

gazelles mentioned in the spells are male. The best explanation is that of Gordis (1961:26–28), who argues that *š'ba'ot* and *ʾaylot haššadeh* are circumlocutions for titles of God, the first for (*ʾelohey*) *š'ba'ot*, (God of) hosts, the second for *ʾel šadday*, El Shadday. (The first term is more likely a circumlocution for *YHWH š'ba'ot*, which Tsevat, 1965, has explained as a phrase compounded of two nouns in apposition, “Yahweh, [is] Armies.” *Šeba'ot* can therefore imply a name of God.) The author uses these animal names to avoid divine titles in a secular context. We see here the first sign of a tendency, which became important in the Talmudic period, to substitute for divine names and titles in oaths various words, sometimes meaningless words such as *baḥerem* (“by the fish net”) and *b'ḥayyey haqqayis* (“by the life of summerfruit”), see the discussion in Lieberman, 1942:125–27. Gazelles and hinds are thus mentioned because of the sound of their names, but their beauty too makes them appropriate to the context, as in Prov 5:19, “a hind of love and a roe of grace” (Ginsburg).

Šadeh, usually translated “field,” in conjunction with animals means the wild, uncultivated countryside (Gen 2:19, 20; Exod 23:11, 29; etc.)

disturb, bestir: Ta'iru and *te'or'ru* signify disturbance of some sort (thus Gordis and many others), not excitement or arousal of desire. There is no case where WR is clearly used of sexual arousal. It is often used of waking or arousing a sleeper. *Ta'iru* and *te'or'ru* are chosen for this verse because the way one disturbs lovemaking is to wake the couple in the morning; compare the girl's complaint against the dove in no. 14 for disturbing her and her lover.

before it wishes: elliptical for “until it wishes to be disturbed, woken up.” The point is not that the girls of Jerusalem *should* wake the couple at the proper time, but that (at least) they should not disturb them before then. As Pope points out, “love” is implicitly personified by the use of the verb HPS here.

This unit (2:1–7) at once recapitulates the motifs of the preceding one (1:9–17) and goes beyond it. After the exchange of endearments between the lovers in 2:1–3a, the Shulammitte tells her comrades: I delight in my beloved's caresses, so he brought me to this little “house of wine” intent on making love. Now I am love-sick, overwhelmed by desire, and wish to lie down surrounded by the fruits of love. He is now embracing me, so please leave us to ourselves and do not disturb our lovemaking.

The girls of Jerusalem serve primarily as a sounding board for the Shulammitte. Their main function is to be present to be spoken *to* (see chapter 8). But now they are to leave. Their presence is reminiscent of that of the “young people” in “The Orchard.” The little sycamore invites the girl: “Come, spend time where the young people are: the meadow celebrates its day. Under me are a festival booth and a hut . . .” Other young people are present at first, but at some point they leave and the lovers remain alone: “The beerhut is disarranged

from drink, but she has remained with her brother. . . . But my lips are sealed . . .” (no. 30). The poet of Canticles, who is also discreet, delicately closes the scene here, as at 3:5 and 8:4, with only a suggestion of what is to follow.

2:8–17

(Girl)

- (8) Listen! My beloved—
 he's coming now!
 Bounding over the mountains,
 leaping over the hills.
- (9) My beloved is like a gazelle
 or a young roe.
 Now he stands behind our wall,
 peering in through the windows,
 glancing in through the lattice.
- (10) My beloved spoke and said to me:

(Boy)

- “Arise, my darling, my beautiful,
 and come away.
- (11) For see, the winter has departed,
 the rain has passed and gone its way.
- (12) The blossoms have appeared in the land,
 the time of song has arrived,
 and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
- (13) The fig tree sweetens its young fruit,
 and the vine is in bud, giving off fragrance.
 Arise, my darling, my beautiful,
 and come away.
- (14) My dove in the clefts of the rock,
 in the covert of the cliff—
 let me see your form,
 let me hear your voice,
 for your voice is sweet,
 your form is lovely.”

(Girl?)

- (15) Catch us foxes,
 little foxes
 that spoil vineyards,
 for our vineyards are in bud.

(Girl)

- (16) My beloved is mine and I am his:
he grazes among the lilies.
- (17) Before the day blows softly in,
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved, and be as a gazelle,
or as a young roe,
on the mountains of Bethel.

The Shulammitte is in her house just before dawn when her lover comes from afar and secretly invites her to go out with him to the fields. The meaning of her response is not quite clear, but she appears to urge him to flee quickly before sunrise. V. 17 points back to v. 9 and closes off the unit.

The maiden speaks of the events as if they were happening in the present, at the time she is speaking (*hinneh zeh* in vv. 8 and 9 is a clear indicator of the immediate present tense). In this way she conveys immediacy and excitement. Nevertheless the events she relates occurred in the past, as is shown by the quoting phrase, "my beloved spoke (*'anah*) and said to me," where the perfect *'anah* breaks the series of seven participles. She is narrating the events to listeners (probably the girls of Jerusalem), just as she does in the parallel unit, 5:2-6:3 (Delitzsch). All the youth's words are a quotation encompassed in her narration.

(2:8) *Listen!*: *Qol* is often best taken as a virtual imperative, "hark" (Gordis), or perhaps as elliptical for "I hear a sound" (Luzzatto on Isa 40:3).

My beloved—he's coming now (dodi hinneh zeh ba'): *Zeh* reinforces *hinneh* (Delitzsch, Ehrlich, GKC §136d). It may emphasize proximity in time or place, or both together. Compare Isa 21:9, "Look, here comes a chariot," and also I Kgs 19:5.

(2:9) *My beloved is like a gazelle or a young roe*: He resembles it in speed, and perhaps also in the power of its sexual desire. In the spring gazelle bucks wander the mountain seeking mates (Feliks, 1964:59). "Three Wishes" (no. 40), too, uses the gazelle as a figure for a youth speeding to his beloved, but with a vastly different tone: here the emphasis is on serene grace, as the lover comes of his own will, there it is on panicky haste, as the gazelle is pursued by a hunter.

After v. 9b, LXX adds "on the mountains of Bethel [*Baithēl*]," an addition presumably based on 2:17b (on *beter* understood as Bethel, see below on v. 17). But since *bēter* is there rendered "ravines," the addition in v. 9b suggests the possibility that *koilōmatōn* in v. 17 is an exegetical revision.

peering in through . . . glancing in through: *Min* is used from the speaker's point of view. The youth is looking from the outside inward.

(2:10b-13) A magnificent description of earth's awakening in spring.

(2:10) *my beautiful*: LXX adds "my dove" here and in 2:13. In v. 10, Vulgate has "my dove" after *ra'yati*. "My dove" was probably a scribal elaboration in different Hebrew texts. LXX lacks *ul'ki lak* in v. 10.

(2:11) *the winter has departed*: The "winter" (*s'etayw*) in Palestine is the rainy season, which usually ends in mid-April. The time envisaged is May or June, when the figs and vines begin to ripen, the vines blossom, and the migrant birds appear.

(2:12) *the time of song (zamir)*: or, "the time of pruning." This stich is in "Janus parallelism" with the A-stich and the C-stich of this verse (Gordon, 1978:59); that is, it is deliberately ambiguous and faces two directions. *'et hazzamir* means (1) "the pruning season," which according to the Gezer Calendar is the two months between "the month of harvest and measuring" and the "month of summer fruit";² and (2) "the time of the song" (of birds). The first meaning looks back to the preceding description of the change of seasons; the second looks forward to the mention of the song of the turtledove.

in our land: The possessive pronoun conveys with amazing conciseness powerful feelings of ties to the land. These ties are not the national bond of a people to its territory, but rather the bond of the individual to the earth, which is to say, the bond of the individual spirit to nature.

(2:13) *The fig tree sweetens its young fruit*: *Han'tah*, correctly explained by Ibn Ezra and Ginsburg as meaning "to sweeten," is the same verb as *HNT* "embalm" (Gen 50:2, 3, 26). Embalming was done by infusion of aromatic mixtures. Here the fig tree is pictured as sending its fragrant fluids to its unripe fruits, in a way reminiscent of the vines' and the mandragoras' giving forth their fragrances (2:13; 7:14). The personification suggested in this phrasing implies that the springtime blossoming is not something that happens to nature but something that nature does.

and the vine is in bud: *S'madar* refers to the bud of the vine. V. 13, "We'll see if . . . the *s'madar* has opened," shows that the *s'madar* is the bud, which may or may not have opened. The season envisioned in this passage is thus early spring, that is, April or May. In *w'hagg'panim s'madar* the predicate noun is used adjectivally; cf. Exod 9:31; Ezra 10:13 (Ginsburg).

(2:14) *My dove in the clefts of the rock . . .*: "Dove" is a term of affection. Used in this context the epithet suggests a point of comparison: he is unable to see through the lattices or to reach her (Ibn Ezra), while she for her part is hesitant, like a reticent dove, to go forth from her covert.

your form (mr'yk): Point *mar'eyk*, a *plene* writing of the singular, like *midbareyk* in 4:3.

2. Lamaire (1975:15-18) argues that *zamir* means "vintage" and that the setting is the grape harvest in June-July. The description of the blossoming of the land, however, pertains more to April-May.

(2:15) *Catch us foxes* . . . : an enigmatic verse, whose literal meaning has no relation to the context. But if the verse is meant figuratively, what is it a figure for? And who is speaking? There are many ways of explaining this verse—all of them more or less guesses. Of the common explanations, these are the least forced:

1. The verse is a wish (spoken by either lover) that nothing be allowed to harm the girl's blossom of feminine charm. The foxes stand for any harmful force; cf. the apparently proverbial use in Neh 3:35 (Budde).
2. The verse is a wish that nothing be allowed to harm blossoming love (Delitzsch).
3. The "vineyards" represent nubile girls (1:6; 8:12), and little foxes represent lustful youths (Rudolph, Gordis).

I tend toward the third interpretation. The jackal or wolf cub represents a lusty lover in Egyptian songs nos. 4 and 49. In no. 4 the girl calls her lover "my (little) wolf cub." (Egyptian *wns* means "jackal" or "wolf," and Hebrew *šū'al* means "jackal" or "fox," so the correct translation for both might be "jackal.") In Theocritus, too, foxes symbolize lascivious young men and women (Ode I, 48–50, and Ode V, 112), and the theft of grapes represents sexual intercourse, as a scholium to Ode V explains (Wendel, 1914:179). The plurals "foxes" and "vineyards" do not exactly fit the situation in Canticles, but perhaps the verse is a saying or a snippet of an earlier song (thus Murphy, 1981:112). "Vineyards," however, may be a "plural of composition" referring to one girl's body; for other examples see GKC §124b. The girl calls her bosom "the vineyards of Ein Gedi" in 1:14, and in 6:2 *gannim* apparently alludes to the same thing as *ganno*, i.e., the girl's body. "Foxes," on the other hand, must be a true plural.

According to my tentative interpretation of this verse, the Shulammitte's reply—requested in v. 14—begins here. (There are examples of women speaking of themselves in the 1st pl. in amatory contexts in Mesopotamian literature; see chap. 5, n. 23.) Her reply is coquettish (Murphy, 1981:112). She is gently teasing her lover, "tending" or "guarding" the vineyards as she was ordered to do. She is saying: watch out for the little fox out there—his intentions are clear enough! The term *'eh^czu* is used playfully, for it can mean "trap" (in order to get rid of) or "hold on to" (so that he cannot get away), as in 3:4 (cf. Würthwein). The banter in 2:15, by this interpretation, is erotically suggestive as well as affectionate and gentle. In any case, *'eh^czu* is a rhetorical imperative; an emphatic wish addressed to no one in particular. LXX and Vulgate have "foxes" only once, but the repetition (as in MT) seems preferable for stichometric balance.

(2:16) *My beloved is mine and I am his*: The girl declares their mutual love, as in 6:3, where the order of the clauses is reversed.

he grazes among the lilies: lit., "who grazes . . ." This is an expression of delicate and luxurious pleasures. He grazes or feeds (*ro^ceh*) not in the pasture but among the most delicate and lovely of flowers. "He grazes/feeds" is ambiguous as to the implicit object—himself or his sheep—but in context the phrase certainly alludes to lovemaking, explaining the preceding sentence by specifying in what way the lovers belong to each other. The phrase may allude in particular to kissing, for lips are compared to lilies in 5:13. The phrase may refer to lovemaking more generally, the lilies being the girl's charms in her "garden," where the boy "eats" (see 4:16–5:1). (On the various connotations of *ro^ceh* see commentary to 1:7.)

(2:17) *Before the day blows softly in, and the shadows flee*: Opinions are divided as to whether v. 17a refers to the coming of evening or morning. *'ad šeyyapuah hayyom* is a phrase without clear parallel and might mean either. But the logic of the context points to the morning. The shadows of day do not "flee" as the sun sets, but stretch out, *nittim* (Jer 6:4; Ps 102:12), and linger until they cover the earth. When the sun rises, the shadows of night may be said to flee. Furthermore, the events described here fit the end of the night better than the evening. The girl is in her house and hesitates to go out. The boy speaks to her in secret, something that would be difficult to do in the late afternoon, when her family would be on their way home or at home and awake. And if we suppose that the meeting occurred during the day, what would be the point in her urging her lover to flee before nightfall, when the danger of being caught would be less? Or what would be the point in urging him to come to her (if that is the intention) before nightfall? If she is calling him to her, we would expect her to tell him to come after dark. We should therefore picture the scene as taking place just before dawn.

Opinions are also divided on whether she is urging her lover to flee or to come to her to spend the rest of the night. While I consider it fairly certain that the time to which she is referring is the morning, I am not sure whether she is calling him to her or sending him away, and I am not sure that we are supposed to be sure. But even a double entendre has a primary meaning, a meaning you are supposed to hear before you catch the hidden meaning. The primary meaning here is that he should flee. *Yapuah* may then refer to the morning breeze. As day approaches, the Shulammitte urges her lover to flee the way he came. *Sob*, "turn," indicates turning from her and departing, not turning to her, which would require "to me." Whenever SBB indicates physical turning and lacks an adverb specifying the goal, it means either going around and encompassing something, pivoting, or turning away from something. Thus the imperative *'sob* in I Sam 22:17, 18 means "turn from me [Saul] to something else," and *wattissob* in I Kgs 2:15 means "[the kingdom] turned away [from me] and went to my brother." (SBB probably could indicate turning to the speaker if it were accompanied by *'elay*, though there are

no examples of this in the Bible.) Furthermore, there would be no point in the Shulammitte's calling her lover to turn *to* her at a time when he was already facing her and speaking to her. So she is probably telling him to depart.

on the mountains of Bether: Many identifications have been suggested for *harey beter*, including the following:

1. The *mons veneris*, which has both "spices" (as in 8:14?) and a cleft, in Hebrew a *beter* (thus Haupt 1902a:233; but can *beter*, whose root-meaning is "to divide, cut in two," really mean "cleft" in the sense of *rima mulieris*? And why "mountains," in the plural, if *mons veneris* is meant?).
2. Breasts, which are "mountains" separated from one another (Lys). (But again, *beter* is probably not the appropriate word for that sort of division.)
3. Mountains that divide, or will divide, the lovers from each other (Ginsburg).
4. Mountains of spices, on the assumption that *beter* is a type of spice synonymous with *b^esamim* in 8:14 (Peshitta translates "spices").
5. Mountains of the ravines, hollows (LXX *orē kōilōmatōn*).
6. Mountains in a place called Bether (Vulgate, Aquila, Symmachus).

The last explanation is the most likely, at least as the primary meaning of the word. Carroll (1923/24:79) identified this Bether with modern Bittîr, Bar Kōq̄hba's Beitar, a village 11 km. southwest of Jerusalem, occupied in the First and Second Temple periods. The town's name is variously spelled. In a verse following Josh 15:59 in LXX A, *baithēr* is mentioned. In LXX B this is spelled *thethēr*, undoubtedly a corruption of *bethēr*. Jerome quotes this verse in his commentary on Micah 5:2 and spells the name *Baether*. In his commentary on Zech 8:19, he writes *Bethel*, for *Bether*. In I Chr 6:44 LXX A, *baiththēr* is mentioned instead of Beth Shemesh. In III Esdras 5:17 LXX B, a *baitēr* appears. *Beitar* is usually spelled *bytr* in the Talmud, but in the Jerusalem Talmud *bytrr* appears, as does *btr* (j. Ber. I, 3:4). (The geminated *-t* seems to be original, but some of the above spellings suggest secondary aspirantization of the *taw*). There is no phonological obstacle to identifying Canticles' *btr* (original pronunciation uncertain, but probably with a geminated *-t*) with Beitar/Bittîr. The mountains of Beitar are mentioned here because of their proximity to Jerusalem, the locale of the Song. Even today you can see gazelles running on the hills west of Jerusalem, a vision of extraordinary grace. The Shulammitte is urging her lover to return like a gazelle on the mountains over which he came to her like a gazelle.

3:1-6

(Girl)

- (1) On my bed night after night
I often sought my soul's beloved;
I sought him, but did not find him.
- (2) I shall get up and roam the city,
through the streets and squares.
I shall seek my soul's beloved.
I sought him but did not find him.
- (3) The watchmen who roam the city found me.
"My soul's beloved—have you seen him?"
- (4) Scarcely had I left them
when I found my soul's beloved.
I seized him—now I won't let him go
till I've brought him to my mother's house,
to the room of her who conceived me.
- (5) I ask you to promise, girls of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the hinds of the wild:
do not disturb, do not bestir love,
before it wishes.

(Girls of Jerusalem?)

- (6) Look who's coming up from the wilderness
(in)* columns of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
all sorts of merchant's powder!

*3:6 *b^etimrot* (MT *k^etimrot*)

This unit shares with the preceding one the theme of the nighttime search. This time it is the girl who goes forth to seek her lover. Each lover is willing to face the dangers of the night to seek the other. The girl asks the watchmen where her lover is and gets silence for an answer; they neither help nor hinder her. But soon she finds him, embraces him, and declares she is going to take him back home. The adjuration again hints that she and her lover are about to make love.

There are those who see this unit as a narration of a dream (Delitzsch, Budde, Würthwein, Gordis), for the story begins in bed and continues with some very strange behavior on the girl's part—she goes out and wanders the streets at night. But while the events do have a dreamlike quality, there is no sign that the girl is asleep. As for the strange behavior, we may compare