

THE SONG OF SONGS AND ITS CONCLUDING SECTION

by JACQUES-RAYMOND TOURNAY\*

Having systematically examined the innumerable attempts to find an underlying structure in the Song of Songs, one of its most recent commentators, M.H. Pope, declared that until now no one had been able to find any logical sequence or development in it<sup>1</sup>. Although I do not claim to share this opinion, here I wish to examine a section of the Song (8:1-7) which is often regarded as its general conclusion. First, however, I wish to call attention to certain salient characteristics of this book of the Bible.

In addition to the vocabulary, syntax and style, an attempt to interpret the Song of Songs must take account of a noticeable feature: the many repetitions scattered throughout it. These have already been listed. In the 12th century, the Abbot Rupert<sup>2</sup> wrote that the Song of Songs is so called because it contains four songs in view of the three repetitions (2:7, 3:5 and 8:4) of the refrain "I charge you...", but he failed to mention 5:8 where the first words of this refrain of "awakening" recur. With regard to the other repetitions, the refrain expressing possession and mutual belonging: "my beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16)<sup>3</sup> recurs in an inverted form in 6:3 and its beginning appears in 7:11. The recurrent theme of the embrace, "his left arm is under my head" (2:6) recurs in 8:3. The refrain of "movement"

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1. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible, 7C), New York, 1977, p. 54.
2. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 168, col. 839-840.
3. On this refrain cf. A. Feuillet, "La formule d'appartenance mutuelle (Song 2:16) et les interprétations divergentes du Cantique des Cantiques", *Revue Biblique* 68 (1961), pp. 5-38.

("before the day-wind rises...", 2:17) recurs in 4:6 and in a slightly different form in 8:14. The theme of the search for the beloved and the meeting with the watchmen (3:1-3) is taken up again in 5:6-7, and that of beauty and the dove (1:15) recurs in 4:1 as well as partially in 4:7 and 7:7. That of the "lovesickness" (2:5) is taken up again in 5:8. The two portraits of the girl contain repetitions (4:2 and 6:6, 4:4 and 7:5, 4:5 and 7:4). The motif of the "house" occurs with variations in 1:4, 2:4, 3:4 and 8:2 (with the same verb *bw*, "to enter" in the causative, in each of the above instances). The motif of the "garden" occurs in 4:12, 16:6, 2:11 and 7:13.

Many words and expressions are repeated.<sup>4</sup> "Him whom my heart loves" (3:2-4) recurs four times (cf. 1:7), "daughters of Jerusalem" seven times, "most beautiful amongst women" three times, "my beloved" thirty-three times, "my friend" nine times, "my promised bride" six times, "my sister" five times. The lily is mentioned eight times, myrrh seven times, the dove six times. The poet uses the word "love" eleven times, and he is fond of referring to wine, scents, aromas, vines, apples, pomegranates, flowers, fawns and gazelles. Lebanon is mentioned seven times.

In the concluding passage of the Song, the question in 8:5: "Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her Beloved?" partially repeats that in 3:6: "What is this coming up from the desert?" in 8:5, though not in 3:6, the question refers to the girl: it is the girl who is leaning on her beloved. The question also recalls that of 6:10 "Who is this arising like the dawn?" which again refers to the girl. The previous lines, 8:3-4, repeat 2:6-7, but without the words "by the gazelles, by the hinds of the field" which recur in 3:5. Moreover, in 8:4 a rhetorical *mah* in a negative sense replaces the *'im* expressing a wish in 2:7. In the Syriac and Latin (Vulgate) versions this entreaty of 8:4 ("I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem...") is ascribed to the young man, and the abstract noun "love" is rendered by "the beloved" in the feminine as previously in 2:7, 3:5 and 7:7. Several commentators agree<sup>5</sup>. Others<sup>6</sup>, however, ascribe the entreaty to the girl, and this interpretation seems to me the better one. It is in fact the girl who in 5:8 declares: "I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you should find my Beloved, what must you tell him?" The continuation "that I am sick with love" repeats 2:5, using the abstract noun "love" exactly as in 8:4. In every case, therefore, it is the girl who is addressing the

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4. J. Angénioux has attempted to reconstruct the Song in a logical order on the basis of these repetitions, but by upsetting the order of the accepted text. Cf. "Structure du Cantique des Cantiques en chants encadrés par des refrains alternants," *Ephem. Theol. Louvain* 41 (1965), pp. 96-140; "Le Cantique des Cantiques en huit chants à refrains alternants," *ibid.*, 44 (1968), pp. 87-140. On the repetitions in the Song, cf. M.H. Pope, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-50 and J.B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (SBL 38), Missoula, Mont., Scholars Press, 1978, p. 29.

5. D. Lys is of this opinion (cf. "Le plus beau chant de la Création," *Lectio Divina* 51, Paris, 1968, p. 108), but he admits that grammatically this entreaty could be assigned either to the boy or the girl. A. Robert (cf. "Le Cantique des Cantiques," *Etudes Bibliques*, 1963, pp. 108 ff.) identifies the bridegroom with God who exhorts Israel to make a full return to Him. He compares Is. 51:17 and 52:1.

6. Grätz, Zapletal, Gerleman etc.

daughters of Jerusalem, her companions, who see and praise her (6:9). It is not she but her beloved who is sleeping. Previously, in 1:13, she spoke of him as follows: "My beloved is a sachet of myrrh who *spends the night* between my breasts."

Now, the conclusion we have arrived at has a bearing on the whole interpretation of the Song. In the light of it, we cannot say like A. Robert<sup>7</sup> that "the only person whom the Song presents as sleeping is the bride." In assigning the thrice-recurring refrain of 2:6-7, 3:5 and 8:4 to the girl, the poet clearly suggests that her beloved is asleep. The two first occurrences of this refrain each conclude a section of the Song, as all authorities agree. The same must apply to 8:4 which must form the conclusion of the girl's speech.

This speech probably begins at 7:10b: "It flows straight to my Beloved." The girl takes up the comparison the young man has just made: "Your speaking is like a superlative wine", adding that this wine "flows straight to my Beloved as it runs on the lips of those who sleep" — referring, no doubt, to the young pair. The girl's speech then continues up to 8:4. In 8:5 the choir intervenes with the rhetorical question already referred to: "Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her Beloved?" The continuation of verse 5 is the answer directly expressed in the first person, with masculine verbal suffixes which must refer to the young man: "I awakened you under the apple-tree, there where your mother conceived you, there where she who gave birth to you conceived you." In place of the masculine suffixes of the Hebrew text, the *Peshitta* (Syriac *targum*) reads feminine suffixes here. Accordingly, several commentators ascribe the answer in verse 5 to the young man who would then be addressing the girl. In that case, however, one would have to change the masculine suffixes of the masoretic text, as certain commentators have done<sup>8</sup>. According to the traditional text, on the other hand, it is the girl who is speaking in verses 6 and 7. The same, then, must apply to the answer in verse 5, just as it applies to the previous passage from verses 1-4. It is the girl who awakens her beloved whom she believes to be sleeping, as in the three refrains 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4.

We believe that this image of the sleeping youth is an allusion to "Solomon", but which Solomon is intended? Here we must refer to the beginning of the account of Solomon in the First Book of Kings. At the start of Chapter 3 we read that "Solomon allied himself in marriage with Pharaoh King of Egypt; he married Pharaoh's daughter and brought her<sup>9</sup> to the Citadel of David until he could complete the building of his house (palace) and the temple of YHWH and the wall

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7. *Op. cit.*, p. 296. In my book *Le Cantique des Cantiques. Commentaire abrégé* (Lire la Bible 9), Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1967, I agreed with A. Robert whose great commentary (which had been edited by me) I summarised. Here, however, I have changed my interpretation.

8. E.g., A. Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

9. "Brought her": the same verb, "to enter" in the causative, as in the prologue to the Song (1:4). See previously, the motif of the "house". Note the building of the "house" here in I Kings 3:1.

surrounding Jerusalem”<sup>10</sup> The reference is probably to the daughter of the pharaoh Psusennes II (ruled 995-950), last ruler of the 22nd dynasty. In verses 4 ff. it is related how YHWH appeared to Solomon at Gibeon in dream *during the night*<sup>10a</sup>. Solomon’s sleep here may be related to the sleep described in Psalm 127:2 “he gives to *his beloved* in sleep.”<sup>11</sup> The allusion to Solomon’s appellation Jedidiah, “the *beloved* of Yah” (II Sam. 12:25) has often been noticed, and it no doubt explains why psalm 127 has been traditionally ascribed to Solomon (see verse 1). Here we may see tradition at work in Israel. The same principle applies to the attribution of the Song of Songs to Solomon the poet, who is alluded to in I Kings 5:12 and Ben Sira 47:17. In the Song itself, moreover, Solomon is mentioned by name seven times (including the reference to “Salmah” in 1:5, parallel with Kedar, which has been read as “Solomon”).

In the Book of Chronicles, the account of Solomon’s reign occupies an important position. Idealised as the Messianic king who will bring true peace to his people Israel, the figure of Solomon becomes synonymous with prosperity, justice and salvation (cf. Mic. 5:4, Zech. 9:9, Ps. 72 etc.). The atmosphere of his reign, as related here, is one which lends itself particularly to poetic and midrashic elaboration, depicting the ruler as an oriental potentate in a bucolic setting. Thus, the Song of Songs appears to recall certain episodes in the life of this monarch of legendary splendour: those, for instance, in which he is seen in the company of his wives and concubines or of his mother Bathsheba.<sup>12</sup>

In this connection it was also necessary to extol Solomon as the Pharaoh’s son-in-law (“extol” is the word used in 1:4), and for this purpose it was quite natural to turn for inspiration to the ancient Egyptian love-poetry. The importance and the numerousness of the associations between the Song of Songs and the Egyptian love-poems (especially those of the New Empire, at the end of the second millenium<sup>13</sup>),

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10. Cf. also I Kings 9:16, 24 and its counterpart II Chron. 8:11 which adds a reflection revealing the concern for ritual purity prevalent in Levitical circles in the Second Temple period: “It is not for me to let a woman live in the palace of David king of Israel; these are holy places where the ark of YHWH has been.”

10a. I Kings 3:4 ff. is very close to Egyptian texts, especially the “stele of the sphinx” of Thutmose IV (cf. M. Görg, “Gott-König-Reden in Israel und Ägypten,” *BWANT* 105. Kohlhammer 1975).

11. The word “sleep” (written in Hebrew with an Aramaic termination) may have been written at the time when Ps. 127 was attributed to Solomon, builder of the Temple (the “house” in verse 1), the “beloved” of Yah (II Sam. 12:25). Other translations have been suggested by V. Hamp (“Wort, Lied und Gottespruch,” *2 Festschrift Ziegler*, 1972, p. 76) and M. Dahood (“The Aleph in Psalm 127,2 šena,” *Orientalia* 44 (1975), pp. 103 ff).

12. Song 6:8-9 has been associated with I Kings 11:3 (Solomon had 700 wives of royal blood and 300 concubines; his son Rehoboam had 18 wives and 60 concubines; II Chron. 11:21). The Shulammit (7:1) has often been associated with the beautiful Abishag, the Shunammite (I Kings 1:3, 2:17). The Book of Ecclesiastes speaks of gardens, orchards and cisterns in connection with Solomon (2:4-6).

13. See J. B. White’s excellent study (cf. note 4). In G. Gerleman and M. Pope’s commentaries, paintings and sculptures of the el-Amarna and later periods have been associated with

has often, with good reason, been pointed out. Is it only chance that the first words addressed by the “beloved” to his bride (1:9) are an allusion to Pharaoh? Again, is it only chance that the girl describes herself as *shoshanna*, a Hebrew word derived from the Egyptian *ššn* meaning lotus, the flower so often depicted in ancient Egyptian paintings and after which Egyptian women could have been named?<sup>14</sup>

These considerations apply particularly to the conclusion of the Song (8:1-7), which we will now examine. In addition to the associations with Egyptian love-songs and with other non-biblical texts<sup>15</sup>, we should also call attention to the purely biblical associations of the Song. This double scheme of parallels and connections should rule out any exclusive, unequivocal interpretation and obliges us to recognise that the *double entendre* permits a historic-Messianic sense to be super-added to the literal sense of the simple love-song. The ambiguity of certain passages of the Song was pointed out long ago<sup>16</sup>, and it is hard to imagine that the poem’s last editor who left it in its present state (to speak only of the final stage of its composition) was not conscious of this *double entendre*. In the concluding section, attention is drawn to the mother of the young man (8:5)<sup>17</sup>, something which is quite understandable if the poet is thinking of Bathsheba to whom Solomon was so much indebted. This, indeed, is what is suggested in 3:11: “King Solomon wearing the diadem with which his mother crowned him on his wedding day.” Do not Bathsheba’s conception of Solomon (II Sam. 12:24-25) and her intervention on his behalf (I Kings 1:13, 17) form the background to these passages?

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various verses of the Song. In these paintings there are lotuses, pomegranates, aromatic trees, palanquins (cf. Song 3:7), perurques and pectorals (cf. 1:10-11, 7:6), scented conical head-dresses (cf. 5:13), coloured statues (cf. 5:10 ff.). Women’s lips are painted (cf. 4:3). Ivory, alabaster, myrrh etc. are frequently mentioned in Egyptian texts.

14. Cf. S. Schott, *Les chants d’amour de l’Égypte ancienne*, Paris, 1956, pp. 116, 178 (note 42). The beautiful woman in the Song, Solomon’s bride, had the Egyptians’ dark complexion, as Dom. Calmet has pointed out. Solomon brought over his horses and chariots from Egypt (I Kings 10:28-29, II Chron. 1:17).

15. See the references published in Robert and Tournay, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, pp. 340 ff. and M.H. Pope. op. cit., pp. 54 ff.

16. Cf. G. Ricciotti, *Il Cantico dei Cantici*, 1928, p. 124; A. Feuillet, art. cit., in *Revue Biblique* 68 (1961), p. 22, fn. 44; P. Grelot, “Le sens du Cantique des Cantiques,” *Revue Biblique* 71 (1964), p. 54; J. Angénieux, art. cit. in *Ephem. Theol. Lovan* 41 (1965), pp. 138, 142; J. Chery, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” *Zeitschr. f.d. alttest. Wissenschaft* 85 (1973), pp. 47-79; S. Wittig, “A Theory of Multiple Meanings,” *Semeta* 9 (1977), pp. 75-103. The sages of Israel had a predilection for these ambiguities. Thus *’amôn* (Prov. 8:30) can mean either architect or beloved son (cf. A.M. Cooper, *Biblical Poetics; A Linguistic Approach*, Yale 1976, pp. 135, 145). Ben Sira 51:13 comprises an erotic vocabulary with a double significance (cf. R. Tournay in *Rev. Bibl.* 76, 1969, p. 596), while 47:12-20 emphasises the ambiguity of King Solomon’s conduct.

17. Note the repetition of *šammah*, “there” (compare *šam* in 7:13). Would this be the counterpart of Ezek. 23:3: “*there* (in Egypt) their breasts were handled, *there* were first caressed...”? We should remember that in Song 1:2a, 4b, and 7:13, the Septuagint understood “your breasts” in vocalising the masoretic text differently. The author of the Song seems to have avoided mentioning Samaria, the prostitute, the unfaithful one, and to have replaced her by Tirzah (6:4, I Kings 15:21 ff.) whose name means “Pleasure” (eudokia) according to the Septuagint translation. This was the name of the youngest daughter of Zelophehad (Num. 26:33, etc.). Compare Is. 62:4, 12.

In this concluding section there are several repetitions of phrases from the initial part of the Song. 8:3 repeats 2:6 and 8:4 repeats 2:7. Similarly, the mention of the “apple-tree” in 8:5 only repeats that of 2:3, where the girl compares her beloved to an apple-tree in whose shade she sits.<sup>18</sup>

Once awakened (for till then he was asleep) the young man listens to the girl’s final request: “Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm”, and the following lines declare the theme of the invincibility and durability of love. The word “love”, here, is repeated three times, just as the verb “to love” is repeated three times at the beginning of the Song (1:3,4,7). We can understand the significance of the seal (“sealed fountain” occurs previously, in 4:11) if we examine the final verse of the Book of Haggai (2:23). This verse is a solemn pronouncement of YHWH, the Lord of Hosts, addressed to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah: “I will set you as a seal (or signet-ring), for I have chosen you”. Here we have the same verb *šym* and the same complement *kḥtm* as in the conclusion of the Song. It is surprising that this dual association has eluded most commentators, although the Midrash Rabbah on the Song mentions it.<sup>19</sup> (It would seem, indeed, to be a more enlightening parallel than certain texts in Deuteronomy or Proverbs suggested by the commentators).<sup>20</sup> The seal is a sign of ownership, a mark of exclusive possession used to authenticate official documents, like Ahab’s seal in I Kings 21:8. It could be worn suspended from a cord (Gen. 38:18) or on the right hand (Jer. 22:24). In this passage, God applies the image of the seal to Himself, for He asserts that even if King Jehoiachin (here called Coniah) were a seal in His right hand, he would pluck him out. In addressing Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin’s grandson, however, God states the opposite, for now the situation has been totally reversed in Zerubbabel’s favour. A descendant of David and Solomon, Zerubbabel renews the Messianism of the royal house (II Sam. 7) and his name is “the branch”: “It is he who is going to rebuild the sanctuary of YHWH. It is he who is going to wear the royal insignia. He will sit upon his throne as a ruler” (Zech. 6:12-13).

On the other hand, the Egyptian associations to be found everywhere in the Song are also present here. The Hebrew *ḥtm* is a word of Egyptian origin which appears as early as the texts of the Pyramids, and its equivalent *ḥb’t* corresponds to the Egyptian *q̄b’t*. In the seventh poem inscribed on the Cairo ostrakon 25218, the young man exclaims: “O why am I not the seal (which she wears on her finger)!”<sup>21</sup> It would seem, then, that the beginning of Song 8:6 could be understood as a *double entendre*. The love-song of Solomon, son-in-law of Pharaoh – the poem is also

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18. In Song 7:9 the scent of the girl’s breath is compared to the scent of the *tappuah* (“apple”), a word which is derived from *naphaḥ* (“to blow out”).

19. It is mentioned, however, by A. Robert, op. cit., p. 191.

20. A. Robert compared Deut. 6:6-8; 11:18; cf. Ex. 13:9; Jer. 31:33; Prov. 3:3 (op. cit., pp. 299-300).

21. Op. cit., p. 349; cf. J.B. White, op. cit., pp. 147, 158 (note 48), 189. Similar wishes are expressed in the Chester Beatty papyrus (ibid. pp. 181-182). There may be a possible word-play between *ḥtn* and *ḥtm*, as Dr. Rossing has suggested to me. See S. Schott, “Wörter für Rollseigel und Ring,” *Wiener Zeitung für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 54 (1957), pp. 177-185.

the love-song of the Messianic Solomon awaited by Israel in the days of the Second Temple. The daughter of Zion, the bride of the Messianic king, hopes to be inseparably joined to him from the moment he is present, but for now he is “asleep” and will have to awaken. Here it is suitable to recall the impatience and anxiety of Israel in the centuries following the return from Exile: “Wake up, Lord! Why are you asleep?” cries the psalmist (Ps. 44:24 and cf. Ps. 89:46; Is. 51:9). The daughter of Zion longs to be totally united with her King as her most precious and personal possession by reason of the Covenant and Promise<sup>22</sup>. YHWH’s love for his people Israel is as strong as the death which no man can escape; in the well-known biblical expression, it is a “jealous” love.<sup>23</sup>

A second parallel may be made with the conclusion of that Messianic compilation, the Book of Isaiah. H. Gazelles has called attention to the associations of Song Chapter 8 with Is. 66:7 in which mother Zion gives birth to a male son which is the new Israel<sup>24</sup>, but there are also other points of correspondence with this post-exilic section of Isaiah: “Long before being in labour, she has given birth (*yldh*) before being overtaken by birth pangs (*hbl*), she has been delivered of a boy. Who (*mi*) ever heard of such a thing?... that Zion only just in labour should bring forth (*yldh*) sons” (Is. 66:7-8). “Rejoice, Jerusalem, be glad for her, all you who love her (*hbyh*)!... That you may be suckled (*tynqw*), filled, from her consoling breast (*mšd*)... Now towards her I send flowing peace (*šlwm*, cf. Song 8:10) like a river (*knhr*), and like a stream in spate (*šwtf*, “submerging”) the glory of the nations. You will suck (*wynqtm*)... Like a son comforted by his mother (*imw*)... At the sight your heart (*lbrm*) will rejoice,... For see how YHWH comes in fire (*bš*)... to assuage... his threats with flaming fire (*blhby-š*)” (Is. 66:10-15). It has been noticed that the two verbs in verse 10: “rejoice” and “be glad” also occur in Song 1:4. Moreover Is. 66:6 begins with *qol* (“a voice”) like Song 2:8 and 5:2.<sup>25</sup> A. Robert has noticed the similarities between Song 8:7 and Is. 43:2 “Should you pass through the waters (*mym*), I will be with you; or through rivers, they will not swallow you up (*yštfwk*). Should you walk through fire (*š*), you will not be scorched and the flames (*lhbh*) will not burn you.” The third part of the Book of Isaiah (Chapters 56-66) often repeats expressions to be found in the second part (Chapters 40-55).<sup>26</sup> All these texts are post-exilic and quite close in time to the period of composition of the Song of Songs.

22. According to Is. 62:5, God will behave towards Zion as a *hatan* towards his *kallah*, like Solomon towards his Egyptian bride (I Kings 3:1), like the Solomon of the Song towards his “betrothed” (3:10, 4:8-12, 5:1), his “sister” (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1-2). Note that the girl cannot call him her “brother” (8:1). This is surprising if the Song of Songs is only a simple love-poem.

23. R. Tournay, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, 1967, pp. 153-154 (cf. Zech. 1:14-15, 8:2; Joel 2:18).

24. Article on the Song of Songs, Robert and Tournay in *Bulletin du Comité des Etudes de la Compagnie de St. Sulpice*, no. 42-43, April-September 1963, p. 214.

25. Note also the verb *ng* in Is. 66:11 and the derivative *t'nwgy* in Song 7:7.

26. Cf. J. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'Apocalyptique II* (1978), p. 495.

To these parallels with the prophets one may add parallels with the didactic books in the Bible. A.M. Dubarle<sup>27</sup> has associated Song 8:6 with Prov. 6:27-28 and Ben Sira 9:8, where love is compared to a fire. A. Robert<sup>28</sup> has associated the end of verse 7 with Prov. 6:31b "he will give all the goods of his house." As for the theme of "many waters", together with rivers, death and the netherworld, it recalls the ever-threatening primaevaeal chaos, the myths of the chasms and waters of death so familiar throughout the ancient East. This imagery of oriental mythology is combined here with the language of the Covenant. If the "flames of Yah" (Song 8:6) recalls the thunder, the "fire of YHWH" (I Kings 18:38, II Kings 1:12, Job 1:16) or in other words a "sacred thunderbolt" as D. Lys translates it,<sup>29</sup> the reader is inevitably and immediately reminded of the "jealous" God of whom it is said that He loves Israel as a bridegroom his bride, with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). Thus the conclusion of the Song leads us towards the familiar theme of the nuptial allegory which so frequently figures in the prophetic books from the 8th century onwards (from the time of Hosea), and often recurs until the Second Temple period.

We should not forget, however, that strictly speaking one is not concerned here with the love of YHWH but with the love of the Messianic "Solomon" towards Jerusalem which personifies the chosen people. This bridegroom cannot be identified with YHWH as A. Robert has proposed, for in 5:2-8 he is shown appearing and disappearing in a manner reminiscent of Zerubbabel, who is at first hailed with the Messianic title of the Branch (Zech. 6:12; cf. Jer. 23:5 etc.), and is afterwards no longer mentioned. The young "promised bride" goes in search of the one she loves (3:1-5, 5:2 ff.) and sooner or later will be joined to him.

A. Robert<sup>30</sup> who believes the bridegroom is speaking in 8:5b-7a, regards 7b as an addition, a sage's aphorism in prose: "If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly condemned." This sentiment cannot be applied to YHWH's love for Israel, but there is no necessity to do so, for here it is the girl who is addressing her beloved and not the contrary. 7b ought to be regarded as the conclusion of the girl's words. The final verb "it would be condemned" should be taken together with the end of verse 2: "none would condemn me". Thus 8:1-7 constitutes a single section in two parts. Each begins with the same interrogative pronoun *mī*, "who". The verb *ntn* ("give") in verse 1 recurs in verse 7; the word *byt* ("house") in verse 2 recurs in verse 7; the preposition *tht* ("under") in verse 3 recurs in verse 5. Above all, the key word *hbbh* ("love") in the refrain in verse 4 is repeated three times in verses 6-7. In this way the two parts of the conclusion of

27. "L'amour humain dans le Cantique de Cantiques", *Rev. Bibl.* 61 (1954), p. 80.

28. *Op. cit.*, p. 304; id., "Le Cantique des Cantiques dans l'exégèse récente," in "Aux grands carrefours de la révélation et de l'exégèse de l'A.T.", *Recherches bibliques* 8, 1966 (Desclée de Brouwer), pp. 147-196.

29. "Le plus beau chant de la Création", *Lectio Divina* 51, p. 288-291. "YH" is the only (and incomplete) mention of the divine name to express a superlative (cf. Jeremiah 2:31).

30. *Op. cit.*, p. 304.



the Song correspond to the two parts of its prologue. Indeed, the two strophes 1:2-3 and 1:4, each consisting of five lines, both conclude with the same verb *hbwk*, "love you". Thus an anxious love for the Messianic "Solomon" appears to be expressed both at the beginning and at the end of the Song. It is true, however, that the word "love" as used in the Song is ambiguous, especially in the refrain: "Do not waken love..." Is this love, here, the mutual attraction and passion of the two young people, or should this abstract noun be understood in a concrete sense as meaning one or the other of the two? In the vocative case, in 7:7, it refers to the girl: "love, daughter of delights..."<sup>31</sup> In the conclusion of the Song, which we are analysing here, the poet draws a parallel between love and jealousy and endows this passion with a cosmic dimension by speaking of fire and water, those primal, indestructible elements, and so ensures the profound unity of the poem despite its bewildering complexity.

G. Gerleman has rightly pointed out that *hb*, "to love" in the erotic sense, occurs eleven times in the "yahwist" texts and in the Books of Samuel, and only twelve times elsewhere. Similarly *yfn*, "beauty", occurs eleven times in the Song, twelve times in the Books of Samuel and Kings, and only five times elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> These considerations bring us back once again to the early period of the Israelite monarchy. The sumptuous, princely atmosphere of the Song recalls the days of Solomon when gold and silver, ivory and alabaster, precious stones, spices, cedar-wood and juniper and all the products of the soil abounded. It was Israel's golden age.<sup>33</sup> The bucklers mentioned in 4:4 may recall the golden shields made by Solomon (I Kings 10:16-17) and delivered up by King Rehoboam to the pharaoh Sheshonq (Shishak) (ibid. 14:26). Certain passages in the Song may also bring to mind episodes from the life of David. The theme of love-sickness (2:5, 5:8) which exists in Egyptian love-poetry, recalls the "sickness" of Amnon, infatuated with the beautiful Tamar (II Sam. 13:2 ff.). The very name of David, written *dwd* without a *yod* in the books of Samuel and Kings, is spelt in the same way as the *dôd*, the "beloved", of the Song. In addition to the "Solomonic" features of the Song, there are thus "Davidic" features, an assertion which requires further elaboration.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude, like M.H. Segal<sup>34</sup> and the ancient Jewish tradition, that the Song goes back to the Solomonic period. This recondite and subtle piece of writing<sup>35</sup> includes many rare words whose sense is uncertain. Some derive from Iranian or Sanscrit, and Aramaisms and constructions unfamiliar in pre-exilic literature have also been noted. One should particularly draw attention to the

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31. We follow the reading of the Aquila and Syriac *targum*: *bt t'rwgym* (haplography of *ta*).

32. Cf., G. Gerleman, *Ruth. Das Hohelied* (Bibl. Komm. A.T., 18), 1965, p. 74.

33. The extent of David and Solomon's kingdom (from Dan to Beersheba and beyond), may be suggested by the references: Sharôn (west), Heshbôn (east), Lebanon (north) and Kedar (south).

34. "The Song of Songs", *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962), pp. 470-490.

35. Despite this uncontested fact, the Song is also connected with love-songs of simple language and the mythological themes of the ancient Orient.

frequency of puns and word-play, characteristic of midrashic writings.<sup>36</sup> The very name of Solomon, *šlmw*, the “Peaceable” is recalled in the prologue by the frequent occurrence of the consonants *shin*, *lamed* and *mem*. The name (*šm*) is a purified oil (*šmn*; same word-play in Eccles. 7:1), which immediately brings to mind the unction of the *mašiaḥ*, God’s anointed (I Kings 2:34-39). “Sh” sounds and liquid consonants occur frequently throughout this prologue, as in *šyrym*, *šr*, *šlmh*, *mnšqt*, *lmwt*, *mšknny*, *mlk*, *myšrym*, *yrvšlm* (Jerusalem), *šmš*. Similarly *šlmw* (“peace”, end of 8:10) connects with the following verse which mentions Solomon. We know, moreover, that *šlmw* is often associated with references to Jerusalem, the city of peace.<sup>37</sup> We may also ask if the choice of certain numbers, *ššym* (“sixty”, 3:7, before the mention of Solomon), or *ššym* and *šmnyym* (“sixty” and “eighty” in 6:8, the number of queens and concubines respectively) was not dictated by a play upon *šlmw*, Solomon.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the rare word *šalmah* (“garment”, 4:11) might also recall the name *šulammit* (7:1), “she who has found peace” (8:10).<sup>39</sup>

Indestructible and invincible, jealous and demanding, Love is as strong as Death. That is the conclusion of this lyrical midrash, the Song of Songs. Beyond the Egyptian love-songs and the historical memories culled from the annals of Solomon, the poet links the future with the past.<sup>40</sup> Thanks to the *double entendre*, he succeeds in celebrating in advance the unbreakable bonds of love which will forever join together the new “Solomon” and his beloved bride. The latter seeks him passionately; her heart watches. She awaits him so impatiently that she becomes sick from it, but she is certain that the day will come when her beloved will awake and become present to her. Then she will know peace and happiness at last.<sup>41</sup>

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36. The midrash Shir Hashirim Rabbah, following the Targum, associates *bšb'wt 'w b'ylwt* (2:7 etc.) with *lhy šb'wt*, “The Lord of hosts”. “By what does he charge them?” it was asked. Rabbi Eliezer said, “he charges them by the heaven and the earth: *bšb'wt* means by the host on high and the host below” (cf. R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs*, 1954, p. 28; Robert and Tournay, op. cit., pp. 108, 168, 437).

37. J.R. Tournay, “Abraham et le Cantique des Cantiques”, *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975), pp. 550-551; Id., *Revue Biblique* 79 (1972), p. 55.

38. Sixty and eighty are also multiples of three and four. This is a traditional gradation; cf., J. Greenfield, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965), p. 257.

39. Cf., D. Lys, op. cit., p. 187. He notes a possible word-play with *šhr*, “black” or “desired” and *šzf*, “to tan” or “to perceive” (ibid. p. 71). *Zamir* (2:12) means “vine-pruning” or “song”.

40. See the article mentioned in fn. 37.

41. Mic. 5:4; Hag. 2:9; I Chron. 12:19, 22:9; Ps. 72:3; Ben Sira 47:13, 16. The epiphalamium in Ps. 45 can likewise be interpreted in relation to the marriage of a king of Israel or Judah, although one cannot say which king exactly. It suggests the marriage of the messianic Solomon with “princess” Sarah, ancestor of the chosen people, who will give birth to “princes” (verse 16). Cf. R. Tournay, “Le Psaume XLV et le Cantique des Cantiques,” *Suppl. to Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1963), pp. 168-212.