

Synesthesia

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Song 5:10

(BHS)

(NLV)

דודי צה ואדום
דגול מרבבה:

My loved one is bright and red,
the best among 10,000.

You may recognize “David” in “loved one.” The next word, *zach*, means radiant or glowing in descriptions of sunshine (Isa 18:4), manner of speech (Isa 32:4), or wind (Jer 4:11). NASB glosses, “dazzling;” KJV, “white;” Young’s, “clear.” But the most interesting word to me is *'adom*.

Dam means “blood.” With an Aleph in front, the verb *'adam* means “to be red,” like wine (Prov 23:31). An *'odem* is a red stone, a ruby. But the word used here in Song 5:10, *'adom*, means red like blood (2 Kings 3:22), like lentils (Gen 25:30), like grapes (Isa 63:2).

It can also be the color of a heifer (Num 19:2), and of a red horse in a vision (Zech 1:8). Many translations treat the word as an ordinary human color and gloss “ruddy.” LEB does so with a footnote, “Literally ‘red.’” NLT glosses, “dark and dazzling.” But the New Life Version treats it as shown above, simply, “red.” (“Ruddy” in 1 Sam 6:12 is a different word form.)

I think the color here means “bright red.” She is not really describing how he appears, but how he affects her. It is like he brilliantly shines crimson. He is eye-popping. He is larger than life. He is a radiant adonis—like a god—from whom she cannot look away. He explodes in her mind like fireworks. To say that “He shines in dazzling splendor” (The Passion Translation) is really to speak of her feelings about him, not how he actually looks. He seems that way to her because of her affected state.

This is the female counterpart to the male, “Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me” (Song 6:5). He can’t stand her gaze, she stirs him inside, he is beside himself. Both girl and boy are shaken and disoriented by their visceral reaction to the other’s amatory presence.

There is a psychological phenomenon known as Synesthesia. Go ahead and google it. Google [images](#) of it in fact. Go on.

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Interesting, no? Synesthesia is: what normally is experienced as one kind of sensation is felt as another. For example, you may “hear” the color green, or upon hearing a certain word you “taste” it on your tongue. You may “smell” a ringing bell or “see” music. (Most synesthetes consider their condition a joy and a pleasure and a helpful tool to enjoy life; some Christians consider it a gift, given to enjoy God better.)

Perhaps what is being described in the Song of Songs is emotion bedazzling the senses of the lovers. She sees him in affected sizzling scarlet; he cannot withstand her eyes. What they *feel* is experienced in how they *see*; an emotionally-induced synesthetic state.

The first word of line 2 is the passive participle of *dagal*, meaning “outstanding, distinguished.” He is highly visible to her among many thousands. He is one sweet tree in the forest (2:3). To him, she is a lily among brambles (2:2). The disarray of their senses is exclusive to each other. They don’t experience this with anyone else; their one-and-only lover commands their whole attention.

Israel was supposed to feel this way about Yahweh, to the exclusion of any other gods. Completely smitten by their one God such that any thought of worshipping another simply wouldn't occur to them.

As a man is called to lose himself in his wife (Prov 5:19), and take no thought for another (v20), so their devotion to Yahweh should be. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:31 – 32).

O that we were so enamored with Jesus that temptations to sin would find no toehold in our hearts! We should be people that hardly notice occasions to sin, with our souls completely occupied. This is how Jesus lived. He never sinned or did wrong.

And this is the way you will be some day. When he returns for you, you will find in him your all-in-all, and have no thought for anything else. On that day, the very idea of being distracted won't even cross your mind.

Remember that in the here and now, when you find yourself seduced to look here or there for satisfaction in life, or fulfillment, or peace, or serenity, or acceptability. To rely on anything but Christ for these good things is ultimately to worship that thing rather than him.

Beware of the good things of this life!