



The Shulammitte Is the “Rose” of Sharon: When a Rose Is Not a Rose; Vectors that Stimulate Recall: Sight, Sound, Touch, & Smell: “These Foolish Things”

Song of Solomon 2:1 - [SW] “I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.”

1. This verse plus the identity of the singer enables us to get a general geographic fix on two important locations mentioned in the opera. The person singing has been referred to in our study as the Shulammitte. This is not a proper name but rather a designation of her place of residence.
2. The Shulammitte is a citizen of a city named Shunem (שׁוֹנֵם \shū' nem\). In Semitic languages the “L” called *lamed* (ל) in the Hebrew and the “N,” called *nun* (נ) are often interchanged and explains the spelling Shu**l**ammite instead of Shu**n**ammite.
3. The title Shulammitte is found only twice in Scripture and both are in Song of Solomon 6:13—**שׁוֹנֵם** *Shulammiyth*. However it has a variant spelling of **שׁוֹנֵם** *Shunemmiyth*. Thus the hometown of the heroine in our opera is Shunem which lies just north of the Valley of Jezreel \jez' rē-el\ near Mount Tabor \tā' ber\ in North Central Israel.
4. However, she characterizes herself as the “rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.” Sharon (שָׂרׁוֹן) is a coastal plain that stretches some fifty miles along the Mediterranean Coast from Mount Carmel in the north to Joppa in the south.
5. This coastal plain formed a valley west of the central mountains and the lower hill country called the Shephelah \she-fē' la\. The water runoff from these formations was retained in the valley by the Kurkar ridges, a series of on-shore and off-shore ridges of carbonate cemented sandstone that runs along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.
6. This created an environment where vegetation could thrive including an abundance of wild flowers, one of which is the “rose of Sharon.”
7. Many commentators assign this verse to Solomon whom they designate as a type of Christ and therefore we have this lyric to the famous hymn:

“The Lily of the Valley”

Charles W. Fry

**I have found a friend in Jesus, He's everything to me,
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul;
The Lily of the Valley, in Him alone I see
All I need to cleanse and make me fully whole.
In sorrow He's my comfort, in trouble He's my stay;
He tells me every care on Him to roll.**

***He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star,
He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.***

8. This is an obvious reference to Song of Solomon 2:1, the only place in Scripture this term is used.
9. However, the Shulammitte is the one who sings this part and she describes herself as the “rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys” as she addresses her right man, the Shepherd Lover.
10. This flower is not a rose, however, there is not enough information to determine exactly what flower it is. The word used is **חַבְצֵלֶת** *havasseleth* and the debate over its identity is summarized by:

Pope, Marvin H. *Song of Songs*. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977), 367:



The exact nature of the flower is unknown. Attempts to get a clue from analysis of the word have not been especially productive. Aquila's [2d century Jewish translator of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek] rendering kalykosis, "rosebud," and Codex Venetus *rodon* [ρόδον], "rose," give rise to the traditional "rose of Sharon," which is hardly correct since the rose apparently was brought in at a later period from Armenia and Persia. Many writers have taken the word to designate the meadow-saffron, a pale, flesh-colored flower with leafless stem which covers the fields of warm regions after the mowing. Apart from the rose fanciers, the consensus is that the plant is some sort of common bulb, such as the asphodel, crocus, hyacinth, or narcissus. The crocus or daffodil is taken as a fair guess.

11. Since all of these possibilities are lilies I conclude that there are not two flowers mentioned here by the Shulammitte but one: the "rose," probably a crocus or the like, which she designates as the "lily of the valleys" in the Sharon Plain.
12. Whatever its definition, this flower grew widely throughout the Sharon Plain and the Shulammitte identifies herself with it which she describes as the lily of the valleys of Sharon. We will stay with the traditional translation, "rose of Sharon."
13. In verse 12 she speaks of her "pouch of myrrh" and in verse 13 the "henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi" as examples of the fragrance of memories she possesses of the Shepherd.
14. Here in chapter 2 verse 1 we are able to discover where the Shepherd grazes his flock of sheep. He works in the Sharon Plain which runs fifty miles along the Mediterranean coast.
15. From the Shulammitte's comments in verse 7 she doesn't know exactly where along the valley he is presently located but she wishes to be with him there.
16. We now learn that the Shepherd has memory vectors for her—the aroma of the "roses" that cover the hillsides of the valleys of Sharon. They are beautiful to the eye and lovely to the smell.
17. The Shulammitte is in the Shepherd's soul as he is in hers. Their recall of each other is stimulated by different vectors but both deal with olfaction. For the Shulammitte her sense of smell detects the aroma of her "pouch of myrrh" that reminds her of her Shepherd Lover whom she compares with the fragrance of the "henna blossoms in the oasis of Engedi."
18. The Shepherd's sense of smell is excited by the ubiquitous "rose of Sharon," the lily-like flower that covers the valleys of Sharon Plain and causes him to recall his Shulammitte Woman.
19. One of the major vectors for memory is the sense of smell and this sense is highly active in the relationship between right man and right woman as we learn from the first chapter of Song of Solomon.
20. The ladies today wear perfume or cologne while the men wear shaving lotion, and both, we trust, use deodorants. But most have their favorites and these become the aromas that cause romantics to be reminded of each other.
21. In order to smell something, molecules from it have to make it to your nose. Everything you smell is, therefore, giving off molecules that are generally light, volatile chemicals that float through the air into your nostrils.
22. When you smell the aroma of perfumes you are smelling esters, organic molecules, evaporating from them. How these esters are detected and processed by the brain is described by:

**Ariniello, Leah. "Smell and the Olfactory System." *The Journal of Neuroscience*, Summer 1995,
<http://apu.sfn.org/content/Publications/BrainBriefings/smell.html>**



The smell, or olfactory system can distinguish thousands of odors. Scientists have identified a large gene family that they believe codes for odor binding sites, or receptors, in the olfactory lining of the nose. In the olfactory bulb, information from these receptors is organized into patterns that the brain may interpret as different odors.

Sniff a rose or freshly cut grass. Scents evoke many images and sensations so common we don't give them much thought.

The olfactory system, which senses and processes odors, is one of the most vital parts of the brain. For most animals, it is the primary mode of communication and influences many important functions, including reproduction and taste.

The nose contains specialized sensory nerve cells, or neurons, with hairlike [sic] fibers called cilia on one end. Each neuron sends a nerve fiber called an axon to the olfactory bulb, a brain structure just above the nose.

Most animals can distinguish thousands of odors. Early studies showed that different olfactory neurons respond to different odors and that odors stimulate specific patterns of activity in the olfactory bulb.

Olfactory information travels not only to the limbic system but also to the brain's cortex, or outer layer, where conscious thought occurs. In addition, it combines with taste information in the brain to create the sensation of flavor. Learning more about these links will help explain how odors affect our thoughts, emotions and behavior.
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23. It is the brain's olfactory system that detects and processes odors and then forms associations with other memories in the cerebral cortex where long-term memories are stored.
24. Thus the aroma of a perfume or a flower can stimulate recall and create an association with past experiences and relationships and the resultant constellation of memories becomes the source of many love songs that emphasize recall of an absent spouse. Here's an example:

"THESE FOOLISH THINGS (REMINDE ME OF YOU)"

From the London revue "Spread It Around" (1936)
(Holt Marvell, Jack Strachey, & Harry Link)

A champagne flute that bears a lipstick's traces,
An airline ticket to romantic places,
And still my heart has wings,
These foolish things remind me of you.

A tinkling piano in the next apartment,
Those stumbling words that told you what my heart meant
A fairground's painted swings
These foolish things remind me of you.

You came, you saw
You conquered me
When you did that to me
I somehow knew that this had to be.

The winds of March that make my heart a dancer
A telephone that rings but who's to answer
Oh, how the ghost of you clings
These foolish things remind me of you.

I know that this
Was bound to be
These things have haunted me
For you've entirely enchanted me.

The smile of Garbo and the scent of roses
The waiters whistling as the last bar closes
The song that Crosby sings



These foolish things remind me of you.

How strange, how sweet
To find you still
These things are dear to me
That seem to bring you so near to me.

The scent of smoking leaves, the wail of steamers
Two lovers on the street who walk like dreamers
Oh, how the ghost of you clings
These foolish things remind me of you;
Just you.

25. Good song. It illustrates the principle of recall in a romantic relationship where the man and the woman are physically separated from each other. Their mutual absence is mollified by the ability of the brain to keep the other present within their souls.
26. The writers of “These Foolish Things” sum up this principle with the line, “These things are dear to me that seem to bring you so near to me.”
27. And so both the Shulammitte and the Shepherd benefit from the sense of smell that takes advantage of their unity of souls.