

LITERARY FORMS AND MOTIFS

There are five literary forms in ancient love poetry that are seen in the Song of Songs: (1) The Admiration Song, (2) The Song of Yearning, (3) The Arrival Song, (4) The Invitation, and (5) The Prayer for Success in Love. A short description of each follows:

1. The lover sings of the wonderful qualities of his or her beloved. The description of the physical beauty of the lover is often in the song, as well as the moral and mental virtues are the object of praise.
 - *My lover is radiant and ruddy, / outstanding among ten thousand. /His head is purest of gold; his hair is wavy / and black as raven (5:10-16)*
2. This form exhibits the man or woman a strong desire of the love one and sings about. Plotting to get to the beloved, concerned about obstacles, expressions of sickness and despondency, and appeals to the beloved to quickly return to them are obvious in this form.
 - *All night long on my bed / I looked for the one my heart loves; / I looked for him but did not find him (3:1).*
3. This form is self explanatory by its title; it is a joyous song about the return of the loved one.
 - *Listen! My Lover! / Look! Here he comes, / Leaping across the mountains, / bounding over the hills (2:8)*
4. Like the Arrival Song, its name is descriptive enough. It is a song where the loved one invites the beloved to come with him or her.
 - *Come away, my lover, /and be like a gazelle / or like a young stag / on the spice laden mountains (8:14)*
5. The lover has a desire for the loved one and prays to a god or goddess for help by wooing them on their behalf.
 - Note: This type of form is not evident in the Songs of Songs. Scholars suggest that its absence signifies that the Israelites did not want to degrade their God to the level of a love charm.

There are ten Motifs of the Song of Songs and occur in the above literary forms. These are metaphoric terms, leitmotifs, poetic reference points, literary types, and pieces of stylized imagery that occur repeatedly and they are the following: (1) Lovesickness, (2) the Door, (3) the Gazelle or Stag, (4) the Kiss, (5) the Breasts, (6) the Authority figure, (7) the Garden or Vineyard, (8) the Theft or Entrapment of the Heart, (9) Horses and Chariots, and (10) Limbs described as precious metals. The aforementioned are not an exhaustive list, but rather the most common.

1. This motif usually occurs in a Yearning form. The love one desires the beloved one so much that it has made him or her sick.

- *O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my lover, / what will you tell him? / Tell him I am faint with love (5:8)*
2. Like lovesickness, this motif usually occurs in the Yearning form. The door represents both obstacles and opening. The sub motif, at times, is frustration—either the door will not open or when it is open the beloved is found to be angry or absent
 - *My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening, / my heart began to pound for him / ... /I arose to open for my lover, / ... / I opened for my lover, /but my lover had left; he was gone (5:5-6)*
 3. This motif is metaphorical and it is usually the man that is called a leaping gazelle or stag by the women. Gazelle or Stag motif is often used in the arrival song and sometimes the invitation. There are times when the men call the women a doe.
 - *My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag (2:9).*
 4. Obviously enough, this motif is a frequently seen in love poetry. Sometime the kiss is combined with the stylization of the beloved as a brother or sister, and it occurs in a song of yearning in which the women longs to be free to kiss her beloved openly.
 - *If only you were to me like a brother, /who nursed at my mother’s breasts! / Then, if I found you outside, /I would kiss you, / and no one would despise me (8:1).*
 5. This motif is often exhibited in the song of admiration. As seen in the Book of Proverbs (5:19), “May her breasts satisfy you always,” exemplifies the Israelites fondness and understanding of the breasts.
 - *I am a wall, / and my breasts are like towers. /Thus I have become in his eyes / like one bringing contentment (8:10).*
 6. Often in the songs of yearning, the lover is frustrated over being kept away from his or her lover by some authority figure—civil authorities, such as: guards, appears in this type of love poetry.
 - *The watchmen found me / as they made their rounds in the city. /They beat me, they bruised me; /they took away my cloak, /those watchmen of the walls! (5:7).*
 7. This motif is very descriptive and uses two of the human senses: sight and smell. A garden with its fragrances is delightful, and pretty with its various fruits. There are times when the garden is a metaphor of the woman’s body and is used this way in the invitation song.
 - *Awake, north wind, / and come, south wind! / Blow on my garden, /that its fragrance may spread abroad. /Let my lover come into this garden /and taste its choice fruits (4:16).*
 8. Seen in the songs of yearning, the lover speaks of having his or heart stolen away by the beloved.

- *You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; / with one glance of your eyes, /with one jewel of necklace (4:9).*

9. Horses and Chariots are often seen in arrival songs, where the man is portrayed as arriving in an entourage with horses and chariots. This imagery incites feelings of valor and manly splendor.

- *Look! It is Solomon's carriage, / escorted by sixty warriors, / the noblest of Israel (3:7).*

10. Stones, metals and jewels are frequent metaphors in love poetry.
His arms are rods of gold, /set with chrysolite. (5:14).