference for him and the masculinity he embodies over Solomon's. Therefore, while Solomon embodies hegemonic masculinity,

[285] Fischer, "Friction in the Fiction," 672.
[286] Spencer, "Song of Songs as Political Satire," 13.

the repeated parodying of Solomon's power and the contrast between Solomon and the male lover indicate that the male lover's "ideal lover's agency" is preferred over Solomon's hegemonic masculinity, as Nissinen suggests.[287] The Song presents the male lover's power as exceeding and disrupting Solomon's, both as a royal figure and as a man. A close reading of the male lover's characterisation illustrates the ways in which the male lover surpasses not only Solomon, but all other men.

3.2. Disrupting Gender

This section identifies the central ways in which both lovers disrupt gender expectations and how this is expressed in the language they use, their bodily autonomy and freedom of movement, and in the multivalent depictions of their bodies. Using the categories developed in the field of biblical masculinities studies, I argue that both lovers embody hegemonic masculinity in different ways. The male lover is portrayed as a peerless warrior with a strong, desirable body, whose freedom of movement is unimpeded. Yet the male lover also challenges hegemonic masculinity in his association with feminine symbols. Meanwhile, the female lover disrupts hegemonic masculinity in her portrayal as a warrior, while her persuasive speech and sexual virility often surpasses the male lover's. However, the female lover faces greater challenges to her autonomy and freedom of movement than any other character in the Song.

3.2.1. The Male Lover's Disruptive Power

The material pertaining to the male lover in the Song is less extensive than that for the female lover, but it is possible to examine the language the male lover uses, the extent of

[287] See Literature Review, pp.33-39. Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 254–255.

his autonomy and the ways in which his body is presented. It is noteworthy that the male lover faces a distinct lack of obstacles compared to the female lover, and as such he does not appear as vulnerable as the female lover. I will explore how the male lover seemingly fulfils the criteria of hegemonic masculinity and "ideal lover's agency"[288] in his presentation as a peerless lover (2:3; 5:10) and through the masculine strength implied in the description of his body (5:10-5:16). However, I will also consider the ways in which the male lover's portrayal disrupts hegemonic masculinity by blurring the feminine/masculine binary in his association with doves (5:12), spices (1:13-14; 5:13) and lilies (5:13). Likewise, the male lover's speeches occasionally reflect his verbal power, yet his commands are not always granted.

3.2.1.1. The Male Lover's Speeches

The male lover does not speak as often as the female lover, yet Sampson Ndoga and Hendrik Viviers maintain that "the man's voice and presence is just as much part of the Song as the woman's."[289] When the male lover does speak, his speech is authoritative and though he rarely uses the imperative, cohortative or jussive verbal forms which are abundant in the female lover's speech, he uses possessives to indicate his determination (5:1). Exum is among one of the few commentators to discuss the significance of the lovers communicating in "the erotic imperative" to create a sense of urgency. [290] While Exum mainly attributes the erotic imperative to the female lover, I argue that the male lover likewise makes recurrent use of the erotic imperative in his speeches.

[288] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 265–269.
[289] Sampson S. Ndoga and Hendrik Viviers, "Is the Woman in the Song of Songs Really That Free?," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 56 (January 2000): 1303.
[290] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 123.

Before discussing the specific examples in the Song, it is important to note that the imperative verbal form is "used primarily to express direct commands, demanding (immediate) action from the one being addressed. It can also be used to grant permission or to communicate a request."[291] The male lover asks the female lover to פתחי־לי "open to me" (5:2), a sexually suggestive request as there is no object which he is asking to be "opened".[292] However, unlike the female lover's use of the imperative to command an action which is shortly thereafter fulfilled, as I will explore below, there is a delay in his command being executed. Rather than immediately opening to him, the female lover responds with hesitation (5:3), yet she does appear to then satisfy his request (5:4-5). I argue that the male lover also uses the erotic imperative in 2:14 when he asks: הראיני את־מראיך השמיעני את־קולך "let me see your form[293], let me hear your voice." The use of the Hiphil imperative highlights the urgency of his request, but he is again denied its fulfilment as the verse provides no indication that the female lover has left her hiding place to reveal herself to him. These two examples of the male lover's use of the imperative suggest that while the male lover may voice his desires in the imperative, it does not always have the intended outcome of fulfilling his wish.

The male lover responds to the female lover's invitation to come to her garden in 5:1 by declaring: באתי לגני אחתי כלה אריתי מורי עם־בשמי אכלתי יערי עם־דבשי שתיתי ייני עם־חלבי "I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my

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[291] Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 209.
[292] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 194.
[293] מראה is difficult to translate precisely in English, but a more accurate translation than "face" would be "appearance" or "form", signifying the female lover in her entirety. NRSV translates as "face". Pope, *Song of Songs*, 401; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 123.

spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk."[294] This immediate response further highlights the male lover's determination to obey the female lover's request. Whilst the male lover does not speak in the imperative verbal form in this verse, Fox draws our attention to the male lover's repeated use of the possessive "my" as illustrating the male lover's self-assuredness.[295] Unlike the female lover who hesitates to respond to his request to open in 5:2-3, the man not only immediately responds, but immediately acts on her invitation as he knows he can now take what he desires. As Exum notes: "the woman's invitation in the previous verse. . . and the man's reply here in this verse. . . are complementary expressions of desire gendered in terms of a cultural version of love as something a woman gives and a man takes."[296] Although the male lover waits to be invited into the garden, his acting on his desire demonstrates his sexual virility, a defining characteristic of biblical masculinity and as Exum comments: "entering the garden and enjoying its produce signify male sexual activity, while the garden symbolically represents female sexuality."[297] There may well be an aggressive undertone to his action, as Landy observes that the abundance of active Qal verbs represent his thrusting motions: "with these verbs, the active mode combines with a passive function: the man is the recipient of nourishment as well as the aggressive intruder."[298] In this verse,

[294] It is disputed whether the latter part of the verse אכלו רעים שתו ושכרו דודים "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk, lovers" is spoken by the male lover, as LaCocque argues, or by the daughters of Jerusalem, as Longman, Exum and Fox argue. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 159; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 189; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 139; LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 116.
[295] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 138.
[296] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 182.
[297] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 189.
[298] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 103.

the male lover expresses his power in his self-assured manner and in his fulfilment of his sexual desires, demonstrating his sexual virility.

His direct and self-assured manner continues in his statement: אמרתי אעלה בתמר אחזה בסנסניו "I said I will go up into the palm tree, I will grasp its branches" (7:9 [7:8 E]). As with 5:1, this verse is sexually suggestive, confirming "his sexual intent when he proclaims his intention to grasp the *date blossom cluster.*"[299] Thus, this verse is a further indication of the male lover's sexual virility and determination to fulfil his desire. Indeed, to adopt Landy's suggestion of the "aggressive intruder" of 5:1, there is perhaps also a sense of aggression in 7:9 [7:8 E] by his climbing the tree, which Fox interprets as his overcoming her inaccessibility.[300] If she does not come to him, then he will go to her. Yet, there is no indication that he will do so without her consent; as we have already seen, the male lover waits to be invited.

While the male lover's speech is not as prominent as the female lover's, the verses that are available to the reader suggest that there is a combination of vulnerability and power in the male lover's language. On the one hand, the male lover's requests are not always fulfilled (2:14), or are fulfilled later (5:2-4), suggesting that while the male lover may issue commands in the imperative verbal form, his speech does not command the same power as the female lover's does, which are almost always immediately fulfilled. On the other hand, the male lover speaks in a self-assured, direct manner in 5:1 and 7:9 [7:8 E] where he illustrates how he will gratify his desires, indicating his sexual virility and power

[299] Original emphasis. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 197.
[300] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 163.

to fulfil his erotic imperative in line with this category of biblical masculinity. The male lover's speech occasionally illustrates his power, yet his depiction as a gazelle and a young stag emphasises that the power of his autonomy stands out.

3.2.1.2. The Male Lover's Autonomy

While the female lover's autonomy has been heavily debated within feminist biblical scholarship due to the unique challenges she faces, by comparison the male lover does not experience such obstacles to his autonomy. On the contrary, the male lover's autonomy is in contrast to the female lover's due to his recurring description as צבי, a "gazelle" and עפר, a "young stag" (2:9; 2:17; 8:14).

The foremost feature of the gazelle is its speed and agility.[301] As such, the gazelle also symbolises freedom of movement.[302] Moreover, it may also be a symbol of fertility[303], connoting sexual desire and prowess.[304] Gault argues that while the gazelle is a symbol of speed, the stag signifies the power of erotic desire.[305] A further link can be made between the gazelle and beauty, through its shared root צבי.[306] As such, "it may also be the case that the animal radiates a masculine sexuality that is imputed to the lover."[307] The male lover is described as מדלג על־ההרים מקפץ על־הגבעות "leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills" (2:8). Longman argues that the verbs "communicate that the lover overcomes obstacles in his desire to reach his beloved. This is an indication of his loving commitment,

[301] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 126.
[302] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 216.
[303] Carole R. Fontaine, ""Go Forth into the Fields": An Earth-Centered Reading of the Song of Songs," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 136.
[304] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 126.
[305] Gault, *Body as Landscapes*, 104.
[306] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 121; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 390.
[307] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 120.

his determination to make a rendezvous."[308] However, Fox notes that "in the spring gazelle bucks wander the mountain seeking mates."[309] The use of מדלג and מקפץ may thus signify the male lover's eagerness to satisfy his sexual desire. Indeed, there is no indication that the mountains and hills are obstacles, and if they are regarded as such then they are shown to be quickly overcome. I therefore concur with Viviers that

> when the man is compared to a gazelle (צְבִי) or young deer (עֹפֶר) in 2:8-9, 2:17 and 8:14 we immediately visualise a picture of agility, strength, virility and untouched natural beauty. He is free and unbound, he moves where he wants whenever he wants. Unlike a harnessed domestic animal the wild gazelle is hindered by nothing in living its life to the full. The image of the energetic gazelle underscores the man's movements and affinity with open ('male') spaces in comparison with the woman, normally confined to interiors.[310]

However, there is a degree of tension in his depiction as a gazelle and stag as both animals are shy.[311] This may seem at odds with the connotations of the sexually virile male lover, and his self-assured speech in 5:1 and 7:8, yet it also solidifies his place in, and mastering of, the landscape. In his leaping and bounding, the male lover demonstrates his confidence in the landscape he inhabits and further illustrates his association with the outside, "male" space. This association with freedom of movement in nature is also seen in the dichotomy of 5:2 where he requests to enter the female lover's house, thereby emphasising that he is out in the open while she is indoors. In fact, the male lover's

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[308] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 120.
[309] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 112.
[310] Hendrik Viviers, "Clothed and Unclothed in the Song of Songs," *Old Testament Essays* 12, no. 3 (January 1999): 616–617.
[311] Elaine T. James, *Landscapes of the Song of Songs: Poetry and Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 38.

freedom of movement and speed is so great that he cannot easily be found, as illustrated in the female lover's recurrent search for him (3:1-3; 5:6).

The symbolism of the gazelle and the stag can be used to measure the male lover against two criteria of masculinity, as defined by Clines. Firstly, Clines describes successful biblical masculinity in terms of a character's ability to be a "womanless male" i.e. a man for whom women are marginal to his life.[312] On an initial reading of the male lover as a gazelle and a stag, and the freedom of movement they suggest, the associations seemingly aid in portraying the male lover as a "womanless male". He is able to avoid detection, and he is not with the female lover in the majority of the Song; indeed, he can be imagined as leaping and bounding in nature, unrestricted by the city's watchmen or the female lover's search. Yet the male lover is also dependent on the female lover to satisfy his sexual desires. He may not search for her as openly as she searches for him, but he does need to gaze at her, as seen in his request to see her form in 2:14 and in his call for her to open to him in 5:2. Moreover, the male lover may also be reliant on the female lover's family, as it is through the female lover's mother that they are able to be intimate in her mother's house (3:4; 8:2). Secondly, Clines notes that beauty is a characteristic of masculinity.[313] I therefore propose that the common semantic link between "gazelle" and "beauty" leaves us with no doubt that the male lover is both agile and beautiful. The theme of male beauty recurs throughout the Song in the female lover's description of him, solidifying his masculinity, if indeed we can view beauty as a distinctly masculine characteristic when beauty is likewise

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[312] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 225.
[313] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 221.

a marker for femininity.[314] The female lover's description of the male lover's body allows us to examine how he fits other categories of biblical masculinities alongside this category, particularly with regards to being a warrior.

3.2.1.3. The Male Body

In the ANE, a man's military competence was viewed as the primary marker of masculinity, as discussed in my summary of biblical masculinities studies. Chapman's study of the Israelite-Assyrian encounter explores how both the Assyrian kings and the biblical prophets used gendered metaphors and viewed battles as a masculine contest. [315] Likewise, Clines's study of King David analyses the close association of warrior qualities with hegemonic, desirable masculinity. More specifically in the Song, Verde's recent study on the military metaphors details the ways in which the male lover is perceived as a conqueror. Verde notes that the male lover's complex character offers a "reconceptualization" of the male warrior to redefine that "being a man" entails both being active and passive, in control and also conquered.[316] As such, Verde concludes that "the Song's construal of maleness, therefore, both reflects and subverts the poem's cultural milieu."[317] In my examination of the male lover's masculinity, I draw on these studies to evaluate how the portrayal of the male lover's body and characteristics fits in with ANE expectations of the warrior male. This section explores the most detailed description of the male lover as provided by the female lover (5:10-16) which combines images of strength and hardness with images of nature,

[314] Moore is sceptical about assigning beauty as a masculine category, but Exum argues that the male lover's beauty in the Song may be a fitting designation. Stephen D. Moore, "Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 249; Exum, "The Man," 112.
[315] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 141.
[316] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 130.
[317] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 130.

scents and spices. Ultimately, I argue that the combination of military and natural imagery illustrates the male lover's disruptive gender by simultaneously upholding and subverting hegemonic masculinity.

3.2.1.3.1. The Peerless Male (2:3; 5:10)

The male lover is described כתפוח בעצי היער כן דודי בין הבנים "As an apple[318] tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the young men" (2:3). This comparison, whilst drawing on the sense of scent and sweetness, also emphasises that the male lover stands above other men (the common trees) in the female lover's esteem.[319] Moreover, the image at the end of the verse implies that the female lover finds protection and nourishment in the male lover: בצלו חמדתי וישבתי ופריו מתוק לחכי "with great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my palate." As Longman notes, "she not only looks at the apple tree from afar, but she places herself, figuratively, under his protecting and comforting branches."[320] Fox interprets this action as an inversion of the protection she provided for him in 1:13-14: "in 1:13 he is a sachet of myrrh nestled between her breasts, an image that pictures her as the dominant and sheltering party, whereas in 2:3b he is the tree in whose shade she sits, so that he is now the dominant and sheltering member of the pair."[321] The idea of providing for and protecting one's family, especially female family members, can be regarded as an essential category of masculinity.[322] Likewise, Chapman

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[318] Some scholars argue that תפוח is an apricot tree as apple trees were not native to Palestine. However, the rarity of the apple tree among the common trees is a more suitable comparison for the male lover standing out among other men and as such, I have retained the translation as "apple tree". Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114; Fox, *Song of Song*, 107; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 251.
[319] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 111; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 372.
[320] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 112.
[321] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 108.
[322] Haddox, "Favoured Sons," 6.

notes that protecting and taking care of one's family is central to royal Assyrian masculinity.[323] I argue that this verse suggests the male lover is able to provide protection on at least one occasion, thereby fulfilling this category of masculinity. However, this scene stands in sharp contrast to the watchmen abusing the female lover in 5:7, where the male lover is notably absent in his inability to protect the female lover from harm. 5:7 is not only illustrative of the female lover's vulnerability, it is also a reflection of the male lover's lack of power. In failing to protect the female lover, the male lover exhibits weakness, and, in the eyes of biblical masculinity categories, his masculinity falters.

However, the male lover's inability to protect the female lover does not diminish his standing in the female lover's estimations as in 5:10, shortly after her encounter with the watchmen, she again proclaims that the male lover is peerless: דודי צח ואדום דגול מרבבה "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, deployed among ten thousand." Whereas his lack of protection may be viewed as an example of failed masculinity, his being unequalled by other men is an emphasis on his successful masculinity. As Chapman notes, "we can conclude that having no rival, no equal, or being first among princes was understood to be constitutive of the royal expression of masculinity."[324] By beginning the speech with a declaration that he is peerless, the female lover immediately states that the male lover has won the contest; there can be no other man that equals him. In this victory, the male lover is presented as achieving masculinity. Furthermore, this verse presents the male lover as a warrior. The description of the male lover as אדם "ruddy" has most often been interpreted

[323] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 29.
[324] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 25.

as illustrative of his skin colour, whether natural or through the use of cosmetics.[325] It has likewise been read as a sign of the male lover's youth and beauty.[326] However, these interpretations overlook two important connections to the male lover's military portrayal Firstly, Quick notes that red face paint is associated with masculinity and warrior-dress in the ANE.[327] Red cosmetics therefore serve multiple functions as part of a warrior's adornment and also as an act of beautification.[328] Secondly, אדם is also used to describe David, further emphasising the military association .[329] Moreover, as the adjective אדם may be derived either from אָדֹם "red" or אָדָם "man", the possible wordplay between both terms emphasises the male lover's masculinity whilst simultaneously portraying him as a warrior. As such, אדם is linked to royalty, masculinity and military prowess.[330] In using this descriptor, the female lover portrays her lover as a warrior of the same calibre as David and establishes his masculinity in terms of hegemonic military power.

The interpretation of דגול is also a further suggestion of the male lover's masculinity in connection to military success. The meaning of the term דגל has been debated due to its two possible meanings. דגל could be derived from its earlier meaning "to lift banners" or from its later meaning "to look/see".[331] Yet the two meanings may not be as different as previously argued. Andruska's study suggests that both roots are semantically related, thus

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[325] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 170; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 531.
[326] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 203.
[327] Laura Quick, *Dress, Adornment and the Body in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 92-93.
[328] Quick, *Dress, Adornment and the Body in the Hebrew Bible*, 92-93.
[329] See descriptions of David in in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 1 Samuel 17:42. Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 113. A further connection can be drawn between Esau's ruddy complexion (Genesis 25:25) and his hunting skills (Genesis 25:27).
[330] The use of אדם in Isaiah 63:1-2 to describe the divine warrior's blood-stained garments indicates that there is also a further link between divinity and being a warrior.
[331] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 218–219.

retaining a strong military aspect.[332] Likewise, Verde argues that דגל always occurs in military scenarios, and thus belongs to the conceptual domains of war and army.[333] Along with the use of רבבה "ten thousand" and צח "dazzling", this verse retains the military awe and terror that is also present in the male lover's description of the female lover (6:4).[334] As such, "the man in 5:10 is not just preeminent among ten thousand. He is an astonishing sight, as fearsome to behold as a bannered host or an awe-inspiring warrior approaching."[335] I am thus in agreement with Andruska and Verde that the term דגל retains a military connotation and portrays the male lover as a warrior. As such, I maintain that Verde's translation of דגל as "deployed" in 5:10 is most accurate.[336] דגל also appears in 2:4: הביאני אל־בית היין ודגלו עלי אהבה which the NRSV translates as "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention toward me was love." However, since דגל retains the meaning of "banner", a more accurate translation of the latter part of the verse is "his banner over me is love".[337] I argue that the recurrence of דגל in 2:4 and 5:10 solidifies the male lover's portrayal as a warrior, contrary to Meyers's statement that military imagery is exclusively applied to the female lover.[338]

Besides the military associations of אדם and דגל in 5:10, the use of מגדלות to refer to the male lover's cheeks (5:13) may be another example of military imagery which is

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[332] Jennifer Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל in Song of Songs 5:10," *Vetus Testamentum* 68, no. 1 (January 2018): 6.
[333] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 71–73.
[334] Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל," 5–6.
[335] Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל," 7.
[336] "In this view, in Song 5:10 the participle דגול mostly functions as an adjective qualifying the man and pictures a static image of him as a deployed soldier." Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 73, 116.
[337] The translation of ודגלו as "his banner" in 2:4 is upheld by Longman, Exum and Bloch as well as numerous translations e.g., NIV, ASV, KJV, YLT. The NRSV follows the Septuagint "set love upon me". Longman, *Song of Songs*, 110; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 98, 100; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 150.
[338] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 215.

applied to the male lover. It is possible to follow the alternative vocalisation tradition in the Septuagint to translate מגדלות as a Piel participle feminine plural of the verb גדל, meaning “to increase, produce”.[339] The translation of “pouring forth” would work in the context of the verse’s horticultural imagery. However, it is equally possible to follow the MT in retaining מגדלות as the noun “towers”, a likewise suitable translation due to the recurrent references to towers elsewhere in the Song (4:4; 7:5 [7:4 E]; 8:10).[340] If we translate מגדלות as “towers” in this verse, this is a further example of military imagery which is applied to both lovers, even though מגדלות is more recurrently associated with the female lover, as I will explore below. The male lover’s portrayal as a peerless warrior through the use of this architectural, military imagery is therefore suggestive of his hegemonic masculine power. This presentation is solidified in the female lover’s continuing description of the male lover in materials which draw on strength and hardness, thereby emphasising the male lover’s masculine beauty and strength.

3.2.1.3.2. Masculine Strength

The male lover’s body is most recurrently formulated with reference to precious materials. This connection begins in 5:11 with ראשו כתם פז “his head is pure gold”.[341] Gold is the most recurrent association of the male lover with a precious material, appearing in 5:14: ידיו גלילי זהב “His arms are rounded gold” and to describe his legs as מיסדים על־אדני־פז “set

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[339] This alternative vocalisation is מְגַדְּלוֹת rather than the MT מִגְדְּלוֹת.

[340] As such, Bloch and Bloch argue that “there is no justification for revoweling the Masoretic Text.” Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 186. See also Fox, *Song of Songs*, 148.

[341] The emphasis of pairing the two nouns כתם and פז, both meaning “gold”, is best translated as “pure gold”. Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 185. Moreover, Gault maintains that “each found only nine times in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in late poetry, כתם and פז appear to describe superior quality gold.” Gault, *Body as Landscape*, 196

upon bases of gold" (5:15). However, the description of him in 5:10-16 is not only limited to the use of gold. His hands are ממלאים בתרשיש "set with Tarshish[342]" (5:14), his penis[343] is עשת שן "a slab[344] of ivory", which is מעלפת ספירים "covered with lapis lazuli[345]" (5:14), his legs are עמודי שש "alabaster columns" (5:15) and מראהו כלבנון בחור כארזים "his form[346] is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars" (5:15). The association with gold, ivory and precious jewels reinforces the theme of royalty which I discussed above and symbolises the male lover's value to the female lover. As Exum notes, "like gold he is rare and precious, and dazzling."[347] These materials are rare, luxurious and expensive, further emphasising that the male lover is peerless. Moreover, the association with Lebanon cedar suggests beauty, grandeur, and majesty, and is also used in the construction of the temple, as Longman notes.[348]

The male lover's association with precious jewels indicates hardness and strength in his body, but it has also led scholars to note that there is a statuesque, idol-like aspect to his features as his body is comprised of the same precious materials as idols.[349] Indeed,

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[342] I retain Tarshish as a proper noun as the precise identity of the jewels is debated and several jewels have been suggested. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 207; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 543.

[343] NRSV translates "his body" but מעיו more specifically refers to the inner organs or lower body and is more likely to refer to the male lover's penis than his entire body. The same word is also used of the female lover in 5:4, where the NRSV translates it as "my inmost being yearned for him." Since the scene in 5:4 is highly sexually suggestive, it is likely that מעה likewise refers to her vagina. מעה also refers to the genitals in Genesis 15:4; 2 Samuel 7:12; Isaiah 48:19 and 2 Chronicles 32:21. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 173; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 543.

[344] עשת is a *hapax legomenon* and Bibles offer varying translations including "work" (NRSV, ERV, ASV), "panels" (NASB), "polished" (NIV, ESV). Exum and Fox translate as "bar", Longman renders this "tusk". Exum, *Song of Songs*, 184; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 141; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 164.

[345] I follow Pope in translating this as lapis lazuli, as the term is unlikely to mean sapphires. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 544.

[346] NRSV has "appearance".

[347] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 202.

[348] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 174.

[349] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 202.

Nissinen argues that the male lover takes on a superhuman, quasi-divine quality.[350] The description of the male lover contains similarities with the statue of Daniel 2:32-33: "The head of that statue was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."[351] While Longman argues that the description's use of god-like language does not make him an idol, I argue that there is no indication that the description stops short of making the male lover a god-like statue, should we interpret it in this way.[352] Rather, Exum attests that "gold and lapis lazuli are the stuff of the bodies of gods in numerous ancient Near Eastern texts."[353] Davis likewise observes that: "what is, then, most striking about this *waṣf* is that it is a kind of verbal statue, executed in precious materials, analogous to the statues that were commonly erected to honor Mesopotamian and Egyptian gods and (semi-deified) kings. They, too, were made of gold, lapis lazuli, marble, and alabaster."[354]

I concur with Exum that the hardness of these materials suggests physical strength.[355] The female lover associates the male lover with an abundance of luxurious, royal materials that prove the male lover is superior to all other men.[356] By doing so, the female lover indicates that it is his physical features, and the sexual appeal they connote, which set him apart from other men:

> There is something sexually suggestive in all these images of hardness – not simply that one of more of these images might be a veiled reference to the man's penis but also the sturdiness of his legs and musculature of his

[350] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 262.
[351] NRSV translation. A connection highlighted by Pope and Bloch and Bloch. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 535; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 185.
[352] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 173.
[353] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 208.
[354] Original italics. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 282.
[355] Exum, "The Man," 121.
[356] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 262.

> abdomen would be especially evident and appreciated during sexual intercourse.[357]

Through her descriptions, the female lover portrays the male lover as sexually appealing and virile, thus upholding biblical masculinities categories.[358] While the noticeable lack of progeny in the Song could be seen as a failure in his masculinity, I argue that the male lover's sexual appeal stands out in spite of this. In showing that he is sexually active and desirable above other men, the male lover shows that he can fulfil this category of masculinity without the need for progeny. And yet, there are also depictions of the male lover which do not fit the hegemonic categories. This creates a complex overall image of the male lover's gender, on the one hand hegemonically masculine in his upholding standards of warrior-like conquest, while on the other hand disrupting hegemonic masculinity through bringing the male lover's body closer to that of the female lover by portraying the lovers using the same natural imagery.

3.2.1.3.3. Blurring Masculinity and Femininity

Despite the association of the male lover with seemingly masculine peerless-ness, physical strength and sexual appeal, the male lover is equally described with imagery drawing from the natural world which blurs masculinity and femininity, aptly summarised by Bloch and Bloch: "the lover is presented in a mixture of images denoting, on the one hand, a sculptural or architectural solidity, and on the other, tenderness and sweetness."[359] The sense of scent pervades the female lover's descriptions of the male lover not only in the "beds of spices" in 5:13, the Lebanon cedar in 5:15 and myrrh in 5:13, but also in her

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[357] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 207.
[358] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 261.
[359] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 185.

description in 1:13-14: צרור המר דודי לי בין שדי ילין אשכל הכפר דודי לי בכרמי עין גדי "My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-gedi." The spices associated with the male lover are also used of the female lover, so that the female lover also smells of Lebanon (4:11) and her "channel"[360] is comprised of henna and myrrh (4:13-14).

Yet the blurring of masculinity and femininity is not limited to scent. The male lover's eyes are כיונים "like doves" (5:12), an image repeatedly applied to the female lover (1:15; 2:14; 4:1; 5:2; 6:9). The image and its precise symbolism is difficult to ascertain.[361] Doves were a common symbol in ANE culture, associated with love goddesses and linked to eroticism.[362] The image's aptness for the female lover in the context of the Song, which I will explore below, perhaps makes it more surprising that it is used to describe the male lover on this occasion. Exum argues the connection to doves is in the brightness of the male lover's eyes as this would complement the references to his glowing complexion in 5:10 and his dazzling appearance in 5:11.[363] Meanwhile, Fox argues the image emphasises the whiteness of the eye, conveying a sense of luxury and delicacy in its connection with milk in this verse.[364] Indeed, milk is a further example of an image that is also applied to the female lover (4:11). Moreover, where the female lover describes herself as a שושן, often translated as "lily" (2:1), she now states her lover's lips are שושנים "lilies" (5:13), another image whose significance is difficult to comprehend.[365] Elsewhere, the female lover's

[360] NRSV translation.
[361] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 172.
[362] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 112; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 123.
[363] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 205.
[364] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 148.
[365] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 173.

breasts are described as תאמי צביה "twins of a gazelle" (7:4 [7:3 E]), further demonstrating the fluidity of imagery applied to the lovers. Landy categorises the images of doves, myrrh, lilies, spices and fragrance as feminine symbols.[366] As such, Landy argues "thus on his face, the expressive articulate part of his body, we find animate images of the woman; whereas the rest of his body, though approximately formidable, is coldly metallic and disjointed. By a curious paradox that which is alive in him and relates to her is feminine."[367] However, I argue that a binary separation of these images to categorise them as feminine does not adequately capture the way in which the Song purposefully blurs the feminine with the masculine; not in a manner where one displaces the other, but in a manner that captures both aspects present within the male and female lover. Landy is closer to this understanding when he describes the lovers having an androgynous personality, but I argue this would be best understood as an androgyny which is present in both lovers individually, as well as in their blurred identities.[368] The male lover is thus repeatedly associated with images that are applied to the female lover, and the inclusion of these images among those illustrating his strength disrupt the male lover's hegemonic power, indicating that feminine imagery is likewise suitable in capturing his characteristics. Above

[366] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 72. For further discussion of the fragrances mentioned in the Song and their association with sensuality, see Athalya Brenner, "Aromatics and Perfumes in the Song of Songs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 25 (February 1983): 75–81. Quick's studies of the function of cosmetics and body adornment reveal that cosmetics communicate important aspects of one's identity as well as allowing individuals to blur boundaries. This is especially pertinent when examining the use of cosmetics in the Song as they allow the lovers to disrupt gender boundaries and social hierarchies through their association with royal grandeur. Laura Quick, ""She Made Herself up Provocatively for the Charming of the Eyes of Men" (Jdt. 10.4): Cosmetics and Body Adornment in the Stories of Judith and Susanna," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 28, no. 3 (March 2019): 215–236; Laura Quick, "Decorated Women: A Sociological Approach to the Function of Cosmetics in the Books of Esther and Ruth," *Biblical Interpretation* 27 (August 2019): 354–371; Quick, *Dress, Adornment and the Body in the Hebrew Bible*.

[367] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 73.

[368] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 266.

all, the inclusion of this blurring imagery emphasises that he truly stands out above all men in his embodiment of hegemonic military power, male strength, and gender-reversing natural imagery.

3.2.1.4. Conclusions

The male lover's combined masculinity and femininity leaves the reader questioning whether the male lover fulfils the hegemonic masculine ideal. Moore argues that "the fundamental logic of biblical masculinity, not surprisingly, turns out to be a binary logic: To be a man is not to be a woman."[369] In this definition of masculinity, a man must avoid feminisation to preserve his masculinity. However, the male lover not only embodies aspects of femininity, but there is also no sign that it diminishes his masculinity. Rather, as Creangă observes, the audience "is subtly encouraged to emulate the masculinity of the male lover rather than the masculinity of any other man in the poem."[370]

In his designation of the male lover as the "ideal lover's agency", Nissinen argues that the male lover fits into the criteria of hegemonic masculinity due to his sexual virility, freedom of movement and lack of vulnerability.[371] Yet Nissinen also notes that there are significant ways in which the male lover deviates from hegemonic masculinity: he does not exemplify martial valour, procreate or hold a public role in society.[372] However, I have demonstrated that there are subtle allusions to the male lover's martial valour even if these are not made as explicit as the female lover's characterisation. In her assessment of the male lover's masculinity, Exum argues that the male lover's vulnerability lies in his love

[369] Moore, "Final Reflections on Biblical Masculinity," 246.
[370] Creangă, "Introduction," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, 10.
[371] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 267.
[372] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 267.

for the female lover, going against the criteria of the "womanless male".[373] The male lover's seemingly gentle and sensitive attitude to his lover has likewise been used as a further separation from the hegemonic ideal.[374] Yet, as Exum detects, there appears to be incongruity in the ways which the male lover self-perceives himself as taking control, whereas the female lover perceives as him acting on her invitation.[375] Indeed, it is the female lover who shapes him as a warrior in her descriptions.[376] Moreover, the male lover's hegemonic status as king surpasses Solomon, whose excessive force and grandeur is mocked. Yet we cannot argue conclusively that the male lover *is* a hegemonic male. Rather, as Verde argues, the Song's presentation of masculinity is

> unique insofar as the poem's male lover simultaneously embodies, contradicts, and reshapes the ancient ideal of masculinity. . . . both "being a woman" and "being a man" are constructed and performed as being powerful and powerless in matters of love.[377]

By portraying the male lover in conflicting ways that both uphold and disrupt hegemonic masculinity, the Song offers unique insight into the complexity of gender and power, with the potential of expanding the field of biblical masculinities studies and reforming the discussions of individual biblical masculinities.

Like her male counterpart, the female lover's power is similarly formulated in terms of hegemonic masculinity and she occasionally fits the biblical masculinities categories better than the male lover. Yet her characterisation also shows the same blurring of masculinity and femininity that is present in the male lover's portrayal. As we have more

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[373] Exum, "The Man," 124.
[374] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 263–264.
[375] Exum, "The Man," 118.
[376] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 218–219.
[377] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 220.

speeches and depictions of the female lover, there are more examples to elucidate the delicate balance between power and vulnerability, and between masculinity and femininity.

3.2.2. The Female Lover's Disruptive Power

As noted in the literature review, the female lover's characterisation in the Song has been of particular interest to scholars due to her prominent voice. The female lover's extensive presence and her detailed portrayal has resulted in a surge of debate regarding female authorship, autonomy, and bodily depiction which has exceeded the interest in the male lover, whose appearance in the Song is marginal by comparison. There is much that can be explored in the female lover's speeches and in the imagery used to describe her, yet my scope will be limited to the aspects which I have found to be most illustrative of her power and vulnerability. As such, I will follow a similar pattern as I employed with the male lover to analyse how the female lover presents herself as powerful through the language she uses, how the matter of autonomy comes into question in the natural landscape (2:14; 2:15; 4:12) vis-à-vis the city (3:2; 5:7), and how her body is depicted in terms of conflicting yet complementary imagery drawing from both the natural and the military worlds.

In my use of biblical masculinities studies, it is crucial to consider how the female lover also acts in accordance with the categories of masculinity which have been ascribed to other biblical men. She is associated with military strength and power, the foremost category of masculinity.[378] Her masculinity is shown in a variety of ways from her portrayal using the architectural/military imagery of towers (4:4; 7:5 [7:4 E]; 8:10), to her inciting

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[378] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 216.

terror (6:4; 6:10). Moreover, the female lover fulfils masculine criteria by displaying sexual virility in her sexually suggestive invitation to the male lover (4:16). Crucially, the female lover has a greater freedom of movement than generally available to women, and she is able to cross from the domestic to the public sphere. She, more than any other character including the male lover, is able to traverse spatial boundaries. She is both on the battlefield and in the confines of her home. Her extensive verbal prowess and persuasiveness throughout the Song, characteristics which are rarely afforded as much attention in other portrayals of biblical women, may likewise indicate her adoption of masculine categories. As such, the female lover proves to be a disruptive force acting against hegemonic power.

3.2.2.1. The Female Lover's Speeches

The female lover's verbal power is primarily expressed through the imperative, cohortative and jussive verbal forms she uses in her speeches, as well as through direct statements.[379] While these linguistic techniques are also present in the male lover's speeches, the female

[379] Laura Mary Elizabeth Hare's sociolinguistic study of gendered speech in biblical narrative investigates whether there are noticeable and systematic differences in the ways men and women speak (p. 3). Focusing on the narratives within Genesis to Kings, Job, Ruth, Esther and Chronicles, Hare's data analysis demonstrates that men use imperatives more often than women in biblical narrative (p. 67). Hare also notes that women who issue orders in the imperative are either in a position of authority over their male relatives, or they are behaving contrary to the norms of Israelite women (pp. 143-144). Hare summarises her findings as: "In general, I have found that women's speech is more deferential, indirect, past-oriented, and explanatory, while men's speech is non-deferential, direct, future-oriented, and imperative." (p. 24). Moreover, Hare reminds us that "when a character speaks in a way that does not seem to fit the expected pattern, it is likely to be a deliberate choice on the part of the author, indicating that there is something unusual about the character or the situation." (p. 404). While Hare's study is limited to biblical narratives and does not have the scope to consider gendered speech in biblical poetry, her research provides a solid groundwork for approaching gendered speech in the Song. Taking into consideration the rarity of women using imperatives, jussives and cohortatives, the female lover is an unusual female character whose power can be gauged through her speech. Moreover, as there is almost a two-fold increase in the use of the imperative by female authority figures in biblical narrative (p. 271), the female lover's use of the imperative verbal forms may be an indication of her high status, thereby potentially giving us a glimpse of her social status. Laura Mary Elizabeth Hare, "Gendered Speech: A Sociolinguistic Study of Conversations between Men and Women in Biblical Narrative," (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2018).

lover speaks more frequently, allowing the reader a larger range of variable speeches to draw upon. As discussed above, both lovers use the erotic imperative however it most frequently occurs in the female lover's speeches. I would like to further expand on Exum's observations of the erotic imperative and ask: what does the Song show us about the female lover's power by giving her the voice to assert her desire and use imperatives abundantly in the first place? I suggest that the recurrence of these verbal forms throughout the Song suggests that there is a continuity of character and power, despite the difficulties faced in attempting to read the Song as a sequential narrative. The female lover's power wanes during the course of the Song, as I will discuss in detail with regards to her autonomy, yet her power is not wholly abandoned, as demonstrated by her beginning her first speech with a jussive ישקני "Let him kiss me" (1:2), and ending her last speech with an imperative ברח "Hurry" (8:14).

I have already examined the significance of the imperative form in the male lover's speech, but it is also important to explain the meaning of the cohortative and jussive forms as they frequently occur in the female lover's speeches. The cohortative and jussive verbal forms are related to the imperative verbal form as they too are used to express wishes, requests or commands, the difference being that cohortatives are in the first person, and jussives are in the third person.[380] The jussive is often translated as an imperfect verbal form; however, it can be distinguished by its positioning as the first word in the sentence.[381] The use of the imperative, cohortative and jussive forms are used to convey the urgency of the erotic imperative, as Exum argues, but it also indicates the female lover's power to

[380] Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 217–219.
[381] Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 219.

communicate her desire openly, directly and underpinned by an expectation that her wishes and commands will be fulfilled, which as I have shown, is not always the case with the male lover.

The female lover begins the first speech in the Song with a jussive ישקני "Let him kiss me" (1:2) as already noted.[382] This sets the dynamic tone of the poem and voices her desire. As Exum argues, this jussive, the imperative משכני אחריך "draw me after you" (1:4) and cohortative נרוצה "let us run" (1:4) "communicate a sense of urgency and create the impression that we are overhearing and observing as a love affair unfolds before us."[383] This is also the case with הגידה לי "tell me" in 1:7.[384] Likewise, Longman argues that the imperative משכני "draw me" indicates that she is the initiator of the action.[385] The use of the jussive in 1:6 אל־תראוני "do not gaze at me" similarly captures her wish not to be gazed at.[386] Her commands in 2:5 to סמכוני "sustain me!" and רפדוני "spread me!"[387] may be a "sort of rhetorical imperative, a strong way of expressing a wish for what is already the case."[388] Other examples of the imperative verbal forms include סב דמה־לך דודי "turn, my beloved, be like" (2:17)[389]; and שימני כחותם "set me as a seal" (8:6), which Exum views as

[382] If we take the superscription to be a later addition, this verse is also the first line of the Song. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 89.
[383] Fox argues that the verbs ישקני and נרוצה should be read as imperfect forms and not as jussive or cohortative forms. However, Exum makes a compelling argument for reading these as expressions of the erotic imperative. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 92; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 69.
[384] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 106.
[385] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 92.
[386] It is possible that this wish is not fulfilled as it does not deter others from gazing at her later on in the Song. However, it is also possible that the wish is immediately fulfilled as there is no indication that the daughters of Jerusalem continue to gaze at her in this chapter.
[387] NRSV translates "refresh me" but this translation is dubious. As Exum and Pope note, the use of the Piel stem is unique. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 115–116; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 378.
[388] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 109.
[389] Most commentators focus on whether the female lover is urging him to turn towards her or away from her. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 126; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 408; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 115.

the erotic imperative "reach[ing] its most fervent pitch as the preface to the affirmation of love's power."[390] The request to be set as a seal on the male lover's heart has been variously interpreted. Landy observes that the female lover may be indicating her insecurity and dependence on the male lover in her wish to be set as a seal on his heart.[391] Yet LaCocque argues that by issuing the command, the female lover lays her claim on him.[392]

The imperative also occurs alongside the cohortative and jussive verbal forms. 4:16 combines imperatives and jussives to issue both a command and an invitation in the same verse: עורי צפון ובואי תימן הפיחי גני יזלו בשמיו יבא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו "Arise, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden that its spices may flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits." This verse identifies two powerful actions. Firstly, the female lover commands the elements.[393] Davis notes that this is an "assertion of personal power" and that elsewhere only God commands the winds, for example in Exodus 14:21, Ezekiel 37:9.[394] Secondly, the female lover invites the male lover to the garden, showing that she is the one who initiates the action.[395] Later on in 7:12-13 [7:11-12 E], the combination of imperatives and cohortatives again offers an invitation for the male lover: לכה דודי נצא השדה נלינה בכפרים נשכימה לכרמים נראה אם־פרחה הגפן "Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields, let us lodge in the villages; let us rise early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine has budded." [396] Moreover, the use of the cohortative in 3:2 אקומה נא

[390] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 250.
[391] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 116.
[392] LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 168.
[393] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 178.
[394] Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 272.
[395] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 158; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 181; LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 112.
[396] LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 158.

ואסובבה בעיר בשוקים וברחבות אבקשה את שאהבה נפשי בקשתיו ולא מצאתיו "I will rise now and go about in the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I did not find him" further indicates that she is active, and that her actions are not confined to the domestic space, but rather she firmly places herself in the public space.

Elsewhere in the Song the female lover's power can be detected through her direct manner of speaking. The repetition of השבעתי אתכם "I adjure you", which occurs in 2:7, 3:5, 5:8 and 8:4 retains a similar sense of urgency as her use of the imperative as she urges the daughters of Jerusalem to make a promise.[397] This repetition also appears in her statement דודי לי ואני לו "My beloved is mine and I am his" in 2:16 and its variations in 6:3 and 7:11 [7:10 E], which emphasises their mutual relationship.[398] Moreover, the female lover engages in direct self-description in 1:5 with her proud assertion that שחורה אני ונאוה "I am black and beautiful,"[399] in 2:1 אני חבצלת השרון שושנת העמקים "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys,"[400] and in 8:10 אני חומה "I was a wall". Aside from self-description, the female lover's speech is also erotically charged in its directness as can be seen in 5:5 קמתי אני לפתח לדודי "I arose to open to my beloved" and in 5:6 פתחתי אני לדודי "I opened to my

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[397] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 115.
[398] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 130; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 405; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 114.
[399] Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 244.
[400] I have kept the plant names the same as the NRSV translation but these may not be accurate as the specific plants are difficult to identify. Moreover, the Critical Apparatus on the MT notes that אני should be read את which would translate to "You are a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys", therefore making the male lover the speaker.

beloved" where there is no object that is being "opened" thereby suggesting that she is opening her body to the male lover.[401]

The wide range of verbal forms in the female lover's speeches as well as her direct manner of speaking are suggestive of her power to express her desire for the male lover and her freedom to move around the city. Indeed, the female lover's strikingly powerful verbosity is one reason why feminist scholars have argued for female authorship.[402] The female lover calls others into action: she directs the winds (4:16), she invites the male lover (4:16; 7:12-13 [7:11-12 E]) and she adjures the daughters of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4). Not only does she have the power to command, but her commands are often obeyed, as evidenced by the male lover immediately coming to the garden (5:1), and the daughters of Jerusalem responding to her request to find her lover (6:1). The importance of her voice, as noted by Exum, should not be underestimated.[403] While it is likely that the female lover is the invention of a male author, by giving her the power to express herself she nonetheless becomes a powerful character, and, to paraphrase Bach, she experiences moments of narrative power.[404] With this in mind, perhaps we now have an answer to Nissinen's question: "and if sexual initiative is a sign of virility, who is the *man* in the Song of Songs?"[405] I contend that the female lover, in her ability to express her sexual desire openly using a variety of linguistic techniques, fulfils this category of masculinity more closely than the male lover. Moreover, her verbal prowess coupled with her persuasiveness

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[401] A more literal translation of these verses is "I, I arose to open to my beloved" (5:5) and "I, I opened to my beloved" (5:6). The inclusion of the first person pronoun emphasises that she is performing the action, and also emphasises, in absence of an object that is being opened, that *she* is the one who will be opening.
[402] See Literature Review section on female authorship for a concise overview, pp.16-20.
[403] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 14.
[404] Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 29.
[405] Original emphasis. Nissinen, "Biblical Masculinities," 280.

prove that she accomplishes a further masculine characteristic: that of intelligent speech.[406] By fulfilling these criteria, the power of the female lover's speech disrupts the expectation of hegemonic power.

In contrast to the male lover whose speeches indicate a combination of power and vulnerability while his autonomy is unimpeded, the reverse is true for the female lover. The directness and variety of her speech holds power, yet it is in her autonomy that she faces challenges which can make her vulnerable while the male lover's autonomy is unobstructed.

3.2.2.2. The Female Lover's Autonomy

The female lover experiences unique challenges to her autonomy and freedom of movement both in nature and in the city, most notably through her portrayal as a locked garden (4:12) and through the watchmen's abuse (5:7). While the danger of the foxes threatening to ruin the vineyards (2:15) may be an obstacle for both lovers, I suggest that the interchangeability of the female lover with the vineyard indicates that this threat is more directly aimed at the female lover's body. On the topic of the female lover's autonomy, Exum has argued that the Song offers "a vision that recognized both desire and sexual pleasure as mutual and that viewed positively a woman actively seeking to gratify her desire." [407] Yet I maintain that the Song also presents an uneasiness over her desires, potentially indicating that the female lover's sexual openness is not positively perceived by the author in light of the challenges she encounters on her journeys to fulfil them. The watchmen's abuse in 5:7 is the most poignant demonstration of the challenge to the

[406] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 219–221.
[407] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 13.

female lover's autonomy, but such challenges abound in the Song. The tension between simultaneously celebrating and condemning her autonomy is also located in the natural landscape in the images of the trapped dove (2:14), the foxes that threaten the vineyards (2:15), and the locked garden (4:12). In this section I will focus on these moments where the female lover's autonomy is challenged to ascertain whether these can be reconciled with feminist readings which argue that the female lover has a high degree of autonomy.[408]

Scholars have often viewed the city and the natural world as binary landscapes. [409] As noted above in the literature review, natural landscapes such as gardens and vineyards have been viewed as places where the lovers can realise their love.[410] In direct contrast, the city has been viewed as constrictive, threatening and violent, particularly due to the violence the female lover experiences at the hands of the watchmen, but also due to the searching motif in the Song whereby the female lover is unable to find her lover.[411] However, this binary opposition of city and nature attempts to simplify the complex interactions the female lover has with the landscapes she moves through. While it is true that she is vulnerable in the city, it is also a place of refuge as she is able to be intimate with her lover in her mother's house (3:4; 8:2). In his study of the city as a labyrinth, Christopher Meredith is among one of few scholars to critique scholars' eagerness to view the city as a violent prison.[412] Meredith argues that the city/nature binary overlooks "a

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[408] See Literature Review section on female autonomy for a concise overview, pp.12-13.

[409] For example, Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 279. "The hostile reaction of the city guards may also serve a symbolic function. The city is for these lovers always a place of opposition, separation, and suffering. It contrasts with the garden, which is a place of satisfaction and union."

[410] For example, see the Garden of Eden motif in Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*; Landy, "The Song of Songs".

[411] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 175.

[412] Christopher Meredith, *Journeys in the Songscape: Space and the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2017), 91.

tension between the city's opacity and the characters' attempts to overcome that opacity through surveillance."[413] In fact, it is

> this tension that allows for the operation of power between the characters in the text: the power of the woman, safe behind her door, to reject the man; the power of the male to disappear and cause his beloved to fret; the power of the male guards over the dark streets; the power of the male guards to beat the woman; the power of the male guards to get away with it.[414]

The same can also be said of the natural world. The lovers inhabit nature (e.g. 1:15-17) but the female lover is also exposed to the danger of foxes (2:15), and her portrayal as a locked garden (4:12) has a sinister undertone. It is therefore more appropriate to take a nuanced approach to the female lover's autonomy in a given landscape as binary oppositions are often misleading.

3.2.2.2.1. Wandering in the City (5:7; c.f. 3:2)

I argue that the watchmen's abuse (5:7) poses the greatest impediment to the female lover's bodily autonomy and freedom of movement. This scene can be seen as a parallel to the female lover's search for her lover in 3:2. As noted in the discussion of the female lover's use of verbal forms, 3:2 contains an abundance of verbs as the female lover describes her movements: אקומה "I will rise", ואסובבה "and go about", אבקשה "I will seek", בקשתיו "I sought him", ולא מצאתיו "but I did not find him." The actions denoted by the verbs dominate the verse. Similarly, in 5:7 the intensity and fast pace of the watchmen's movements are relayed through the use of verbs: מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר הכוני פצעוני נשאו את־רדידי מעלי שמרי החמות "Making their rounds in the city the watchmen found me;

[413] Meredith, *Journeys*, 99.
[414] Meredith, *Journeys*, 101.

they beat me, they wounded me, they lifted my mantle from me, those watchmen of the walls." However, whereas the female lover initiated the action in 3:2, 5:7 is noticeable in its reversal of action. The female lover, who was searching for her lover, is now found by the watchmen, and the power dynamics are likewise reversed. This scene has been the source of contention between scholars, from those who overlook the impact of the violence, to those who read the scene as a dream sequence.[415] I concur with Meredith that "perhaps one reason we have kept dream rhetoric around is that it provides a handy mechanism by means of which almost anything in the text can be explained."[416] For the purposes of my examination of power, my focus is on how this scene, and the fact that it is a reversal of 3:2, impacts the female lover's autonomy. This scene will, and should, continue to pose a challenge to the Song's readers. As with much of the Song, the text allows, and invites, multiple interpretations of its scenes.

A significant interpretation of this verse is Polaski's argument that the watchmen are a symbol of panoptical power, resulting from the female lover's internalised discipline rather than a physical threat.[417] In a similar observation, Longman notes the importance of the gaze: "we are not driven to provide motivations as much as to understand the symbolic function of the guard's treatment of the woman, which we have already taken as the unfriendly urban-public gaze versus the private intimacies of the couple."[418] Yet we do not have to read a symbolic meaning into the scene to identify the imbalance of power. The

[415] For example, Pope and Fox do not comment on the reasons for or the effect of the abuse, while Longman stresses the abuse is part of a dream sequence. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 527–528; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 146; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 168–69.
[416] Meredith, *Journeys*, 37.
[417] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 78–79.
[418] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 169.

female lover's garment, רדיד, often translated "mantle" as in the NRSV, occurs elsewhere only in Isaiah 3:23 where the precise type of garment cannot be identified, but it is likely an item of clothing that is wrapped around the body.[419] Regardless of the type of clothing, the action of forcibly removing it demonstrates the female lover's vulnerability: "for men to strip off part of a woman's clothing, even if it is not an essential piece of clothing, is a contemptuous act of exposure."[420] Likewise, Munro notes how the removal of her clothing is ironic,

> for she, who is thrown into disarray at the thought of being already undressed when her lover comes to her door (5.3), is thereafter forced to leave her home in the middle of the night to be forcibly stripped of her mantle (5.7). The inconvenience of having to get dressed again to open the door and to find shoes for her freshly bathed feet (5.3) is nothing compared to the violence she subsequently suffers at the hands of the nightwatchmen (5.7). [421]

The removal of the garment is a humiliation, which some interpret as indicating that she was regarded as a prostitute (c.f. Isaiah 20:4; Jeremiah 13:22, 26; Ezekiel 16:37-39).[422] Likewise, LaCocque argues that "in the Canticle, the woman radically redefines her boundaries and, as a result, is assaulted by the guards assuming that she is promiscuous or a prostitute."[423] However, I concur with Exum that there is no evidence for the female lover's mistreatment on account that she may have been perceived as a prostitute: "there is no biblical evidence to indicate that a woman on the street at night would be treated so ruthlessly."[424] The watchmen's beating, wounding and stripping of the female lover are a

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[419] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 197.
[420] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 197.
[421] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 55.
[422] Viviers, "Clothed and Unclothed," 615–616.
[423] LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 120.
[424] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 198.

transgression and violation of corporeal boundaries, therefore placing the female lover in a passive position of vulnerability and the watchmen in a position of power.[425]

Readers are left to wonder why the watchmen have such a visceral reaction to a woman walking the streets at night in search of her lover. Does this scene illustrate a typical female experience?[426] Van Dijk-Hemmes and Brenner-Idan note that the Song's gynocentrism is disrupted by the abuse scene, offering a glimpse of the patriarchal world.[427] The female lover's seeming lack of protest at the abuse has been interpreted as either an indication that the abuse occurs in a dream, or that she is unaffected by it as in the following verse (5:8) she repeats her address to the daughters of Jerusalem. Such interpretations are reminiscent of modern-day apologetic responses to sexual harassment allegations, whereby women's experiences are discredited and overlooked if they do not appear sufficiently traumatised by the experience. Moreover, the female lover's emphasis on שמרי החמות, "the watchmen of the walls", potentially offers an insight into the female lover's reaction to the assault. Bloch and Bloch argue that this emphasis "captures the tone of exasperation in the words of the Shulamite as she relates the violent encounter," based on a nuance in the Hebrew explication that they are specifically "watchmen of the walls" rather than simply "watchmen", a hint which is often lost in English translations.[428] Likewise, the description of the watchmen making their rounds in the city captures the female lover's sense of frustration and constriction. [429] The most tenable explanation for

[425] Black, "Nocturnal Egression,"101–102; Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 133.
[426] Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman*, 50.
[427] Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 79.
[428] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 183.
[429] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs*, 198.

the watchmen's actions is that the female lover threatens the watchmen's order.[430] In doing so, she thereby also endangers their hegemonic power. By wandering the labyrinthine streets at night, the female lover becomes caught between the public and the private space.[431] Their abuse is a way to control her and keep her from crossing into their hegemonic space: "social control and social disorder are closely linked: both are manifestations of power, are gendered male, and emphasize the walls of public space."[432] The watchmen's abuse therefore serves as a violent reminder that, while the female lover has the freedom to walk around the city, she is still far from attaining the hegemonic power that would allow her to walk around the city unharmed.

I therefore concur with Black that "the beating scene must leave us unsettled, then, as a constant challenge to the temptations of cohesive reading for the Song of Songs and to its celebrated gynocentrism."[433] As Exum notes, this scene will continue to impact modern readers:

> Even if the woman seems unaffected by this setback, it is not so easy for modern readers to dismiss it. Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that it is a woman whom the poet represents as abused by men in a role of authority. Her lover does not undergo suffering for her sake, and this disparity may well reflect the different expectations ancient Israelite society had for men's and women's behavior.[434]

The reversal of power exhibited in this scene demonstrates that even if she is only impeded from her wandering around the city for the space of this verse, and even if this scene is a result of poetic license, a dream, or an unconscious desire, her freedom is momentarily

[430] Black, "Nocturnal Egression," 97.
[431] Meredith, *Journeys*, 103.
[432] James, *Landscapes*, 100.
[433] Black, "Nocturnal Egression," 104.
[434] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 198.

constricted. The female lover, who so often initiates or invites the actions in the Song, is here made vulnerable by the watchmen's abuse. Yet it is not just in the city that the female lover faces challenges to her autonomy as the natural landscape brings freedom from the city at the expense of facing danger in nature.

3.2.2.2.2. Nature: A Refuge or a Danger? (2:14; 2:15; 4:12)

The images of the trapped dove (2:14), the foxes (2:15) and the locked garden (4:12) can be interpreted as limiting the female lover's autonomy and they cast doubt over the female lover's power. In my close reading of these scenes, I will show that nature is not always a place of refuge, nor is it always a dangerous place. Rather, as is also the case with the city, nature is both a refuge and a danger at different times in the Song, and perhaps even within the same verse.

Reading the trapped dove image (2:14) as an illustration of the woman at the window motif, Meredith argues that the female lover is enclosed, surrounded and contained in the cliff while the male lover is free and active.[435] The scene therefore initially appears to uphold spatial gender boundaries whereby the woman is located inside the domestic sphere while the man is located outside in the public sphere.[436] However, as Meredith notes, this scene is paradoxical once the reader realises that the female lover, not the male lover, is the storyteller, creating an image of herself by turning the window into a mirror.[437] This paradoxical reflection blurs the inside/outside, domestic/public space, allowing the female lover to transcend the binary division of gendered space as well as the

[435] Christopher Meredith, "The Lattice and the Looking Glass: Gendered Space in Song of Songs 2:8—14," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (June 2012): 375.
[436] Meredith, "Lattice," 376.
[437] Meredith, "Lattice," 377–379.

binary division of gender itself.[438] Meredith argues that the female lover attempts to reimagine herself through the male gaze to escape it.[439] Yet another level of paradox is added with the realisation that the female lover may in turn be created by a male author, thereby imagined and constricted by the male imagination.

While Meredith's argument is salient in its observation that gender and space are blurred in this scene, I believe Meredith's reading is too influenced by the woman at the window motif. The beginning of 2:14 יונתי בחגוי הסלע בסתר המדרגה is translated in the NRSV as "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff." The noun סתר denotes a hiding place, and is also used in 1 Samuel 19:2 where Jonathan suggests that David should hide from Saul, and in Jeremiah 49:16 to describe the dwelling place of the Edomites. While some scholars have argued that the female lover is trapped in a dangerous environment and potentially afraid, a more accurate rendering of this verse is that she is hiding in an inaccessible place as סתר is used to denote a hiding place or a place of refuge rather than a hostile place.[440] Her inaccessibility may be indicative of her pride and autonomy, playing on the image of the unreachable goddess in the temple.[441] Her hiding may be playful.[442] Or it may be that she is "shy and hesitant, like a dove reticent to venture forth from its secure, secluded nest."[443] Moreover, it is interesting that the male lover associates her with the

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[438] Meredith, *Journeys*, 126.
[439] Meredith, "Lattice," 380.
[440] Both Longman and Pope emphasise the hostility of this image. Longman argues that the female lover is in a dangerous environment while Pope notes that she may be afraid. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 122; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 400.
[441] Yvonne Sophie Thöne, "Female Humanimality: Animal Imagery in the Song of Songs and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography," *Journal for Semitics* 25 (January 2016): 402.
[442] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 155; Talmy Givón, *Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes: Sex and Sophistry in the Old Testament: A New English Translation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019), 45.
[443] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 128.

wilderness rather than a domestic setting.[444] This disrupts the binary division of public (male) space and domestic (female) space. My interpretation of the female lover as hidden from view, rather than trapped, allows for a nuanced understanding of the power dynamics in this scene. By willingly hiding from view, the female lover has the power to decide when to leave her hiding place while the male lover attempts to persuade her to reveal herself, desperately requesting הראיני את־מראיך השמיעיני את־קולך "let me see your form, let me hear your voice" (2:14). Her hiding place in the cliff thus also disrupts the hegemonic power of the male gaze.

Immediately following this image of the dove hiding in the cliffs, the lovers introduce a potential danger in the foxes that threaten to destroy the vineyards: אחזו־לנו שעלים שעלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים וכרמינו סמדר "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, and our vineyards are in blossom!" (2:15).[445] This verse has puzzled commentators, and there may be something lost in the significance of the foxes in the present context. Carole Fontaine states that the foxes are one of the few hostile forces in the Song, and "if blossoming vines are a sign of the power of life, the foxes become harbingers of the power of death - but only as seen through a *human* lens."[446] Indeed, it is noteworthy that foxes in the HB always carry negative connotations and are associated with destruction.[447] Meanwhile, Elaine James argues that because foxes prey on birds, they pose a threat to the lovers in their embodiment as doves.[448] The most frequent

[444] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 156.
[445] It is sometimes proposed that the שעלים should be rendered "jackals" rather than "foxes" and they are generally associated with scavenging. W.S. McCullough, "Fox," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1962), 323.
[446] Original emphasis. Fontaine, ""Go Forth,"" 135.
[447] See for example Judges 15:4; Nehemiah 4:3; Psalm 63:10; Lamentations 5:18; Ezekiel 13:4.
[448] James, *Landscapes*, 22.

interpretation of this scene is that the foxes are metaphors for the female lover's suitors. Indeed, Nissinen views the foxes-as-suitors to be a type of male agency in the Song. [449] However, Longman cautions against reading too much into the suitor narrative, arguing that the foxes should be regarded as more of a general obstacle.[450] I argue that the threat posed by the foxes can be gleaned from the use of the Piel participle of חבל, meaning "to destroy/to ruin". Elsewhere in the HB, the Piel stem of חבל is illustrative of God destroying Babylon as in Isaiah 13:5. The intensity of this action denoted by מחבלים leads me to disagree with Landy's argument that the foxes' threat is minimised by their being described as קטנים "little".[451] It also does not uphold the playful tone in which Fox interprets the verse.[452] The foxes may present a general threat to both lovers, yet if the vineyard is a metaphor for the female lover, I argue that the threat is especially aimed at her body. Her call for assistance reveals her helplessness in the face of this obstacle.[453] Since the foxes signify an impediment to the female lover's bodily autonomy, the foxes in nature can be perceived as a counterpart to the watchmen in the city.[454]

Nature's sinister undertone can be further detected in the locked garden metaphor גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול מעין חתום "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden[455]

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[449] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 257.
[450] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 140; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 114; Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 233; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 124.
[451] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 232.
[452] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 114.
[453] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 232.
[454] Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 91.
[455] The MT has גל which may be related to springs, pools or fountains, see Bloch and Bloch, Pope, Landy and Bekkenkamp. Bekkenkamp argues that "attributing the qualities of both a garden and a well to the woman makes her the subject of her own sexuality (the garden)." Supported by ancient versions including the Septuagint, Vulgate and Peshitta, others have proposed that this should be read as גן "garden" which would be a repetition of "a garden locked" at the beginning of the verse, see Exum and Fox. I have kept the "garden" translation as repetition of the first word or phrase is common in the Song, and also occurs in 1:15; 4:1; 4:8; 4:9; 4:10; 5:9; 6:1; 6:9; 7:1 [6:13 E]. However, it is also possible to read this as גל "spring" in accordance with

locked, a spring sealed" (4:12). The image of the locked garden and the fountain sealed suggest a similar inaccessibility as the image of the dove in hiding (2:14).[456] However, here the female lover is available for the male lover's exclusive pleasure, secluded from view and inaccessible to others.[457] Mari Joerstad notes the purposeful ambiguity of the verse in its blurring the boundaries between nature and humanity: "to see this poem *either* as a metaphorical depiction of the woman *or* a nonmetaphorical description of a luxurious garden is unnecessary; the man and the woman playfully evoke both these possibilities."[458] This verse is best understood with the aid of spatial and landscape theories, and drawing from Yi-Fu Tuan's study of gardens, Meredith notes that gardens are status symbols for kings, symbolising environmental domination.[459] Walled gardens specifically are a site of exclusion and prohibition.[460] Moreover, a garden that is a metaphor for a woman also represents the disciplining and cultivation of the female body in resistance to nature.[461] The sinister aspect of the locked garden is thus soon revealed: "Often construed as a space of freedom, the garden is in fact predicated on a kind of surveillance: the garden is locked and only the authorized may enter."[462]

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the pattern of biblical parallelism, intensifying the association with water when the similar term מעין "spring" is used at the end of the verse. Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 176; Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 100; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 453; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 154; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 137; Jonneke Bekkenkamp, "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. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 81.

[456] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 155.

[457] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 175–176; Anselm Hagedorn, "Place and Space in the Song of Songs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127 (January 2015): 213.

[458] Original emphases. Mari Joerstad, *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics: Humans, Non-Humans, and the Living Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 188.

[459] Meredith, *Journeys*, 74.

[460] Meredith, *Journeys*, 75.

[461] Meredith, *Journeys*, 78, 88.

[462] Meredith, *Journey*, 83.

Yet the power dynamics in the locked garden may be operating in a more disruptive manner. As Landy observes, "it is not clear that the garden is any the less hers for being his."[463] Landy thus views the female lover as both an object and a subject to herself. [464] Indeed, Viviers argues that the garden is a subject in its own right too as it sustains life.[465] This raises an interesting question: does the female lover retain any power and autonomy as a locked garden? It is probable that the garden is locked to protect it from intrusion. [466] However, the Song does not specify who locked the garden and Stefan Fischer suggests that the male lover, as the speaker of this verse, is stating that he is unable to enter the locked garden, indicating that the woman is in a position of power as he cannot enter the garden without her consent. [467] As with the trapped dove in 2:14, this verse could be seen as a paradox: "this power shift to the woman creates a subtle tension vis-à-vis the idea of the harem as another male-dominated space. The locked garden awards all power to the woman while she is simultaneously portrayed as an object."[468] As discussed above, my interpretation of כרמי שלי לפני "My vineyard, which is mine, is for myself" (8:12) makes the female lover the speaker of the verse. As the owner of her vineyard, it is likewise possible that she is also the owner of her garden, evidenced also in her invitation for her lover to come to her garden shortly after in 4:16. I maintain that the emphasis placed on her being a locked garden and a sealed fountain in 4:12, followed by the female lover's invitation in

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[463] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 101.
[464] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 100.
[465] Hendrik Viviers, "Eco-Delight in the Song of Songs," in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 150.
[466] Landy, "The Song of Songs," 523.
[467] Stefan Fischer, "Rhetorical Figures of the Garden Motif in Song of Songs 4:12-5:1," *Journal of Semitics* 23, no. 2 (January 2014): 814.
[468] Fischer, "Rhetorical Figures," 814.

4:16 suggests that the female lover exerts at least some control over her garden and she disrupts the male lover's hegemonic power by controlling who has access to her body.

The four scenes I have explored exemplify the tension inherent in the female lover's autonomy. On the one hand, the female lover experiences vulnerability both in the city and in the natural landscape. The obstacles and threats she encounters suggest that female eroticism is controlled in a way that male eroticism is not.[469] To a certain extent it is true that "if the female moves, it is only under male supervision."[470] The watchmen's abuse, the foxes' threat and the image of the locked garden serve as potential threats to her bodily autonomy and her freedom of movement and the power they have to render her vulnerable should not be underestimated. On the other hand, these scenes illustrate that the female lover is not wholly lacking in power. She deals with the watchmen's abuse through attempts to regain her freedom of movement in her continuing search for her lover, despite the assault she has experienced. Her depiction as a dove in the cliffs is shown to be a place of refuge, while the locked garden can also be understood as her controlling who has access. The issue of her autonomy is therefore not straightforward. The female lover is both powerful and vulnerable, and as discussed above, this is often the case even within the same verse. This tension disrupts the hegemonic powers that threaten her. This complexity of power and vulnerability in her autonomy is also upheld in depictions of her body, which, like the male lover's body, combines masculinity and femininity by drawing on military and natural imagery.

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[469] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 25–26.
[470] Meredith, "Lattice," 374.

3.2.2.3. The Female Body

As the main character in the Song, the female lover is associated with a variety of animals, natural habitats and military strongholds. For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on two aspects of her portrayal: the female lover's body in nature and the female lover's body in battle. These aspects should not be viewed as contrasting depictions of the female lover. Rather, the author's ability to draw from different world experiences builds a complete, if not entirely coherent, portrait of the female lover. Moreover, the two fields intersect in their embodiment of both natural and military imagery. As with so much in the Song, the use of landscape and military imagery is another instance of boundaries being crossed, blurred and merged to form a poetic depiction of the female lover, further disrupting the binary divisions of city/nature, masculine/feminine and power/vulnerability, showing that the female lover embodies all of these categories.

3.2.2.3.1. The Female Lover's Body in Nature

The female lover is inextricably connected to the land she inhabits. As discussed above, the woman as garden/vineyard motif recurs throughout the Song and her portrayal as a locked garden (4:12) can be interpreted as both a symbol of power and vulnerability. The garden is often viewed as a metaphor for her sexuality, but in doing so it has taken away the focus of the landscape itself.[471] James responds to theories focused exclusively on the domination and power over the garden by arguing that "the garden situates humans in both aesthetic contemplation and ecstatic experience such that they both work in and lose themselves to the larger landscape."[472] As Brent Strawn reminds us, we must remember

[471] James, *Landscapes*, 56.
[472] James, *Landscapes*, 64.

that “the ‘Garden of Delight’ in the Song of Songs may be *more* than a garden – it most certainly *is* more than that – but it is *no less* than a garden.”[473] Yet the female lover is not only the garden, but the flowers that populate it. The female lover proclaims that: אני חבצלת השרון שושנת העמקים “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys” (2:1). While the exact species and meaning of these flowers are difficult to decipher, it is possible that they are associated with beauty, delicacy and sensuality.[474] Yet it may also be that she is self-deprecating: “she says: I'm just a little flower, hardly noticeable among the thousands of flowers that cover the valley.”[475] Regardless of the meaning, her self-description as flowers solidify her place in, and her identity as, the garden.

The female lover is also associated with the Song’s topography, perhaps best exemplified in 7:5 [7:4 E] צוארך כמגדל השן עיניך ברכות בחשבון על־שער בת־רבים אפך כמגדל הלבנון צופה פני דמשק “Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus.” This verse combines the images of the female lover in nature and in battle, and I will return to its military imagery below. When identifying the landscape’s purpose in this verse, Black’s reading with the grotesque heuristic demonstrates how the female lover’s body is being stretched and dismembered over the land.[476] Similarly, Meredith notes that the landscape and the female lover are equally encompassing, inseparable entities.[477] As such, the intimate connection between nature and the human body may be an acknowledgment

[473] Original emphases. Brent A. Strawn, “עין גדי in Song of Songs 1,14,” *Biblica*, no. 1 (2020): 123.
[474] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 113.
[475] Fox, *Song of Song*, 107.
[476] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 155.
[477] Meredith, *Journeys*, 174–175.

of humanity's bond with nature.[478] To take these arguments further, I contend that the female lover becomes a pervasive presence in the Song through her embodiment of the landscape. She is everywhere in the landscape; indeed, she *is* the landscape. Her ability to seamlessly merge with the landscape is suggestive of her power to transcend the public/private, male/female binary that has dominated spatial theory. She may be enclosed in the locked garden (4:12) but she also becomes an archetypal City in her embodiment of multiple cities.

Aside from being synonymous with the landscape, the female lover participates in it in her non-human forms, most frequently as a dove. Although the male lover is also associated with a dove in 5:2, the image may be predominantly a female metaphor, emphasising the connection to love goddesses in the ANE.[479] They are therefore a suitable symbol for the female lover in the Song, although the exact meaning of the comparison is lost to us. Exum argues that "the choice of doves for comparison suggests softness, gentleness, beauty, and perhaps shape."[480] Meanwhile, Marvin Pope notes that the female lover's eyes and doves are alike in the glistening colour and quick movements.[481] Similarly, Fox claims that they may be indicative of the oval eye-shape, and perhaps also of the female lover's bashfulness.[482] The dove may be apt as a combination of timidity, distance

[478] Viviers, "Eco-Delight," 149.
[479] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 216.
[480] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 112.
[481] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 356.
[482] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 106, 129.

and movement.[483] Moreover, doves have been interpreted as a symbol of innocence as well as a symbol of love-play, characteristic of their association with love goddesses.[484]

Fontaine argues that the female lover is associated with more static animals in comparison to the male lover, who is associated with the active gazelle and stag.[485] However, as illustrated in the image of the hiding dove (2:14), doves can also be active, and are thus symbolic of the female lover's freedom of movement. For Black, the unintelligibility of the comparison between doves and the eyes in 1:15 is part of the allure of the image.[486] Black argues that each time the metaphors is used, its inaccessibility increases, but the earlier connotations linger.[487] This has the effect that "the eye has been built, too, taken from one simple analogy to another and another, until the final product is rich, dense, confusing, and at the same time so enticing that it cannot be ignored."[488] I therefore perceive the dove metaphor as paradoxical, associated with femininity, softness and beauty, while at the same time the very same eyes which are like doves also have the power to unsettle the male lover (4:9), a point to which I will return in my discussion of the gaze. Whilst the natural and dove imagery is commonplace in love poetry, the Song's use of military imagery to depict the female lover has often been at odds with a romantic reading of the female lover's desire and femininity. As such, the image of the female lover as a warrior disrupts the romantic reading and as a consequence is often not offered sufficient attention by commentators.

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[483] Gault, *Body as Landscape,* 142.
[484] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 238; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 247.
[485] Fontaine, ""Go Forth,"" 132.
[486] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 169.
[487] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 170–171.
[488] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 172.

3.2.2.3.2. The Female Lover's Body in Battle

The female lover's depiction as a warrior is crucial for understanding her embodiment of masculinity and power throughout the Song. As I discussed above, the male lover's depiction as a warrior draws on ANE expectations of military masculinity and the battlefield was primarily a masculine space where men could prove their power over their opponents. However, the military world in the Song is most recurringly associated with the female lover, thus making her more closely aligned with this category of hegemonic masculinity than the male lover. Yet in doing so, the female lover does not renounce her femininity. The battlefield, associated with female goddesses such as Ishtar, proves itself to also be a female space. Examining the Song's military imagery therefore elucidates how the Song disrupts ancient gender roles and creates unconventional characters.[489]

As discussed in the introduction to this section, the military imagery used to describe the female lover often combines aspects of natural imagery. Thus, the mare among Pharaoh's chariots (1:9) is a further association of the female lover with non-humans while military strongholds, and the awe inspired by them, form part of the landscape, and are inseparable from the female lover's body. This section will examine a selection of images which portray the female lover in battle: Pharaoh's mare (1:9), the towers (4:4, 7:5 [7:4 E]; 8:10), and her awesome presence (6:4; 6:10), illustrating her position in, and disruption of, the hegemonic masculine order.

[489] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 35.

3.2.2.3.2.1. Pharaoh's Mare (1:9)

The female lover is compared to Pharaoh's mare in 1:9: לססתי ברכבי פרעה דמיתיך רעיתי "I liken you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots." As noted in my discussion of royalty, this verse contributes to the royal imagery in the Song in the link between royalty and opulence. Yet the comparison also impacts how readers view the female lover's autonomy. Exum notes that "comparing a woman to a fine horse, as the man does here, was a common trope in antiquity, indicating a male view of both as a coveted or prized possession."[490] The mare may signify a distraction for the opponent in battle.[491] However, Chapman suggests that using a mare rather than a stallion in battle may have been proof of the warrior's lack of masculinity.[492] Yvonne Sophie Thöne perceives a parallel between the mare and the dove imagery as "both horse and dove are desirable in their own ways – either being dominated (like the horse) or revealing dominion (like the dove)."[493] For Thöne, this verse cannot be reconciled with the female lover's autonomy as she regards both the mare and the female lover as passive objects of the male speaker.[494] As such, Thöne argues that "this voice expresses an androcentric and an anthropocentric worldview, showing men as the hegemons, as those who have dominion over women and animals for their own benefit."[495]

However, I argue that it is possible to redeem the female lover from this subordinate position. The comparison may instead emphasise the female lover's

[490] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 108.
[491] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 343; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 103.
[492] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 36.
[493] Thöne, "Female Humanimality," 405.
[494] Thöne, "Female Humanimality," 392.
[495] Thöne, "Female Humanimality," 397.

uniqueness and desirability.[496] Moreover, the mare may be viewed as a distraction tactic in battle, symbolising the female lover's power to fight a trained army.[497] Similarly, Davis observes that this image emphasises the female lover's strength and power: "It is important to observe that nowhere in the Song is there a hint of male condescension to 'the weaker sex.'. . . The inference here seems to be: 'You drive men wild!'"[498] Yet I am most in agreement with Verde, who notes that stallions and mares were the most lethal weapons and as such, the reference to Pharaoh's mare is "primarily associated with literary scenes and experiences of war and with concepts such as overwhelming, staggering, irresistible power."[499] In keeping with this view, Landy argues that this military imagery is imbued with phallic imagery which threatens the men's supremacy on the battlefield. [500] Viewed in these terms, I contend that it is possible to read the mare imagery as a threat to the hegemonic masculinity of the battlefield. The female lover, in her ability to distract the opponent, is sufficiently powerful to prove herself on the battlefield and thus she fulfils the main category of masculinity by emerging victorious. Furthermore, Verde notes that this is the first description the man gives of the woman in the Song, suggesting that the first way he perceives her is in military terms just as she does of him (5:10).[501] The military component of this reference to Pharaoh's mare, rather than denoting submission, as it has occasionally been interpreted within feminist scholarship, instead becomes a symbol of the

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[496] Gault, *Body as Landscape*, 99–102.
[497] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 217.
[498] Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 247.
[499] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 139–140.
[500] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 169.
[501] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 143.

female lover's military power, which is further emphasised by her later associations with towers.

3.2.2.3.2.2. Towers (4:4; 7:5 [7:4 E]; 8:10)

The female lover is compared to a tower three times in the Song. The first occurrence is in 4:4: כמגדל דויד צוארך בנוי לתלפיות אלף המגן תלוי עליו כל שלטי הגברים "Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses; on it hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors." [502] There is no archaeological evidence to date that suggests a tower of David existed.[503] Rather, David features here as a poetic flourish. Exum suggests that this may be a wordplay on דוד, the term the female lover uses for her lover.[504] As David is the model warrior-king, the metaphor could imply that the neck had a distinguished size, strength, and symmetry.[505] Likewise, Bloch and Bloch state that the tower of David designates workmanship of the highest order.[506] It may also have been a memory associated with the golden age of Israel, furthering the association between the female lover and the topography.[507] In its connection to David, Landy notes that this carries masculine connotations.[508] The tower is a military structure which represents the city's strength, protection and military power.[509] Indeed, Verde notes that the inverted word order, which is literally translated "like the tower of David is your neck", adds emphasis to the military

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[502] I have followed the NRSV translation in translating תלפיות "courses", מגן "bucklers" and שלט "shield" as these terms are difficult to translate precisely. For further discussion on the various possible translations, see Pope, *Song of Songs*, 465–469.
[503] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 146; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 164; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 465.
[504] Exum, *Song of Song*, 164.
[505] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 465.
[506] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 172.
[507] James, *Landscapes*, 131.
[508] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 80.
[509] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 213; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 53.

image, inviting the reader's attention.[510] Thus, Longman's observation that "David's association with the tower lends a further sense of power and dignity to the image. It also fits into a pervasive use of military imagery to describe the woman" offers a further connection between power, masculinity and the tower as a military image.[511]

The thousand shields that hang from the tower probably refer to the female lover's necklace.[512] This image captures military might, but also splendour.[513] While Exum concedes that "the description of the neck blends royal, military, and architectural imagery", she argues that the female lover's power is erotic.[514] Verde highlights the uniqueness of the neck as tower metaphor, which is not used to describe a woman elsewhere in the HB.[515] I argue that as well as containing erotic undertones, this image also signifies the female lover's military power in her own right. She is decorated and beautiful, but having a presence like a tower suggests that she also appears imposing. The mention of David, as the model for biblical masculinities studies, carries an important significance in its embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. In associating the female lover with the tower of David, the author is portraying her as hegemonic and militarily masculine, a characterisation which is not applied as clearly or directly to the male lover.

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[510] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 46–47.
[511] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 146.
[512] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 146; Francis Landy, "Erotic Words, Sacred Landscapes, Ideal Bodies: Love and Death in the Song of Songs," in *A Companion to World Literature*, ed. K. Seigneurie (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2019), 5, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118635193.ctwl0050; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 467; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 172; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 164.
[513] Landy, "Erotic Words," 5.
[514] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 164–165.
[515] As Verde notes, ""Neither the lexemes מגדל, מגן, שלט, and גבור nor cognate expressions belonging to the conceptual domains fortified city and war ever occur in the Hebrew Bible to depict a woman." Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 62.

The tower imagery continues in 7:5 [7:4 E] with the description of her neck like an ivory tower, expanding to her nose like the tower of Lebanon as mentioned in my earlier discussion of its topography. As with the royal connection to David (4:4), 7:5 [7:4 E] continues the regal association through the use of ivory, a rare and expensive material. Ivory suggests strength, and could either be describing her neck or a necklace.[516] The nose like the tower of Lebanon could potentially illustrate a prominent nose, but the perspective is skewed.[517] Brenner-Idan argues that a large nose may been undesirable.[518] By contrast, 4Q561 1 i 3, an Aramaic physiognomic text from Qumran, notes that a beautiful nose is indeed one which is long, suggesting that a prominent nose would be desirable. In another meaning, LaCocque suggests that it may express her majesty.[519] The reference to לבנון "Lebanon" is a potential play on לבונה "frankincense" while the nose overlooking Damascus is protective, and, as Meyers notes: "the military vantage point of a tower above Damascus provides a strong suggestion of strategic advantage and hence of military power."[520] Similarly, לבנון could be a play on לבן "white", with its connections to ivory, beauty and power.[521] As with the masculine association of the tower of David (4:4), Landy notes that the nose's appearance is "masculine, mighty and imposing, its essence is feminine. Thus we come to the derivation of masculine from feminine imagery."[522] The

[516] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 195; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 160; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 234.
[517] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 196; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 236; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 627.
[518] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 267.
[519] LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 155.
[520] Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 236; Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 214.
[521] See for example Maria Bulakh, "Basic Color Terms of Biblical Hebrew in Diachronic Aspect," in *Babel und Bibel 3: Annual of Ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and Semitic Studies*, ed. L. Kogan et al. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 185–187; Ian Young, Robert Rezetko and Martin Ehrensvärd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts,* vol. 1: An Introduction to Approaches and Problems (New York: Routledge, 2014), 282.
[522] Landy, "The Song of Songs," 85.

image of the neck and nose as towers further connects the female lover with masculine, military power.

The last referent to the female lover occurs in 8:10 אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות "I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers", and is probably "a strong assertion of sexual maturity."[523] Most commentators interpret this verse as symbolising the female lover's chastity, yet in doing so they overlook the continuation of the tower metaphor. In describing herself as a tower, the female lover affirms the previous instances where the male lover described her as such.[524] For Landy, the female lover's breasts become a phallic symbol in their comparison to towers.[525] Furthermore, he argues that, as with her nose, her breasts have a masculine projection but a female function.[526] In this verse, the female lover builds upon the association with towers as symbols of military might, splendour and strength and applies it to herself. The female lover acknowledges that she is the embodiment of a military symbol often exclusive to the public, male sphere and, declaring that she belongs to this world, disrupts the hegemonic masculine power by also successfully embodying masculinity. The recurrent use of tower imagery draws on military strongholds to depict the female lover, but the Song also employs language and imagery to illustrate the female lover's terrifying presence, which is likewise formulated in military terms.

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[523] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 173.
[524] As Verde also notes, "8:10 is the only line of the poem in which the woman applies to herself the metaphor of the fortified city that has been used by the man in 4:4 and 6:4. In other words, in 8:10 the woman proposes an image of herself and of her relationship with her beloved, drawing on the man's views, metaphors, and words." Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 95.
[525] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 66.
[526] Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 81.

3.2.2.3.2.3. Terrible or Outstanding? (6:4; c.f. 6:10)

The female lover is described as יפה את רעיתי כתרצה נאוה כירושלם אימה כנדגלות "You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners" (6:4). The references to Tirzah and Jerusalem further solidify the female lover's embodiment of the landscape. So, as Davis also notes, she is not only "comely as Jerusalem", she *is* Jerusalem.[527] Both cities are connected to royalty and military power.[528] Tirzah may be a connection to beauty, but it may also be a wordplay on the root רצה meaning "to be pleasing".[529] Black reads the mention of Tirzah as a site of desolation and mourning, illustrating that beauty is troubled by death and violence.[530] Pope translates Tirzah as "pleasing" and translates the remainder of the verse as "beautiful as Jerusalem, awesome with trophies."[531] אימה signifies something which is terrifying and Pope argues that the female lover is a combination of beauty and terror, a commonality shared with ANE goddesses of love and war.[532] Longman likewise notes that the female lover inspires fear as well as joy.[533] However, Fox argues that this is an exaggeration of the fear that אימה connotes.[534] Yet a closer look at the combined use of אימה and כנדגלות suggests that this terror should not be underestimated. Rather, Verde observes that אימה is a state of terror often invoked in a military context.[535] Moreover, he notes that scholars have hesitated to follow the military aspect of these two terms, and I would add that this is due to scholars

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[527] Davis, *Scripture*, 172–173.
[528] Polaski, "Where Men Are Men," 445.
[529] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 179; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 217; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 188–189.
[530] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 141.
[531] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 551.
[532] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 560–562.
[533] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 180.
[534] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 151.
[535] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 66.

dismissing the female lover's military portrayal in favour of the more romantic, softer insinuations of the natural imagery used to describe her.[536]

As discussed above, I concur with Andruska's and Verde's arguments that דגל is inextricably connected to its military meaning "to raise a banner".[537] Most translations of 6:4 follow this root and translate as "army with banners" (NRSV).[538] However, some commentators translate based on the later meaning "to look/see". Fox translates this to "awesome as most eminent".[539] Furthermore, Bloch and Bloch argue that the meaning of the term had significantly changed by the time of the Song's composition and, as such, נדגלות was "no longer associable with the literal 'banner'."[540] Bloch and Bloch, too, follow its meaning of "prominent, conspicuous, outstanding" to translate the occurrence of נדגלות in 6:4 and 6:10 as "daunting as the stars".[541] Exum translates the term as "splendor" both in 6:4 and in the female lover's comparison to the cosmic elements in 6:10. She therefore disagrees with reading Jerusalem and Tirzah as inspiring fear through military might, instead arguing that they are indicative of the female lover's beauty and splendour.[542] However, I follow Andruska and Verde in arguing that as the use of אימה before נדגלות suggests a military context, דגל is best translated with the sense of "banners", as I have also shown in relation to דגל being used to describe the male lover ("He brought me to the

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[536] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 66.
[537] Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל," 6; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 71–73.
[538] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 183; LaCocque, *Romance, She Wrote*, 136.
[539] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 150–151.
[540] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 192.
[541] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 95.
[542] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 219.

banqueting house, and his banner over me was love (2:4) and "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, deployed among ten thousand" (5:10)).[543]

The combination of terror drawing on military imagery indicates the female lover's power. Black argues that the female lover's dove-like eyes, and her association with military banners are grotesque themes.[544] Indeed, this is a further example of not just how nature and the military city interlink, but how the female lover is connected to Ishtar both through her portrayal as a love goddess and as a war goddess. As Fontaine notes, the terrifying banners in 6:4, and the combination with celestial awe in 6:10 "indicates awesome power in a female form."[545] The terror she inspires is suggestive of her power: "elsewhere in the Bible we are admonished to fear God. But in this text it is the woman who is awesome, even terrifying, her eyeglance dazzling to the lover, her presence 'terrible as an army with banners.'"[546] Moreover, the extent of her military power further signifies her masculinity. Whilst Chapman explains that "becoming a woman" in ANE meant showing fear in battle, I argue that the female lover in the Song is a reversal of the metaphor in that she, as a woman, inspires the fear in men.[547] As such, the verses "blur the masculine/feminine boundary, placing the feminine in a powerful, controlling position."[548] The recurrent use of military imagery to describe the female lover creates an overall image

[543] Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל," 6; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 73.
[544] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 142.
[545] Fontaine, ""Go Forth,"" 139.
[546] Alicia Ostriker, "A Holy of Holies: The Song of Songs as Countertext," in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 45.
[547] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 48.
[548] Polaski, "Where Men Are Men," 445.

of a militarily powerful woman, whose disruptive power intimidates her opponents, simultaneously upholding yet also defeating hegemonic, masculine and military power.

3.2.2.3.2.4. A Military Portrayal

I wish to briefly return to Meyers's argument, introduced in the literature review, that the military imagery used to describe the female lover is indicative of female power in the domestic realm.[549] As I have shown above, and following Andruska's and Verde's arguments for the military reading of דגל, Meyers's argument that military imagery is exclusively associated with the female lover is unfounded, as translations of דגל in 2:4 and 5:10 also associate this military term with the male lover.[550] Moreover, Meyers's assumption that the military imagery indicates female power in the domestic realm is flawed. Rather, I argue that the opposite would seem to be true. In her association with the public, male, military world, the Song states that the female lover belongs in this male world as much as, if not more so than, any male warrior. In fact, the military imagery used to describe the female lover firmly places her in the public sphere, specifically on the battlefield. There is an underlying assumption of beauty in the association with Pharaoh's mare, towers like ivory and places like Tirzah and Jerusalem. Yet these images illustrate her military power above all, suggesting that women can disrupt the hegemonic military power of men.

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[549] "The idea of female power projected by the military architectural imagery and by some of the animal figures is stunningly appropriate to the internal world of Israelite households, where women exercised strong and authoritative positions." Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 221.

[550] Meyers, "Gender Imagery," 215; Andruska, "The Strange Use of דגל," 6; Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 70–74.

Carey Walsh proposes that the military imagery describes the male lover's uncertainty over his lover rather than accurately describing her.[551] This poses a challenge to the interpretation of the female lover as embodying masculine military power and raises the question: what would it signify if the military imagery draws on the male military world familiar to the male lover, and to a male author? The use of military imagery could be used to solidify the male lover's masculinity through his knowledge of the military world. While this is a possibility, the male lover also draws on the natural world to describe the female lover. We can therefore ask why the military imagery is present in the first place, and I argue that it is used because it aptly describes the female lover's power and the terror she incites in him. The male lover uses symbols associated with femininity in her portrayal as a dove, but only the military world can convey the masculine aspects of her power. Moreover, the repetition of military imagery, viewed in contrast to the comparative lack of military metaphors used to describe the male lover, indicate that the female lover fits and fulfills the criteria of hegemonic masculinity more than the male lover. It is therefore surprising that while Nissinen comments that

> the woman's will is stronger than that of the 'heroes' (*gibbôrîm*) who attempt to take advantage of her, hence the hyper-masculine hubris of the warriors is diminished by exposing the deficiency of their military competence. . . . her independent will is contrasted with martial valor, one of the quintessential and yet vulnerable features of hegemonic masculinity,[552]

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[551] Carey Ellen Walsh, "A Startling Voice: Woman's Desire in the Song of Songs," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (November 1998): 131.

[552] Original emphasis. Nissinen, "Male Agencies," in the Song of Songs', 255–256.

he fails to recognise that the female lover is herself fulfilling the categories of hegemonic masculinity.[553] Not only does the female lover exhibit martial valour, she likewise emerges victorious from the competition of the battlefield after inciting terror in the men, and, to paraphrase Chapman's words, turns them into women, thereby disrupting the hegemonic order of battle.[554]

3.2.2.4. Conclusions

The female lover embodies both masculine and feminine characteristics as demonstrated through the combined use of natural and military imagery. Perhaps what has drawn feminist scholars to studying the female lover is that her distinctive voice, her presence and her desire, rather than exemplifying her femininity, all seem to better fit our expectations of biblical masculinities. We, as readers, are equally drawn to her "feminine" power as well as her "masculine" power. It is therefore surprising that Nissinen does not count her among the "male agencies" he investigates, and it is interesting that scholars have often been reticent to study her masculinity. Feminist scholars have thus far argued that her language, autonomy and sexuality are expressive of her femininity. Yet it is these very characteristics that equally support an argument for her masculinity. Black cautions that "it is difficult to evaluate whether the attributions of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' of a given image are based on contemporary stereotypes or ancient ideas."[555] However, it is equally important to note that the female lover embodies both feminine and masculine characteristics, and neither should be overlooked. One the one hand, the female lover's

[553] Nissinen, "Male Agencies," 255–256.
[554] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 48.
[555] Black, "Looking in," 220.

femininity is expressed through her association with doves, gardens and flowers. On the other hand, she is also portrayed in terms of hegemonic masculinity as a militarily powerful, sexually virile and persuasive person more so than any other men in the Song. The female lover's complex characterisation in the Song offers an opportunity for future studies to expand beyond the "traditional" categories that masculinities studies have been bound by, and to investigate how femininities and masculinities interact within a person. Indeed, the female lover's portrayal brings into question what categorises "femininity" and "masculinity" in the first place, and present studies have been limited in their ability to convey the complexity of the lovers' disruptive genders in the Song. I have thus far demonstrated how the lovers' genders disrupt the hegemonic power in the Song, and another critical aspect of this disruption resides in their ability to gaze at each other.

3.3. The Disruptive Gaze

Eyes, and by extension sight, play a central role in the Song in conveying desire and depicting the lovers' bodies.[556] It is noticeable that the male lover dedicates three songs to describe the female lover (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]), whereas the female lover only dedicates one (5:10-16). Exum argues that this is due to the lovers experiencing desire differently: the man mainly configures the female lover through the gaze, but she primarily formulates him through the voice.[557] And yet the female lover is also included in the gaze

[556] Francesca Stavrakopoulou examines bodily modification and the transaction of the gaze between Jehu and Jezebel in 2 Kings 9:30-37. Stavrakopoulou argues that it is not just Jehu who gazes at Jezebel. Rather, through modifying her eyes in applying kohl and playing on the cultural anxieties of "the evil eye", Jezebel draws attention to her own gaze. Jezebel's gaze provides an excellent framework for how we may identify a female gaze in the HB and begin examining its function. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "Making Bodies: On Body Modification and Religious Materiality in the Hebrew Bible," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2, no. 4 (December 2013): 532–553.

[557] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 14.

as seen through her description in 5:10-16. This has led Exum to claim that the gaze is therefore mutual.[558] Moreover, Exum distinguishes between the erotic and voyeuristic gazes, maintaining that the gaze in the Song, regardless of who gazes, is always erotic.[559] However, I argue that this distinction is not a straightforward one as the erotic gaze can easily be interpreted as voyeuristic.

In this section, I will begin by examining the male gaze in the description songs (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]) as well as elsewhere in his desire to gaze (1:15; 2:9; 2:14). The male gaze is also present in the female lover's self-descriptions (1:5; 8:10), revealing an ambivalent relationship between the female lover and the gaze. Furthermore, I will examine whether there can be a separate female gaze in the Song, not only as illustrated in the description of the male lover (5:10-16) but also in the effect the female lover's eyes have over him (4:9; 6:5).

3.3.1. The Male Gaze

The male gaze is most prevalent and most often discussed in relation to the three description scenes (4:1-5; 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]). However, the male gaze is also present outside of the description scenes (1:15; 2:9; 2:14). I argue that the male gaze can also be noticed in the female lover's self-description in 1:6 and 8:10, as well as in her encounter with the watchmen.

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[558] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 20.
[559] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 22–24.

3.3.1.1. The Importance of Sight

The male lover makes the first connection between the female lover's eyes and doves in 1:15, which is also the first instance where he noticeably gazes at her: הנך יפה רעיתי הנך יפה עיניך יונים "Ah, you, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves." The translations of the particle הנך differ, with commentators such as Longman preferring not to translate it as the translation "behold" is too awkward.[560] Conversely, Exum argues that the male lover's use of the particle is an invitation for the reader to gaze at the female lover too, so the translation "Look at you!" is more appropriate.[561] This invitation to gaze is further reflected in the female lover's response in 2:16, where she directs the gaze from her to the male lover, which I will return to shortly.

In the female lover's speech in 2:9, the reader is made aware that the male lover is gazing through her window: הנה־זה עומד אחר כתלנו משגיח מן־החלנות מציץ מן־החרכים "Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattices."[562] Pope notes that the verb שגח, which he translates as "peeking" is rare but in Isaiah 14:16 it means "to stare, look intently", casting the male lover as a "peeping Tom."[563] Longman, on the other hand, argues that "He is no voyeur, as Pope suggests by calling him a Peeping Tom, but rather beckons his beloved to join him."[564] Exum likewise argues that this is an inaccurate portrayal of the male lover. His use of the Hiphil imperative in 2:14

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[560] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 107. I have thus followed the NRSV in translating הנך as "ah" and I have added the second person feminine singular suffix.
[561] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 112.
[562] Bloch and Bloch note that the particle מן takes on the meaning of "through". "When windows, doors, holes, gaps, etc. are involved, *min* thus acquires a secondary sense of 'through'." Original emphasis. Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 154.
[563] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 391–392.
[564] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 120.

הראיני את־מראיך "let me see your form" suggests that he has not yet seen his lover as he is here imploring her to show herself to him. These verses show the importance of sight for the male lover before he even embarks on describing the female lover, capturing the sense of urgency in the male lover's need to gaze at his lover. The male gaze begins with the desire to see but quickly escalates to describing the female lover's body.

3.3.1.2. Describing the Female Lover

The three description scenes (4:1-5, 6:4-7; 7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]) are recognisable in their use of similar imagery to describe the female lover. Yet it is also important to note that the images intensify with each description, a technique which serves to heighten the grotesque imagery, as Black argues.[565] Moreover, Black observes that "feminist critics have neglected to notice that in the relatively fewer instances where the man speaks, much of this space is devoted to itemizing and objectifying the female body, for his (and a presumed male audience's) consumption."[566] While the gaze is problematised in the description scenes, I note a lack of power in the male lover's gaze as he has three attempts at capturing her beauty but does not quite manage to do her justice. The female lover may be readily available for the gaze in the description scenes, but it is not necessarily reflective of the male lover's power. On the contrary, I perceive his multiple attempts at describing her as a vulnerability when compared to the female lover, who only requires one attempt at describing him to the daughters of Jerusalem (5:10-16) before they are sufficiently convinced by her description to go out and find him (6:10). The description scenes describe the female lover's individual body parts, an act which Exum argues makes "the loved one

[565] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 137.
[566] Black, *Artifice of Love*, 49.

present through language."[567] The male lover needs to break down her body into parts to cope with the effect she has over him.[568] Yet Exum persists in distinguishing between the voyeuristic and erotic gaze, arguing that, as in the first description song (4:1-6), while the description may "verge on objectification", the male lover puts himself in the picture in 4:6, thus changing the tone from voyeuristic to erotic.[569] This continues in the subsequent description songs, such that the reader will find it occasionally difficult to distinguish between the voyeuristic and erotic gazes.

While all of the description songs are created through the male gaze, I will focus on the gaze(s) present in the final description song (7:1-10 [6:13-7:9 E]) as this culmination of intensified imagery, offers the longest and most detailed description of the female lover. As several scholars note, this song is different to the preceding songs in its reversal of addressing the body part from her feet to her head rather than from head to feet.[570] In doing so, the song creates a more encompassing picture of the female lover.[571] The song begins with the call for the female lover to: שובי שובי השולמית שובי שובי ונחזה־בך "Return[572], return, O Shulammite! Return, return, that we may look at you" (7:1 [6:13 E]). The imperative שובי, repeated four times in this verse, illustrates the urgency of the call. Commentators have also noted the difficulty in ascribing this verse to a specific speaker. Longman argues that the plural voice of the verse could only belong to the daughters of

[567] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 160.
[568] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 160.
[569] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 156.
[570] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 215; Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 260; Black, *Artifice of Love*, 20–21; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 188; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 200.
[571] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 232.
[572] שובי has been variously interpreted as "come back, come back!", "again, again", "return, return", and even "leap, leap!" Exum, *Song of Songs*, 211; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 154; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 99; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 592.

Jerusalem.[573] Meanwhile, Exum observes that the poem subtly invites everyone (the daughters of Jerusalem, the audience and the reader) into the gaze with the use of the first person plural נחזה.[574] It is also interesting to note that the use of the verb חזה, rather than the more common ראה may connote looking with pleasure or interest.[575] Verde notes that "the construction חזה + ב implies the experience of contemplating and finding inner gratification in what is seen."[576] Following Exum, I argue that the ambiguity of the speaker(s) and the pace of the verse is an ingenious technique used to break the fourth wall and draw everyone, including the reader, into the gaze. The reader also partook in the gaze in the previous description songs through invertedly being invited to gaze at the female lover as she is described, yet here, in the final description song, the invitation is made explicit through the sudden, unexpected and disruptive drawing in of the reader. The imperative שובי is aimed at the female lover, yet its urgency also prompts our gaze. In asking the female lover to return, the narrator is preparing the audience for the sight that is about to unfold. I therefore interpret this song as intentionally containing multiple gazes, further emphasising the intensity of the description as well as the act of looking itself.

The latter half of the verse serves as the reply to the first half: מה־תחזו בשולמית "Why should you look at the Shulammite?" As with the first half, the speaker is ambiguous. While some propose the male lover is the speaker, most identify the female lover as the speaker, responding to the call to return earlier in the verse.[577] The end of the verse, כמחלת

[573] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 191.
[574] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 226.
[575] Pope argues that "commonly the meaning is to look on with pleasure (cf. Job 36:25; Psalm 27:4) or interest (cf. Isaiah 47:13." Pope, *Song of Songs*, 600.
[576] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 151.
[577] Fox argues that the male lover is the speaker while Longman and Exum propose that the female lover is the speaker. Fox, *Song of Songs*, 155; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 189; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 228.

המחנים (7:1 [6:13 E]), translated by the NRSV "as upon a dance before two armies" likewise poses difficulties in its translation, and several interpretations have been posed, including "dance of two war camps", "camp-dancer", "Dance of the two Camps", while it is also possible to leave המחנים as a proper noun, rendering this "dance of the Mahanayim."[578] The mention of the dance has led some to argue that the female lover is dancing in the song.[579] However, Exum argues that there is no indication that this is the case, and there are no biblical accounts of women dancing to entertain a camp.[580] Yet Verde reads the scene in the context of a military dance extolling the female lover as the military hero.[581] The challenges of translating this response makes it difficult to gauge its tone. As such, Exum concedes that it may be "viewed as expressing the speaker's wish to avoid the gaze because it makes her uncomfortable"; however, as Exum ultimately argues that the gaze is erotic, she does not believe it is problematic.[582]

The degree to which the male gaze has been perceived as objectifying remains debated. Among feminist scholars, Brenner-Idan and Exum argue that the description songs do not depict a real female body.[583] Meredith likewise summarises that "in the Song it is not described bodies that we find (beautiful, grotesque, or otherwise), but the act of

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[578] Fox argues that neither the translation as a proper noun "Mahanayim" nor as "two camps" makes sense. "The youth rebukes the girl's companions for looking upon her disdainfully as if she were a common dancer who roams the camps of the soldiers (or, possibly, the shepherds)." Fox thus translates the end of this verse as "camp-dancer" while Longman translates this as "dance of two war camps" and Pope renders this "Dance of the two Camps." Fox, *Song of Songs*, 154, 158; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 189; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 592.
[579] Brenner-Idan is most notable for interpreting the song in a dancing context. Brenner, "'Come Back,'".
[580] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 225, 230.
[581] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 159.
[582] Exum proposes several interpretations: "I favor taking 6:13cd [7:1cd H] as either (1) a coy way of inviting the gaze: 'why will/should you look?' or (2) taking pleasure in it ('how you [love to] look!'), or even possibly (3) suggesting that looking will have an effect on the viewer ('how will you look?' so Pope)." Exum, *Song of Songs*, 230.
[583] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 259; Exum, "Ten Things," 34.

description posing as a body."[584] Similarly, James argues that the final description of the female lover "overcom[es] some of the limits of description, revealing greater intimacy, as well as a greater sense of totality as he considers her beauty from the ground up."[585] For James, the male lover's gaze is ultimately not exploitative, but a measure of his affection, allowing him "to see the complexity of the whole of the lover's being more clearly, more fully, and with greater totality."[586] However, the lack of a "real" female body could conversely be used to argue that the female lover's body is solely the product of men's imagination and the male gaze, as Clines has argued.[587] The absence of a "real" body behind the bodily descriptions therefore does not save the female lover from the claim that she may be a victim of the male gaze. The easy access to the female lover, even if this access is only a version of the female lover as the male lover presents to us, indicates the power of the male gaze.[588] Moreover, the open invitation for everyone to partake in the gaze, as best exemplified in 7:1 [6:13 E], shows that even we, as readers, have access to the female lover's (real or imagined) body. The difficulty of interpreting the tone of "Why should you look at the Shulammite?" (7:1 [6:13 E]) does not erase the possibility that this may be a rebuttal, the female lover's feeble attempt to resist the gaze. Perhaps the male gaze is both voyeuristic and erotic, and the separation enforced by Exum serves to rescue the female lover from being victimised by the male gaze. Yet I argue that the female lover may be both victimised and empowered by the same male gaze, and the intentional

[584] Meredith, *Journeys*, 145.
[585] James, *Landscapes*, 137.
[586] James, *Landscapes*, 147.
[587] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 12.
[588] As Polaski argues, "thus the male gaze is represented here as having almost complete, if not total, access to the female's body." Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 72–73.

ambiguity holds the power dynamics in the description songs in perpetual tension, creating unease on the one hand and pleasure on the other. The gaze's disruptive power is likewise identifiable in the female lover's descriptions of herself, indicating a desire to evade the gaze whilst also being unable to formulate herself without it.

3.3.1.3. The Effect of the Gaze on the Female Lover

The effect of the male gaze is perhaps most intriguing in the female lover's self-descriptions which can be variably interpreted as desiring to evade (1:6) or find comfort in the male gaze (8:10). Meanwhile, the pervading gaze of the watchmen, and their ability to find her, culminates in her abuse (5:7).

In 1:6 the female lover requests אל־תראוני שאני שחרחרת ששזפתני השמש "Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked on me." The use of the jussive here, as elsewhere, indicates a command or a demand. The gaze is prevalent in this verse in several ways. Firstly, the sun is literally described as gazing at her, meaning that she is scorched by the sun.[589] This is the first non-human entity which gazes at the female lover, and her sunburn suggests that she was unable to evade the sun's gaze. Secondly, while commentators agree that the female lover is here addressing the daughters of Jerusalem, I argue that it is possible to interpret the verse as addressing a larger audience by breaking the fourth wall to include the reader alongside the daughters of Jerusalem.[590] Paradoxically, her request invites rather than averts the gaze. Polaski notes that her ineffective request exemplifies the internalised male gaze.[591]

[589] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 102; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 99.
[590] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 104.
[591] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 71–73.

For Polaski, the internalised male gaze is intensified in the presence of the watchmen. Yet the watchmen also represent the externalised gaze in the ambiguity of whether they are real or imagined characters. The irony of the watchmen finding the female lover while she is searching for the male lover has already been discussed, but this has further implications when we consider the power of the gaze. The female body is extensively described through the three description songs, and the male lover yearns for the chance to gaze at the female lover. Yet while the description songs are erotically suggestive, the watchmen's gaze goes beyond problematising the act of gazing at the female lover by crossing corporeal boundaries and abusing the female lover. The negative impact of the gaze is best exemplified by the watchmen's actions; they do not merely look at her, they act upon her, thus physically disrupting the female lover's autonomy. This provides a further reason for my disagreement with Exum's separation of the voyeuristic and erotic gaze on the basis that the erotic gaze participates in that which is seen, as I argue that the watchmen's abuse is a form of participation in the gaze that has fuelled their abuse, yet their gaze and their actions are not erotic.

Elsewhere, the female lover seemingly describes herself positively in the male gaze in her declaration that: אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות אז הייתי בעיניו כמוצאת שלום "I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers, then I was in his eyes as one who brings peace" (8:10). While there is a certain ambiguity over whose eyes the female lover is referring to, this is most likely referring to the male lover.[592] כמוצאת שלום is likewise unclear as it could be a Qal

[592] Exum and Bloch and Bloch argue the male lover is meant here. Fox disagrees, believing the brothers are being referred to, and thus translates this to "So now I've become in your eyes one who finds good will." Exum, *Song of Songs*, 259; Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 218; Fox, *Song of Songs*, 173.

participle of מצא "to find" or Hiphil of יצא "to go out."[593] Regardless of the translation, the relevance of this verse is on the focus of the eyes. I began this section by highlighting the importance of eyes and sight in the male lover's formulation of the female lover. This verse illustrates the significance of the eyes, but it is here reversed so that it is the female lover who formulates herself through the male lover's eyes. As Polaski notes, the ambiguity of 8:10 suggests that there is an overarching male gaze in the Song, and, crucially, the female lover finds security in it.[594]

How the female lover reacts to the gaze may give an indication as to whether the male gaze is welcomed or problematic. Clines argues that "the woman is everywhere constructed as the object of the male gaze."[595] Moreover, "she is to have no vision of herself; he will impose that upon her. . . . She is to see herself as he sees her; otherwise she has no identity."[596] Meredith likewise notes that the male lover masculinises our gaze through describing the female lover from his perspective.[597] Yet I maintain that the possibility of the male lover's description being mediated through the female lover, who is in turn likely created by a male author, thereby creating several layers of complexity disrupts the hegemonic power of the male gaze. The female lover is seemingly averse to the male gaze (1:6 and possibly also in 7:1 [6:13 E]), yet she does not have the power to evade it as even her hiddenness (2:14) is short-lived, nor does she always seem to object to the male gaze (8:10). It is possible that the female lover is amenable to the male lover's gaze and averse to other gazes, namely that of the daughters of Jerusalem, the audience

[593] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 244.
[594] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 74, 80.
[595] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 26.
[596] Clines, *Interested Parties*, 28.
[597] Meredith, *Journeys*, 124.

and the reader. Yet the difficulty in translating the meaning and context of the verses in which the male gaze reveals itself allows the female lover's reaction to remain ambivalent. However, I suggest that the female lover's gazing back at the male lover is a possible response to being fashioned in the male gaze, further disrupting the hegemonic power of the male gaze that pervades the Song.

3.3.2. The Female Gaze

The fact that the female lover also gazes at her lover has been repeatedly noted, as has the power of her eyes (4:9 and 6:5). Yet to my knowledge commentators have not yet used the term "the female gaze" in their attempts to distinguish between the different types of gazing in the Song.[598] I have already noted how the female lover searches for her lover in 3:1 and 5:6 when I discussed the female lover's autonomy, but these verses are also relevant when examining the gaze. The female lover's inability to find her lover suggests that the male lover is able to successfully evade the gaze, a fact also observed by Polaski.[599] While the female lover dedicates a description song to the male lover (5:10-16), it is noticeable in its difference to the male lover's descriptions of her. Whereas the male lover appears to be looking directly at the female lover in his descriptions, she is conjuring him up from memory in her description.[600] As Exum notes, it may be reflective of differing social norms which may not have permitted the female lover to be as forward as the male

[598] Quick's recent examination of Oholibah's gaze in Ezekiel 23 provides an important framework for how we can approach the concept of the female gaze and how we can begin categorising it within biblical studies. See Quick, "Art, Aesthetics and the Dynamics of Visuality in Ezekiel 23".
[599] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 75.
[600] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 21.

lover.[601] Yet this may equally be indicative of the female lover's exclusion from partaking in the act of gazing, and may reflect a difference between the male and female gazes.

As I have noted in relation to the male lover's gaze in 1:15, the female lover responds in kind by gazing back at her lover, following the same pattern of speech: הנך יפה דודי אף נעים "Ah, you, you are beautiful, my beloved, also lovely" (1:16). Exum likewise translates the הנך here as "Look at you!"[602] Furthermore, this repetition and reversal of the gaze leads Exum to argue that "the adoration of the lovers is mutual, and so is the look. The woman repeats her lover's exclamation and shifts the reader's gaze from her to him: "Look at you! You are beautiful!"[603]

The female gaze, if indeed there is one, is most prevalent in the description of the male lover (5:10-16). A number of feminist scholars have paid specific attention to the implication of the female lover's gaze in this description to argue that her gaze is equal to the male lover's. As noted above in relation to the male lover's power, the description that the female lover offers portrays the male lover in a statuesque manner.[604] Exum, too, notes several differences:

> He concentrates on the outward appearance (lovely, beautiful); she, on what he is to her. . . . He deals with her body in parts to cope with her devastating presence. She treats his by parts to cope with his absence and to conjure him up through the evocative power of language.[605]

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[601] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 20–21.
[602] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 113. As with my translation of 1:15, I have kept the NRSV translation of הנך as 'ah' and I have added the second person feminine singular suffix.
[603] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 113.
[604] Brenner, "'Come Back,'" 259.
[605] Exum, "Poetic Genius," 92.

Moreover, the female lover's gaze has led Exum to argue that "the woman takes on a role more often associated with men, that of owner of the gaze" thereby making the gaze mutual and erotic rather than voyeuristic.[606] Andruska, following Exum, likewise argues that both are subject to the erotic gaze.[607] However, I argue that the power she takes on as the owner of the gaze (5:10-16) need not exempt her from the potential victimisation of the male gaze when it is aimed at her. Rather, this suggests that the power dynamics fluctuate throughout the Song and are dependent on who owns the gaze in any particular moment. That the gaze moves from one lover to another is testament to the fleeting nature of glances, eyes, and doves, and to their disruptive power in their being easily transferrable. Where once the male lover's gaze had power of the female lover, her gaze disrupts his hegemonic power by unsettling him, thereby disturbing the power dynamics.

3.3.2.1. The Effect of the Gaze on the Male Lover

The male lover describes the power of the female lover's gaze (4:9 and 6:5) in terms of its having an unsettling, overwhelming effect. In these verses, the female lover's gaze is more powerful than the gaze employed in her description of him (5:10-16), which may only be conjuring up her lover from memory rather than looking at him directly. It is the female lover's gaze in 4:9 and 6:5 which allows for the possibility of a female gaze, and its formulation in terms of masculine grammar offers an insight into the extent of its power.

The female lover's gaze first unsettles the male lover in 4:9: לבבתני אחתי כלה לבבתיני [באחד כ] (באחת ק) מעיניך באחד ענק מצורניך "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your

[606] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 190.
[607] Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 71.

necklace." I have followed the NRSV translation of the verb לבבתני "you have ravished my heart", but it could also have the meaning "you have taken my heart"[608] or "you have captured my heart."[609] The Piel form of the verb suggests an intense action, and as Longman notes, "a more colloquial translation of the verb would be 'you drive me crazy!'"[610] The phrase here translated as "with a glance of your eyes" is literally rendered "with one of your eyes" in Hebrew.[611] Fox suggests that the eye may refer to a bead on the necklace and Lambert notes that within Sumero-Akkadian literature, the eye can refer to the eye-stones of a necklace.[612] This connection is appropriate in the present context as similarities are drawn between the effect of the human eye and the effect of a bead on a necklace. . The effect of the glance should not be underestimated, as Longman explains "it does not take much to set the man off in a frenzy of excitement over the woman: a mere *glance* of the eyes or one *jewel* from her necklace."[613] That this occurs immediately after the male lover gazes at her to describe her features is an interesting reversal and a disruption of the male gaze. Moreover, as Exum notes, the male lover appears to have an intense reaction to the female lover's gaze as though blaming her for the awesome effect she has over him. [614] The male lover's magnified reaction perhaps stems from the fact that

[608] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 136.
[609] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 172.
[610] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 151.
[611] Exum notes that "the Hebrew here in v. 9 says simply 'with one of your eyes.' Many translations and commentators insert 'glance,' as I have done, on the assumption that it is not the sight of one of the woman's eyes that so affects the man but what the eye does. The mention of one eye suggests a quick look, a glance." Exum, *Song of Songs*, 171; Longman, *Song of Songs*, 149.
[612] Fox, *Song of Songs*, 136; W.G. Lambert, "An Eye Stone of Esarhaddon's Queen and Other Similar Gems," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 63, no. 1 (1963): 65-71.
[613] Original emphases. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 151. Indeed, Pope notes that the effect of a glance is common in love poetry. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 480.
[614] Exum notes that: "As a man, he is used to feeling in control. Now it seems to him as though he has surrendered control, and his autonomy is thereby challenged. The feelings he is experiencing are wonderful and welcome but also unfamiliar and thus disconcerting. And so he is in awe of her." Exum, *Song of Songs*, 172.

the female lover's returned gaze is unexpected and the power she has over him in that single glance the more so! I propose that the power of the returned gaze, which he so freely bestows on the female lover, makes him feel emasculated and vulnerable.

The female lover's powerful gaze and its connection to masculinity, only intensifies in its second occurrence הסבי עיניך מנגדי שהם הרהיבני "Turn your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me" (6:5). Here, the male lover does not simply note that the female lover's gaze affects him, rather he uses the Hiphil imperative הסבי to request that she look away from him. The verb רהב can be variously translated into English, but it would have the sense of "overwhelm, excite, overpower, unsettle."[615] Verde explains that רהב is usually associated with exerting force elsewhere in the HB, suggesting that it holds a similar meaning in 6:5 to indicate the force the female lover's gaze exerts.[616] Moreover, Bloch and Bloch observe the intensification of the female lover's eyes from doves, to ravishing his heart and now to inspiring fear.[617] Exum further notes that the verb could connote arousal or agitation and likewise suggests that her gaze inspires awe.[618] Yet contrary to his demand for her to turn her eyes away, "of course, he does not really want her to look away; just the opposite!"[619] This contradictory sentiment perhaps echoes her earlier desire to avoid the gaze in 1:6, which simultaneously invites the audience to gaze at her. The male lover is clearly affected and weakened by the female lover's gaze.[620]

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[615] Longman, *Song of Songs*, 180.
[616] Verde, *Conquered Conquerors*, 75.
[617] Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 189.
[618] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 215, 219.
[619] Exum, *Song of Songs*, 220.
[620] Sarah Zhang, "How Is a Love Poem (Song 4:1–7) Like the Beloved?: The Importance of Emotion in Reading Biblical Poetry," in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading*, ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 138–139.

The female lover's gaze in 6:5 poses further issues due to its grammatical assignation of the eyes to the masculine gender through the use of the pronoun הם "they" (masculine plural) as opposed to הן "they" (feminine plural). Pope, too, notes that the eyes should be grammatically feminine.[621] Polaski is one of few scholars to comment on the significance of the masculine eyes, arguing that

> at the very points where the female's gaze may be understood as interrogating the male figure, that gaze is grammatically assigned to the masculine gender. In the Song, a gaze strong enough to disturb a male is itself styled as a masculine gaze.[622]

Elsewhere, Polaski states that the distinction between the lovers is that the male lover is less available to the gaze while the female lover is unable to escape it.[623] However, I argue that this could be interpreted as a gender reversal, whereby the female lover disrupts and embodies hegemonic masculinity. As I suggested above, perhaps the male lover finds himself emasculated by her gaze, precisely because gazing is equated with masculinity. As Quick has demonstrated in her study of Oholibah's gaze, the female gaze has a masculinising effect on the agent as well as an emasculating effect on the subject by making them passive objects.[624] In the Song, both lovers' eyes are akin to doves, and both lovers gaze, yet perhaps the eyes' power to overwhelm, inspire awe, and to return one's gaze is primarily a masculine act. The female lover's ability to gaze, whether erotically or voyeuristically, and to overpower the male lover suggests that the female lover's gaze is itself masculine, particularly when we consider its grammatical assignation to masculine

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[621] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 564.
[622] Polaski, "What Will Ye See," 76.
[623] Polaski, "Where Men Are Men," 38–39.
[624] Quick, "Art, Aesthetics and the Dynamics of Visuality in Ezekiel 23," 12-13.

pronouns. Far from being excluded from the male gaze because she is female, the female lover may be allowed to partake in the male gaze because the power of her gaze is suggestive of her masculinity. One wonders whether a male author would allow the female lover to gaze back at the male lover if he did not think she was herself masculine. Yet I propose a further possibility. Perhaps the female lover's gaze unsettles and overwhelms precisely because the female gaze is rarely perceived. As such, the power of her gaze lies in its very femininity and contrasts to the default male gaze. As elsewhere, the female lover's power draws not only on her femininity or masculinity, but on the disruption caused by the combined strengths of both aspects of her gender. She is therefore simultaneously excluded from the male gaze as an object to be perceived and included in it in her ability to confront the male gaze with her own.

3.3.3. Conclusions

The prevalence of the patriarchal male gaze which risks objectifying the subject raises challenges for how the lovers' gazes should be perceived in the Song. On the one hand, I concur with Black that the formulation of the female body through the male gaze makes it difficult to sustain a feminist reading of the description scenes.[625] On the other hand, the female lover's ability to unsettle the male lover with her own gaze suggests the possibility that there is a female gaze, or at least a male gaze embodied by the female lover, even if it is rarely glimpsed. Yet the overwhelming effect on the male lover is brief, and it does not prevent him from repeatedly subjecting her to his gaze later in the Song. The gaze is therefore trapped in an endless disrupting cycle; moving from one lover to another,

[625] Black, "Beauty or the Beast?," 318–319.

capturing the daughters of Jerusalem, the audience and the reader, before it is quickly averted, only to be refocused shortly after.

Throughout this section I have argued that Exum's separation of the voyeuristic and erotic gaze serves to protect the female lover from objectification. Yet this is an oversimplification of its effect. The gaze has the power to describe, unsettle, objectify and eroticise in the same glance. The gaze shifts, and with it so does its power. Both lovers are placed in a position of power when they gaze, just as they are both at risk of being objectified when they are being gazed at. I am therefore in agreement with Black that the gaze is multivalent.[626] One's erotic gaze is another's voyeuristic gaze, as aptly summarised by Exum's and Polaski's differing interpretations. I believe that this ambiguity is purposeful, and the gaze is an excellent representation of the blurring and disruption of boundaries present throughout the Song.

[626] Black, "Looking in," 223.

4. Conclusion

In this study, I have demonstrated that the Song's author has imbued the Song's lovers with the ability to disrupt hegemonic power in three primary ways: through their subversion of Solomon's hegemonic power, by destabilising gender norms and by illustrating the disruptive power of their gazes.

In the first part of my analysis, I examined how the lovers are portrayed as appropriating a royal fiction through the invocation of Solomonic grandeur and designating each other as "king" (1:4, 12; 7:6 [7:5 E]) and "noble woman" (7:2 [7:1 E]). Yet despite the lovers' reliance on the association between royalty and Solomon, Solomon's appearances in the Song are parodic (3:7-11; 8:11-12). The mocking undertones of Solomon's wedding/coronation ceremony in 3:7-11 and the comparison of the vineyards in 8:11-12 ultimately undermines his hegemonic power as a ruler and as a hegemonic male. The lovers challenge Solomon's hegemonic power by creating a royal court for themselves in the natural landscape, stripping away symbols of Solomon's royal power and separating themselves from him by the end of the Song. This appropriation of royal power, shortly followed by separation from Solomon as a ruler, has a disruptive effect on Solomon's hegemonic power by proposing the male lover as a more desirable "king" by contrast and by allowing the female lover to assert her independence from Solomon in her refusal to give him access to her vineyard (8:12).

In the second part of my analysis, I employed biblical masculinities studies to identify the characteristics which make the male lover the most desirable man in the Song and I have argued that the male lover upholds certain criteria of hegemonic masculinity

through his portrayal as a peerless warrior (2:3; 5:10) who enjoys autonomy and freedom of movement (2:9; 2:17; 8:14) and whose beauty is often expressed in images of strength and hardness (5:10-15). I have also shown that the male lover disrupts hegemonic masculinity in his deviation from masculinity tropes such as "the womanless male", through the lack of progeny in the Song and in the mixed results of his attempts at persuasive language (2:14; 5:2), factors which may be indicative of his vulnerability. Moreover, the male lover's association with natural imagery also used to describe the female lover, such as doves (5:12), spices and scents (1:13-14; 5:13; 5:15) and flowers (5:13) blurs his gender, potentially alluding to his femininity.

I have evidenced that the female lover's gender is likewise complex in the third part of my analysis by drawing on the fields of feminist biblical studies and biblical masculinities studies. While there is an element of vulnerability for the male lover in his deviation from hegemonic masculinity, the female lover is the most vulnerable character in the Song, facing challenges to her autonomy that the male lover does not experience, and her association with nature particularly in her recurring portrayal as a dove is suggestive of her femininity (1:15; 2:14; 4:1; 5:2; 6:9). Yet, I perceive the female lover's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity through her association with military power to be the most prominent disruptive aspect of power in the Song (1:9; 4:4; 7:5 [7:4 E]; 8:10; 6:4; 6:10). The female lover's presentation as a warrior disrupts the hegemonic power of several male characters in the Song, including that of the male lover. As I have suggested, the female lover fulfils several criteria of hegemonic masculinity better than the male lover as she is more consistently and discernibly portrayed as a warrior, has greater persuasive power in her speech, and she voices her desires openly, thus reflecting the category of sexual virility.

In the final part of my analysis, I proposed that the lovers' power to gaze is a further indication of their disruptive power. The act of gazing affords the lovers the power to objectify and eroticise each other, and the balance between these two effects is held in constant tension. While the effects of the male gaze on the female lover have been examined at length by other scholars, the presence of a separate female gaze is yet to be explored in depth. As such, I have argued that the power of the female lover's gaze lies in its masculine formulation and in its ability to counteract the male gaze and unsettle the male lover, thereby disrupting the power dynamics of the pervasive male gaze (4:9; 6:5).

The lovers' complex characterisations thus pose interesting challenges for interpreters. The lovers' constant disruption of gender binaries calls into question the use of categories to identify "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics in biblical characters. While I have employed feminist biblical scholarship and biblical masculinities studies in my examination of gender, the lovers' multivalent genders demonstrate that these gender categories often limit our interpretation of the text. Such blurring of categories is particularly effective in the Song as boundaries are continually distorted and disrupted. Likewise, the lovers' blurring of social status through their appropriation of royal symbols at the expense of undermining Solomon's hegemonic power tests the distinction between royalty and non-royalty. A close reading of the portrayal of the lovers in the Song has shown that both are depicted as powerful and vulnerable, masculine and feminine, and as conforming to and disrupting hegemonic royal power. As such, the

question that arises is: at what stage do we change and adapt the gender categories to better fit the characters we ascribe them to, or simply discard them altogether?[627]

In its portrayal of key characters, the Song itself proves to be disruptive. To briefly return to the question of female authorship of the Song, I maintain that it is not possible to identify the author's gender. The author's ability to create both lovers' characters convincingly leaves no obvious trail by which to determine the author's gender, and it is a testament to their skill as a writer that the possibility of female authorship continues to be debated. Rather than allowing the reader to identify the author's gender, this ambiguity demonstrates the author's innovative style and literary skill, showing an uncanny ability to draw on imagery from several conceptual domains including the natural, military and royal worlds and revealing a deep awareness of the city, the landscape, and local history. The author shows themselves to be disruptive in their use of techniques and imagery and they further project that disruptiveness onto the Song in enabling the lovers to travel through these landscapes and to experience aspects of the natural, military and royal worlds simultaneously.

The author's disruptive creation of characters and a world that leaves no trace of the author's identity accounts for the Song's equally disruptive history of interpretation, whereby approaches to the Song have often been polarised. My examination has shown that the disruptive nature of the Song and its blurring of gender, landscape and social status allows for a more nuanced appreciation of the Song's imagery. In this thesis, I have

[627] I am grateful to Brian DiPalma for the discussion on adapting and discarding the biblical masculinities studies categories following his paper on masculinities studies, presented at the Created Male and Female: The Hebrew Bible, Gender, and Sexuality Conference, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford (conference held online), 26th April 2021.

demonstrated the difficulty of maintaining a binary perspective on the Song, whose very appeal appears to be disrupting and going beyond the binaries that we often bring to our reading of the text. I have suggested, moreover, that the Song keeps these binaries in constant tension. The invocation of Solomon's royal grandeur coupled with the author's mocking characterisation of Solomon holds his hegemonic power in flux. Likewise, the lovers both uphold and disrupt hegemonic power, often through images that can be interpreted in contrasting ways. The female lover's ability to gaze back at the male lover suggests the possibility to disrupt the male gaze. These multivalent possibilities preserve the Song's inherent power to disrupt and inspire our readings and interpretations.

In concluding this study, I propose several areas for future studies on the Song to further elaborate on its disruptive qualities. My application of gender categories, particularly the categories of masculinity that prevail in biblical masculinities studies, has shown that these gender categories are as limiting as they are insightful. I would therefore welcome new approaches that expand upon and go beyond current gender categories to offer a more nuanced examination of how genders overlap and interact within an individual. Similarly, the boundaries between social hierarchies, and the depiction of Solomon's grandeur can be further examined to reveal how characters draw on the concepts of royalty to fashion their identities.

The Song must continue to be interpreted in new and innovative ways from a variety of perspectives. The Song's poetic style and rich imagery invites further investigation, and this text poses a unique parallel to exploring similar themes in biblical narratives, prophetic texts and other poetic texts. The Song thus calls for continuous

reinterpretations of its dynamic poetry, settings and characters to elucidate its disruptive power.

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