

# Green-Eyed Lovers: A Study of Jealousy in Song of Songs 8:5-7

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Famously, jealousy is the theme of Shakespeare's *Othello*, a plot that turns around a husband tormented by the thought that his wife might be unfaithful to him. This is a theme so common in real life that it makes one pause to ask the question: is a wife also "allowed" to be jealous of her husband? I ask the question from the context of a predominantly Hindu society, one in which it is acceptable for a man to have an "official" wife and family, and in addition, a "little house." This latter is a secondary setup which houses a mistress and any children born within that relationship—clearly, out of wedlock. With polygamy illegal in India, these alternative arrangements are fairly common, and more often than not, all the parties seem quite content. The man demands that all his women be faithful to him, but the woman understands that she must make do.

In the narratives of the OT, a wife understands and accepts that she may not be the only woman with whom her husband cohabits. Within the extended household, she must make room for other wives, for concubines, and for surrogate wives. Thus, we have the sisters Leah and Rachel vying for Jacob's affection (Gen 29:31–30:24), trading with each other to spend a night with him (Gen 30:14–17), and even squabbling a bit (Gen 30:15). However, all of this happens backstage—Jacob is not expected to intervene. Then, there is Abimelek, who can claim that Gideon is his father because his mother was Gideon's concubine (Judg 8:29–31; 9:1–2). Another example is Sarah, who is comfortable with the idea of arranging for her slave Hagar to be a surrogate wife to her husband, Abraham, and takes exception only when she thinks Hagar is moving above her station. Similarly, Rachel and Leah offer their personal handmaids to bear them sons by surrogacy—thus are birthed the twelve tribes of Israel. If these are the situations within the household that call for accommodation, outside the household a wife may also be expected to tolerate her husband visiting prostitutes, perhaps having children by them, and even bringing those children home to be raised with hers. This is the case of Jephthah, who eventually supersedes the "legitimate" sons of his father to become judge over Gilead (Judg 11).

These quick examples give us a fairly good sense that jealousy within marriage was a male prerogative. The legal codes even had a procedure for husbands who suspected a wife of unfaithfulness—quaintly but rightly called a "jealousy offering." This was a procedure in which the wife might even die if she had indeed been unfaithful (Num 5:11–31). That there was no due process for a jealous wife simply underlines the fact that there was not room for such in that society. She, like some Hindu women in present-day India, had to make do—that is, to accommodate to jealously and even infidelity as a male privilege.

The OT accommodates these social contracts, but does not necessarily endorse them. It legislates regarding them in order to provide channels for issues that otherwise might be settled by prevailing custom, often to the disadvantage of the party that is lower on the social hierarchy—the woman. Thus, though the OT describes polygamy and concubinage, surrogacy and prostitution, it should not be read as prescribing them. On the contrary, the

OT balances its accommodation to existing systemic realities with depictions of the ideal.

This article makes a case for the counter-cultural and egalitarian position the OT endorses using the example of an emotion common in romantic relationships, jealousy. Our text comes from Song of Songs—the book that attempts to untangle itself from societal constraints so that it can lay out what romantic love looks like in the ideal.<sup>1</sup>

## Song of Songs 8:5–7

Song of Songs 8:5–7 is rather peculiar in its vocabulary and imagery. Replacing the stock word pictures of the love-speak in the seven chapters previous, this poem in the final chapter is dense with new vocabulary, some even at odds with the familiar terms. So, we have here: "seal," "death," "cruel," "grave," "jealousy," "flame," "fire," "rivers," and "wealth." Chapter 8 even includes a word found nowhere else in the OT (*shalheveyah*, 8:6) that confounds translators and that even Marvin Pope's massive commentary prefers to leave un-translated.<sup>2</sup>

### *Friends*

8:5a: Who is this coming up from the wilderness / leaning on her beloved?

### *She*

8:5b: Under the apple tree I roused you;  
there your mother conceived you, / there she who was in  
labour gave you birth.

8:6: Place me like a seal over your heart, / like a seal on  
your arm;

for love is as strong as death, / its jealousy (*qinah*)  
unyielding as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire, / like a mighty flame  
(*shalheveyah*).

8:7: Many waters cannot quench love; / rivers cannot  
sweep it away.

If one were to give / all the wealth of one's house for love,  
/ it would be utterly scorned. (NIV-UK)

Most agree that 8:5b–7 is atypical of the Song's style, with the speaker unexpectedly trading her gauzy veil (4:3) for the gear of a sage,<sup>3</sup> her words addressed to an audience well beyond her usual world-of-two. What is more, commentators burst into applause when they come to this section—"the beauty of this passage puts it beyond interpretation."<sup>4</sup> But interpret it we must, not least because this is arguably the highpoint of the Song, and because it intriguingly promises a woman who is as jealous as any male in the OT.

While we read the Song as applying to human love relationships, we should, in all fairness to centuries of tradition, also read it allegorically as referring to the deity-devotee dynamic across the OT which casts YHWH as divine husband and Israel as his human wife. The two readings are not independent of each other. The ideal in man-woman attachments is described

in engagement with the ideal in the divine-human relationship. So, our unpacking of Song 8:5–7 treats both literal and allegorical readings, each informing the other.

### Jealousy (*qin'ah*) in Song of Songs 8:5–7

Song 8:5 nicely sets the stage for the focus on jealousy.

8:5a: Who is this coming up from the wilderness / leaning on her beloved?

8:5b: Under the apple tree I roused you;  
there your mother conceived you, / there she who was in labour gave you birth. (NIV-UK)

The woman makes her entrance “leaning on her beloved.” Some read this as a happy dependency of the female protagonist upon her male lover,<sup>5</sup> but interestingly, the lines that follow will establish the woman as remarkably independent. She will remind the man of times when she “roused” him; she will construct her own definition of love, pronounce herself worthy of courtship, and assert that she will give her “vineyard” to whom she chooses. Given these, her “leaning” on her lover seems more a public declaration of her choice. As such, it may be a notice of possession.<sup>6</sup> At the very least, the description conveys the woman’s lack of reticence—which one would expect in an Eastern setting—in matters of romantic attachment.

If her public display of affection is unconventional, her opening line is a bit of a shock to the system. “Under the apple tree I (a) roused you,” the woman reminisces. Given the use of the same verb in the Song’s refrain, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), and given the apple tree—the Song’s favourite aphrodisiac<sup>7</sup>—we gather the woman is not talking about irritably nudging awake a snoring partner. “The claim by a woman that she has ‘awakened’ the man’s love would . . . be extraordinary, particularly in an ancient Near Eastern poem,” says Günter Krinetzki.<sup>8</sup> Thus some prefer to amend the grammar of the Hebrew text here in order to place the words in the mouth of the man rather the woman.<sup>9</sup> But, unsettling as it may be to some readers ancient and modern, here is a woman who is bold enough, both in public and in private, to make the man hers.

At this point there is talk of conception and child-bearing: “There your mother conceived you, there the one who gave you birth conceived you” (author’s translation). This is regularly noted as being the only reference to pregnancy in the Song, odd in a canon that mentions sex mostly as a preamble to begetting offspring. Commentators seem unsure what this line is about. In positioning her love life in tandem with that of a generation previous, is the woman assuming a role of “keeper of the family tree”?<sup>10</sup> Or, is she reminding her beloved that their union also serves to “maintain and regenerate society”?<sup>11</sup> Could she perhaps be anticipating bearing her man’s child? In Eastern societies, ancient and present-day, bearing a child traditionally legitimates the woman’s claim on the man. She expects that he owes her attachment for this reason alone, if not any other (e.g., Gen 29:32–34; 30:20). It is possible then, that as the beloved leans on her lover, her thoughts turn on possessing his affections to her satisfaction.

This may find support in the lines that follow:

8:6a i: Place me like a seal over your heart, / like a seal on your arm (NIV-UK)

Taking a cue from Egyptian love poems, and considering that seals were either worn on a cord around the neck or as a finger ring (Gen 38:18; Jer 22:24),<sup>12</sup> some read this as a wish for nearness: “If only I were her little seal-ring / the keeper of her finger! / I would see her love each and every day. . . .”<sup>13</sup> A second alternative is to understand the seal as one that marks ownership, such as the engraved seals made of semi-precious stone used to stamp on the wet clay of a jar.<sup>14</sup>

So, in asking to be worn on the man, is the woman pleading to be in constant proximity to him (the sense in Hag 2:23),<sup>15</sup> so as to find satisfaction in his nearness, or—like the Egyptian poet—to experience his “love each and every day”? Or, more aggressively, is the woman sealing her ownership of the man? Since there is no grammatical indication of mere entreaty in her (“set me . . . !”), the imperative suggests insistence rather than plea. The woman has shown a keen sense of ownership so far: “My beloved is mine” (2:16; 6:3). Seals on heart and finger will thoroughly mark him as her territory.<sup>16</sup> She can secure her claim and preempt rivals.

The vocabulary and intent of the woman’s speech remind us of Deut 6:6–8. Here, YHWH requires that his instructions to Israel must figuratively “be on your hearts” (cf. Deut 11:18; Prov 3:3; 7:3) and, as physical symbols, be worn on hands and foreheads. The requirement is made in the context of the creed which declares Israel’s exclusive relationship with YHWH—“YHWH is our God, YHWH alone”—and demands Israel’s whole-hearted devotion: “Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:4–5, author’s translation). Medieval Jewish mysticism catches the essence of YHWH’s demand and responds to YHWH in reciprocation using the language of the Song’s woman: “For as the imprint of the seal is to be discerned even after the seal is withdrawn, so I shall cling to you.”<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, the Deuteronomy text warns Israel not to “follow other gods” for YHWH “is a jealous God” (*‘El qanna’*, Deut 6:14–15). When they ask to be affixed onto the object of their affection, are the woman of the Song and YHWH motivated by the same emotion, jealousy? We must seek an answer in the imagery that follows:

8:6a ii: for love is as strong as death,<sup>18</sup>

8:6a iii: its<sup>19</sup> jealousy as unyielding as the grave (*she’ol*).  
(NIV-UK)

The pair of lines startles the imagination with stark equivalencies: “love” with “death,” and “jealousy” with “grave.” The nouns are reinforced with a matching pair of adjectives:<sup>20</sup>

love	<i>strong</i>	death
jealousy	<i>unyielding</i>	grave

What must we make of this?

In other parts of the canon, “death” is the default superlative for intense emotions. Samson is “sick to death” of Delilah’s questions (Judg 16:16); Jonah is vexed to the point of death with God’s dealings with Nineveh (Jonah 4:9); in Gethsemane, Jesus is sorrowful to the point of death (Matt 26:38).<sup>21</sup> Further, as in this Song text, “death” is often paired in parallelism with the grave (*she’ol*) to express their common distinctive—both death and the grave are unassailable (Pss 49:14; 89:49 [v. 48 in English]; Hab 2:5). Indeed, the next line describes the “grave” as “unyielding,” or as

Cheryl Exum prefers, “adamant.” The “grave” is a force that cannot be resisted, and is as undefeatable as in the combative contexts that use this adjective (Judg 4:24; 2 Sam 2:17; Isa 27:1, 8; Job 9:4).<sup>22</sup> We infer then, that the woman is placing the irresistible inevitability of “love” and “jealousy” on par with that of “death” and the “grave.”

That brings us to the paired terms “love” and “jealousy.” “Love” is simple enough, but the Hebrew *qinah* needs unpacking. The standard choice in English versions follows the Greek Septuagint in its use of the basic sense:<sup>23</sup> “to be jealous” (e.g., KJV, NAS, NLT, NIV). Those who are either uncomfortable with the negative baggage this word carries, or wish to keep *qinah* strictly parallel to “love,” instead use “passion” (e.g., NET, NRSV, TNK) or suggest “ardour” (NIV-UK footnote).

Exum argues strongly for rendering *qinah* as “jealousy,” which is a “violent emotion, usually aroused when a rival . . . is felt to threaten an exclusive relationship.” In other parts of the canon, it stirs up ferocious anger, which may be turned against the rival<sup>24</sup> or even against the beloved partner, who is seen as a possession.<sup>25</sup> Exum supports her case with Prov 27:4, which, like the Song, describes jealousy as a force that cannot be withstood: “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy (*qinah*)?”<sup>26</sup>

The woman’s stance and speech so far (8:5–6a) indicate her desire for exclusive rights to the man. Her emotional state accommodates starry-eyed “love” just as much as green-eyed “jealousy.” Fidelity is a non-negotiable demand in a relationship such as the woman describes and can be used to nail down the difference between “love” and “jealousy”: “Fidelity is clearly honed in the term ‘passion’ [or ‘jealousy’] in a way that is not the case for ‘love,’” and it thus communicates the inability of one partner to “tolerate receiving divided loyalties.”<sup>27</sup> If so, the context here suggests that *qinah* is better rendered “jealousy” than, say, “passion” or “ardour.”

Tremper Longman rightly observes that jealousy is a “potentially appropriate reaction” in only two relationships, both of them conjugal: one is in human marriage; the other is in the biblical reflection of human marriage, the divine-human nuptial metaphor.<sup>28</sup> Thus, as much as YHWH articulates his “love” for Israel, he also speaks about his “jealousy” (*qinah*). Deuteronomy 32:21–22 even shares the vocabulary of Song 8:6 in expressing YHWH’s jealousy over unfaithful Israel:<sup>29</sup>

They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols . . . a fire will be kindled by my wrath, one that burns down to the realm of dead below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains.

In a Christian equivalent, the twelfth-century theologian Honorius of Autun transposes the woman’s emotion onto the Christ-church relationship and places the Song text in Christ’s mouth: “just as hell is stronger than all bitter things . . . so jealousy is unconquerable—I mean my own envy, by which I envy the Devil because he possesses you, my Bride. . . .”<sup>30</sup>

But we may have run ahead of ourselves in making the transition from the Song’s human female protagonist to the canon’s divine bridegroom, whether YHWH or Christ. So, we return to the poem.

8:6b: It [love] burns like blazing fire, / like a mighty flame (*shalheveyah*).

8:7a: Many waters cannot quench love; / rivers cannot sweep it away. (NIV-UK)

The Hebrew is achingly beautiful to the ears with the *sh* sibilant of the previous line (8:6a iii) continuing its lyrical sweep into this one (8:6b), slowing down the reader only at the unfamiliar noun *shalheveyah* with which the line climaxes.<sup>31</sup> The tantalizing possibility is that here at last, in a book from which any reference to deity is absent, is the poetic abbreviation of the sacred name: YAH. But, after carefully considering the options for translation,<sup>32</sup> we end up with the recommendation that *shalheveyah* be rendered “a blazing flame.” This is disappointingly mundane, stripped as it is of any association with YHWH,<sup>33</sup> but the furthest we can go is along the lines of “almighty flame”<sup>34</sup> and “god-awful flame.”<sup>35</sup>

Two considerations soften our disappointment. First is the common observation that the woman’s description of love (8:6–7) tingles with allusions to a selection from the slew of deities that populated the world of its time. The NASB places YHWH (LORD) among these:

love is as strong as **death** (*Mavet*), Jealousy is as severe as **Sheol**; Its **flashes** (*reshafim*) are flashes of fire, The *very* flame of **the LORD** (*Yah*). **Many waters** (*mayim rabbim*) cannot quench love, Nor will **rivers** (*neharot*) overflow it (boldface added)

*Mot* or *Mavet* is the god of death who is retrieved from the underworld by the unyielding love of *Anath*. Further, death and *She’ol* are sometimes twinned personifications.<sup>36</sup> *Resheph* is the god who shoots arrows (*reshafim*) of plague and pestilence. The “many waters” echo *Marduk*’s triumph over *Tiamat*, goddess of the chaotic deep. *Yam* or Prince River (*Nahar*) is the god of the Sea. Why could not the poet have smuggled in an echo of his national deity, *Yah*?<sup>37</sup>

The second consideration by which we may associate *shalheveyah* with YHWH is tied into the term “jealousy.” The forms *qanna’* and *qanno’* are used only in description of YHWH, to mean “a jealous God”: ‘*El qanna’*’ in Exodus and Deuteronomy,<sup>38</sup> and ‘*El qanno’*’ in Joshua and Nahum.<sup>39</sup> The occurrences of these terms across Genesis-Joshua are invariably in the context of Israel switching her devotion from YHWH to other gods. Just as invariably, YHWH’s response is unnervingly violent. Particularly relevant to the Song’s *shalheveyah* (“a god-awful flame”) are images of his jealousy as burning anger (Deut 6:15) and his anger as a devouring fire (e.g., Isa 30:27, 30; cf. 33:14). He does not intend an amicable separation with his unfaithful spouse. In this zero tolerance of infidelity lies the juncture of divine “love” with divine “jealousy.”

As Terence Fretheim explains, jealousy, by definition, has both an inner and outer reference, the inner being the prior one. God cares deeply about Israel; *therefore* he cares about what she does with her allegiance.<sup>40</sup> God’s aggressive response to her rejection of him is an index of his passionate love for her. Given this, it makes sense that in every instance, YHWH presents his jealousy as the reason Israel must not attempt to be unfaithful to him. “Do not worship any other god *because* the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exod 34:14).

The story of Phinehas in Num 25 illustrates how YHWH's jealousy plays out in one specific situation, and may reinforce our reading of the description of human love in the Song text.

### “Jealousy” in Numbers 25:1–15<sup>41</sup>

Numbers 25 relates how at the city of Shittim Israel began to “play the harlot” with Moabite women. This verb is frequently used as a metaphor for idolatry.<sup>42</sup> Soon enough, Israel was worshipping Baal of Peor. As a result, YHWH's anger “flared up” (ISV, NAB, NET) and a deadly plague swept through the camp. Even as Moses took steps to control the damage and Israel wept at the tent of meeting, an Israelite named Zimri openly brought in a Midianite woman named Cozbi.

The scene is set to narrate Phinehas's act of “jealousy,” the deed for which history would celebrate him.<sup>43</sup> Phinehas picks up a spear, follows the Israelite into the “tent” (*qubbah*) and skewers the two in the act—in *flagrante delicto*.

Opinion is divided over the nature of Zimri's sin. Commentators variously propose that it could have been illicit sex,<sup>44</sup> marriage to a non-Israelite,<sup>45</sup> a cultic offence,<sup>46</sup> or a combination. Numbers 25:6 does not specifically point in the direction of any particular sin. However, the story provides clues.

First, we must work out what a *qubbah* is—a term which occurs only here in the OT. Three distinct suggestions are that it could have meant a regular tent,<sup>47</sup> the tent of meeting,<sup>48</sup> or a portable shrine.<sup>49</sup> The second suggestion is the least likely, since Phinehas and the congregation assemble at the door of “the tent of meeting” (Num 25:6), but it is into the *qubbah* that Phinehas follows the offenders (25:8). It is unlikely that two different terms would be used for the same structure within the space of three verses. On the contrary, the two nouns possibly distinguish between one tent and the other. The suggestion that *qubbah* is neither more nor less than a regular tent is weakened somewhat by the narrator's preference for this unusual term over the usual usage for “tent,” *ohel*. This leaves the possibility that the tent could have been a non-Yahwist shrine.

Secondly, Moses's order to the “judges” is to “put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor” (Num 25:5 NIV-UK). If one assumes that Phinehas acts on this command, it favours the presence of a religious component in Zimri's act of defiance, in addition to any other motivations there might be.

Thirdly, Zimri is “Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family” (Num 25:14 NIV-UK). This recalls Num 25:4, in which YHWH commands punitive action against “all the leaders of these people.” This could be either because of their direct involvement with Baal, or because of their failure to keep their people from unfaithfulness, or both. What is significant is that the action against the leaders is meant to effect the turning away of divine wrath, and since YHWH's wrath is in reaction to Israel's association with Baal of Peor (25:3), the offence of the chiefs is strongly linked to Israel's infidelity.

Fourthly, Zimri's death immediately stays the plague consequential to Israel's worship of Baal (cf. Num 31:16; Josh 22:17). This again points to a connection between Israel's collective offence and Zimri's.

The likelihood then, is that Zimri, a leader in Israel, has set up a *qubbah* (“shrine”) among the tents of his clan (since he brings

the woman “to his brothers,” Num 25:6), within sight of the tent of meeting. While Moses and the congregation wait on YHWH at the door of the tent of meeting, Zimri brazenly continues the liaison with Baal of Peor by bringing Cozbi into the camp; or worse, Zimri, being a member of a chieftain's family, takes responsibility in this crisis and seeks recourse to another oracle in order to find an alternative solution to the plague.<sup>50</sup> Either way, Zimri flagrantly challenges the exclusive worship of YHWH. This is what stirs Phinehas to his violent deed.

The story attaches value to Phinehas's deed by multiple devices. Intertextually, the incident resonates, point for point, with that of Israel's idolatry of the golden calf (Exod 32). At the level of the story, Phinehas's line is rewarded—on the spot—with a “permanent right to the priesthood” (Num 25:13 NLT). More significantly, Phinehas is acknowledged at the most authoritative level—by the most reliable character in the narrative, YHWH. It is enormously to Phinehas's credit that YHWH sees his own jealousy active in Phinehas's. YHWH's declaration is that “he [Phinehas] was jealous with my jealousy” (Num 25:14 NASB). A. H. McNeile describes the satisfaction achieved: “His [Phinehas's] jealousy was so deep and real that it adequately expressed the jealousy of Jehovah, rendering it unnecessary for Jehovah to express it further by consuming Israel.”<sup>51</sup> Phinehas's character is subsumed into YHWH's. He is more than merely YHWH's representative. His jealousy, at that moment, is the very jealousy of a thwarted YHWH, and so, even though the deed is not commissioned by YHWH, it meets with his full, even extravagant, approval. Indeed, that Phinehas acts voluntarily only adds to his merit.

Our toes may curl with discomfort at this portrayal of YHWH as the spurned lover.<sup>52</sup> Still, we understand better now how love's jealousy can be as relentless and as irresistible as the grave.

### Lovers with Green Eyes

Dipping her brush in three paint-pots, the Song's heroine expresses herself with the elemental colours of Death, Fire, and Water. On her canvas, “love” and “jealousy” dissolve into each other. They form a substance as unyielding as the underworld, an emotion like a raging fire barely under control, whose red-hot blaze cannot be doused by floodwaters, not even by the ocean. As we admire this woman's art, we need to appreciate that it is from “jealousy” that the portrayal of “love” gains its depth.

How strange that the woman should speak of a jealous love, and that too of unrelenting, fiery jealousy. Exum reminds us that there are no biblical examples of women displaying jealous wrath.<sup>53</sup> In a social environment in which exclusive rights were a male prerogative, women limited themselves to backstage bickering (e.g., Gen 30:14–16). It is highly unusual that the Song's protagonist, with her talk of seals on sundry body parts, should demand full reciprocation of her love. Rather than cause jealousy, it appears she can exercise it. So startling is the idea that a woman can express herself thus, that even a modern grammarian such as Paul Joüon—as well as the early Christian translation into Syriac and several early Christian interpreters—would rather adjust the grammar in favour of the male lover being the speaker of these lines.<sup>54</sup>

The canonical significance of this woman who jealously insists on her lover's undistracted affection is twofold. First, when

the Song is read literally, as a prescription to male-female human relationships, it allows the two sexes equal opportunity to make a sole claim on the other. The woman is permitted *not* to share her man among a slew of other wives and concubines. She is entitled to the kind of jealousy that is not only legitimate in love, but defines that love as exclusive. Given the world of the OT, this levelling of conjugal privileges is extraordinary.

Secondly, when the Song is read allegorically, its expositors cannot miss the astounding contribution it makes to the YHWH-Israel marriage metaphor that permeates the OT. Its contribution is that it sets out Israel as the *ideal* beloved. YHWH's wife, Israel, as we remember vividly from the rest of the OT, is constantly found in beds other than her own. Unashamed and unrepentant, who could imagine her sitting down to compose a poem on jealously-guarded reciprocal fidelity? The Song is, as Blaise Arminjon describes it, a "lyrical transposition"<sup>55</sup> of the otherwise negative metaphor of YHWH and Israel as lover and beloved, foregrounded so dramatically in the prophets.<sup>56</sup> No wonder Jewish tradition recommends that one must read the Song only after having first read the rest of the canon.<sup>57</sup> One would otherwise miss the theological freight of a book in which Israel behaves and speaks like YHWH.

The Song abandons, even resists, the cultural accommodation that the rest of the OT makes to the male prerogative of jealousy within romantic love. This egalitarian ideal is amplified into the human-divine metaphor, offering the devotee a claim to the undivided affection of God, the same affection that he expects of his devotee. The Song looks forward to the ideal of lovers perfectly matched. Green eyes and all.

## Notes

1. I have argued in another article that even the Song of Songs refrains from becoming divorced from the cultural realities of its time. As such, it can only be said to move towards an idyll rather than being one. See Havilah Dharamraj, "The Idea of the Idyll: Why it May Not Work for the Song of Songs." *ExpTim* 124, no. 9 (2013): 417–24.

2. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 653. Notice that the final syllable, *yah*, is half of the divine name, presenting a translation issue further discussed below.

3. For elements of wisdom, see Edmée Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God: A Study in Biblical Intertextuality* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71–72.

4. Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, 278.

5. E.g., Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 208; Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs*, pp. 1–265 in *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, WBC 23B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 253.

6. Tom Gledhill, *The Message of the Song of Songs*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1994), 219.

7. Othmar Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994) from *Das Hohelied*, ZBK (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1986), 88, 82–83.

8. Günter Krinetzki, *Kommentar zum Hohelied: Bildsprache und theologische Botschaft*, BBET 16 (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Peter D Lang, 1981), cited in Keel, *Song of Songs*, 267.

9. As in the Syriac translation, followed by a minority of scholars, e.g., Blaise Arminjon, *The Cantata of Love: A Verse by Verse Reading of the Song of Songs* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983).

10. Keel, *Song of Songs*, 269.

11. Gledhill, *Message of the Song of Songs*, 223.

12. Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary*, rev. ed. (New York: Ktav, 1974), 74.

13. Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Lyrics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 38.

14. The majority of scholars agree on the first and second readings. E.g., J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 2005), 250. A third alternative is to understand the seal as a talisman, an amulet that protects the wearer. Keel, *Song of Songs*, 272–73. This is plausible considering that the request is followed up with a causal clause: "For (or because) love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as Sheol" (8:6a ii). The woman's love, worn on the man's heart and/or arm will ward off the underworld or, at least, an untimely descent into it. This reading would be possible but for the fact that the description of love immediately continues into another simile. Love is not only like death, but it also burns like a raging fire. This second simile does not accommodate the apotropaic evil-averting function of the seal. Thus, the "for" is best read as asseverative or declarative rather than causal, and is best left untranslated. Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 118.

15. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 250.

16. It is pointed out that the "heart" and "arm" of Song 8:6 refer to thought and action respectively, which taken together make a synecdoche for the whole person. E.g., Longman, *Song of Songs*, 210.

17. From the Jewish Kaballah. Gershom G. Scholem, *Zohar: The Book of Splendour* (New York: Schocken, 1949), 70.

18. Some scholars read "love is stronger than death." E.g., Longman, *Song of Songs*, 212. Most prefer an equation between "love" and "death."

19. Since love (*ahavah*) is the theme that unifies vv. 6–7, I see the usefulness of the NIV-UK's insertion of the pronoun "its." It is in line with the fem. sg. Hebrew pronouns in v. 7.

20. The line echoes with assonance in the first half, swishes with sibilants in the second, the alliterating *k* sound enmeshing the two cola.

21. D. Winton Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," *VT* 3 (1953): 220–21.

22. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 252.

23. *Qin'ah* has a spectrum of meanings, all of them circling around deep emotion. (The cognate roots in Akkadian and Arabic mean "to become intensely red" or "become red with passion.") Thus, with reference to the context, *qin'ah* has been rendered "jealousy" (Prov 6:34; 14:30; 27:4), "competitiveness" (Eccl 4:4; 9:6), "anger" (Num 5:14, 30), and "zeal" (2 Kgs 10:16; Pss 69:10; 119:139; Job 5:2; Sir 30:24), *HALOT*. The analogy between divine and human jealousy lies in the demand for exclusive possession or devotion and the central meaning of *qin'ah* relates to jealousy as applicable to a marriage relationship, this relationship being used metaphorically to describe the bond between Israel and their God. Though most strongly developed in Hos 1–3, Jer 3, and Ezek 16 and 23, the language of conjugal jealousy sometimes describes God's feelings for Israel in the Pentateuch as well.

24. Prov 6:34; Ezek 36:5–6; 38:19; Zech 1:14; 8:2.

25. Num 5; Ezek 16:38, 42; 32:25.

26. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 251–52. Similarly, e.g., Longman, *Song of Songs*, 211.

27. Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 165.

28. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 211–12.

29. Barry Webb, "The Song of Songs: A Love Poem as Holy Scripture," *RTR* 49, no. 3 (1990): 98n.18.

30. Richard A. Norris Jr, ed., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 285.

31. Thomas, "A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew," 209–24. Examples of *ʾelohim*: "a mighty wind" (Gen 1:2), "a mighty prince" (Gen 23:6), "a great struggle" (Gen 30:8), "a great fire" (Job 1:16), "an exceeding great city" (Jonah 3:3). Examples of *ʾel*: "the mighty mountains" (Ps 36:7) and "the mighty cedars" (Ps 80:11). Examples of *yah* suffixed: "darkest gloom" (Jer 2:31), "mighty deeds" (Jer 32:19; Ps 77:12).

32. Derived from the verb *lhv* ("to blaze"). It has an unusual *sh* prefix, a fem. *th* ending, and a debated *yah* suffix. This last is read in three ways. First, as an abbreviated form of the Tetragrammaton functioning as a genitive of source ("the flame of YH," see Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 191–92). Secondly, as the divine name expressing the superlative or intensive in the same way that *ʾelohim* and *ʾel* are sometimes used: "a most vehement flame" (KJV), "a mighty flame" (RSV, NIV), "a blazing flame" (NJPS, cf. Jer 2:31; 32:19). However, both possibilities are weakened by the absence of the expected maqqef (hyphen) and mappiq (a dot marking an *h* as a consonant), which occur only in the Ben Naphtali tradition. See M. Saebø, "On the Canonicity of the Song of Songs," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions*, ed. Michael V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 275. That leaves us with the third possibility: the *yah* is an intensive adjectival suffix as in some cognate languages (*iy*, *ay*, and *awi* are intensive adjectival suffixes in Aramaic, Akkadian, and Arabic, respectively). This best explains Song 8:6, Jer 2:31 ("darkest gloom"), and Jer 32:19 ("mighty deeds"). Sabatino Moscati et al., *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969), 81 §12.18, and 83 §12.23.

33. Pope concedes the difficulty of choosing between options. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 653.

34. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 254.

35. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 213.

36. Judg 16:16; Jonah 4:9.

37. Walsh lists six themes "that hint at the possibility of God's presence in a text that never names him": the ambiguous identity of the male lover; phrases that recall theophanies such as fire, and the phrases "cleft of the rock" and "column of smoke"; the metaphoric use of "vineyard"; and imagery that evokes the temple. Walsh, *Exquisite Desire*, 203–10.

38. Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15.

39. Josh 24:19; Nah 1:2.

40. Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999), 310.

41. This section is largely taken from Havilah Dharamraj, *A Prophet Like Moses?: A Narrative-Theological Reading of the Elijah Cycle*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011), 57–60.

42. See Phyllis Bird, "To Play the Harlot: An Enquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 75–94.

43. For example: Mattathias "burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu" (1 Macc 2:26 NRSV). "Phinehas son of Eleazar ranks third in glory for being zealous in the fear of the Lord, and standing firm, when the people turned away, in the noble courage of his soul; and he made atonement for Israel" (Sirach 45:23 NRSV; cf. 4 Macc 18:12).

44. F. C. Cook and T. E. Espin, *The Fourth Book of Moses called Numbers*, The Holy Bible according to the Authorized Version, vol. 1/2 (London, UK: Murray, 1871), 750; C. F. Keil, *The Book of Numbers*, trans. J. D. Martin et al. (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1869), 205.

45. L. E. Binns, *The Book of Numbers*, WC (London, UK: Methuen, 1927), 178; A. Noordtzij, *Numbers*, trans. E. van der Maas, BSC (Grand

Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 241; Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. J. D. Martin, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 198; J. Sturdy, *Numbers*, CBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 184; Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, WBC (Waco: 1984), 280.

46. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 187; J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (New York: JPS, 1990), 212, 214, 476–80; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 201–3; Stephan C. Reif, "What Enraged Phineas?," *JBL* 90 (1971) 200–6.

47. Cook and Espin, *Numbers*, 750; Keil, *Numbers*, 206; Noordtzij, *Numbers*, 241; Noth, *Numbers*, 198.

48. Sturdy, *Numbers*, 184–85.

49. Budd, *Numbers*, 280; Reif, 200–6; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 201–3. These follow J. Morgenstern, who proposes a parallel between the *ʾohel mo'ed* and the pre-Islamic *qubbah*, a sacred tent. Morgenstern, "The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting," *HUCA* 17 (1942–43): 153–265; Morgenstern, "The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting," *HUCA* 18 (1943–1944): 1–52.

50. Reif, "What Enraged Phineas?," 205; Barbara E. Organ, "Pursuing Phineas: A Synchronic Reading," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 203–18, here 208–9.

51. A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Numbers: With Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 144.

52. The OT's depiction of jealousy-fuelled violence within the YHWH-Israel marriage relationship is a hermeneutical issue that requires separate treatment. In my forthcoming book with Fortress Press, *Altogether Lovely: A Thematic and Intertextual Reading of the Song of Songs*, I examine the so-called pornoprophetic texts: Hos 2, Ezek 16 and 23.

53. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 252–53.

54. Paul Joüon holds that the woman has been unfaithful earlier (5:3), and the male lover here requires her fidelity. Joüon, *Le Cantique Des Cantiques: Commentaire Philologique Et Exegetique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1909), 315. See also R. F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs from Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (London, 1869), 355–57.

55. Arminjon, *The Cantata of Love*, 41.

56. Kingsmill frequently shows correlation between the vocabulary of the Song and prophetic texts in an attempt to demonstrate that "a network of biblical allusions is being woven in the Song for the purpose of conveying a picture opposite to that we find in the prophets who, confronted by the continual 'adultery' of Israel, poured forth their condemnation with unwearying passion." Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, 6. Andre LaCocque's *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998) is another commentary that demonstrates intertextuality between the Song and the rest of the OT canon, but directed towards a naturalistic (rather than metaphorical) reading of the Song.

57. Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 27.



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