

Solomon's Pick-Up Lines: Eyes Like Doves, Hair Like Goats' cf. Hair Like Secretions of Worm Larvae; Teeth Like Shorn Sheep, SOS 4:1b-2

33. Solomon however is just getting warmed up. He uses the “Eyes like doves” line to set up his next pick-up line:

Song of Solomon 4:1 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #6] “How beautiful you are, my lover, how beautiful you are! [KS: Pick-Up Line #7] Your eyes behind your veil are like doves;

1. To understand #7 we need to understand the culture of the tenth century B.C. The comment did not mean that the Shulammite’s eyes looked like the *eyes* of doves but that her eyes looked like *doves*.
2. Tenth-century Egyptian art depicts women’s eyes made up to resemble the shape of a dove. In Israel it was the most beloved of the species and as a result was protected. [See TXP: Egyptian Art ca. 1000 B.C.]
3. A description of the place the dove held in Israelite society is discussed in:
Orr, James (ed.). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 2:871-72:
DOVE (דּוֹבָהּ *yonah*): The most loved of all the myriads of birds of Palestine. Doves were wild and more illusive. The thing that escapes us is usually a little more attractive than the thing we have. Their loving natures had been noted, their sleek beautiful plumage, their plump bodies. They were the most precious of anything offered for sacrifice. Because of their docility when caged, their use in sacrifice ... they were allowed to nest unmolested and flocked all over Israel. (p. 871)
 The veneration cherished for doves in these days is inborn, and no bird is so loved and protected as the dove—hence it is unusually secure and happy and its mournful cry is the product of our imagination only. The dove is the happiest of birds. Hosea 7:11 and 11:11 each compares people with doves; the first, because the birds at times appear foolishly trusting; the second, because, while no bird is more confiding, none is more easily frightened. (p. 872)
4. Christian theologians are correct to point out that the use of the dove in poetry often makes reference to purity and that the eyes of a person are windows to his soul and character. The implication in this passage is that the Shulammite has a pure character as can be seen through the eyes.
5. All of this is true. But it was used by Solomon as a pick-up line. He didn’t know the woman. They’ve just met. But he notices that her makeup causes her eyes to resemble the shape of doves and he makes mention of it as a means of offering yet another hollow compliment designed to appeal to the Shulammite’s approbation lust.
6. He also mentions that they are revealed behind her veil. The Hebrew word is the feminine noun צִמָּה *sammah*. It can refer either a veil or a woman’s hair and in this context it describes the long locks of the Shulammite, which we know according to Song 5:11 were “black as a raven.”
7. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*’s article on hair, “Long black tresses were the pride of the Jewish maiden and matron.” Jewish women kept their heads covered but their long black hair formed a veil around their faces.
8. The Shulammite’s long black hair framed her eyes and this caught the attention of Solomon and inspired Pick-up Line #7. The king again is captivated by the symmetry of the Shulammite’s bone structure and how her large eyes and black hair complement her appearance.

9. Solomon continues with a metaphorical description of her hair:

Song of Solomon 4:1 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #6] “How beautiful you are, my lover, how beautiful you are! [KS: Pick-Up Line #7] Your eyes are like doves behind the locks of your long black hair; [KS: Pick-Up Line #8] your hair is like a flock of goats that have descended from Mount Gilead.”

10. Yikes! Is this really the right thing to say? Apparently it is since Solomon considers himself to be a sophisticated wooer of women. To Solomon, the Shulammité’s flowing locks remind him, from a distance, of how flocks of goats appear when descending from Mount Gilead.
11. The goats of Israel were black; their hair was usually long and hung down from their bodies. It was woven into tents, as noted of the Kedarites in Song 1:5, tent ropes, carpets, cloaks, sacks for storage of wheat and rice, and trappings for camels, horses, and mules. The goat is among the clean animals and thus acceptable for sacrifice in accordance with the Levitical offerings and goats’ hair cloth was one of the coverings for the Tabernacle.
12. The vision of these long black-haired animals coming down Mount Gilead was one of great beauty marked by the contrast of colors: the green grass of the mountain, the bright blue sky above, and the dark flow of the flock moving down the hillside.
13. Nothing is more beautiful than nature’s selection of colors whether in the appearance of the various species of fauna and flora or a combination of them gathered together.
14. The natural beauty of a woman involves coloring as well. Solomon observed the swirl of the Shulammité’s black hair curling around her eyes and together they reminded him of the flocks descending Gilead. He is not comparing her to a goat but rather her hair to the hair of goats. This was not an insult. Goat hair was considered to be of high quality and beautiful.
15. Today hair care advertisements promote shampoos that are said to make your hair shine like silk. Here’s an example from the Hair Care page of Amazon.com: a shampoo called BioSilk. [TXP: BioSilk Shampoo]
16. Its ingredients contain “hydrolyzed silk.” Silk comes from the larvae of silkworms. Now think about it: would you compliment a woman by telling her that her hair shines like silk? The advertisement informs us that if she would use BioSilk we would instantly see her hair do this. So to say, “Your hair shines like silk” would be a compliment according to Farouk Shami, founder of Farouk Systems and manufacturer of BioSilk shampoo.
17. But would you say to a woman, “Your hair shines like the secretions of worm larvae”? No, you would be more discreet. You might say, “Your hair shines as if it were fine silk.” Likewise, Solomon did not say to the Shulammité, “Your hair reminds me of the hair that hangs off the side of goat.” He is much more subtle: “Your hair is like a flock of goats flowing down from Mount Gilead.” Much better. Here is the translation of verse 1:

Song of Solomon 4:1 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #6] “How beautiful you are, my lover, how beautiful you are! [KS: Pick-Up Line #7] Your eyes are like doves behind your flowing black tresses; [KS: Pick-Up Line #8] your hair flows like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.

v. 2 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #9] “Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes which have come up from their washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost her young.”

1. Solomon doesn’t let up. He’s started at the top and is working down. Eyes and hair are mentioned first and now the teeth. But again he uses a metaphor: her teeth are like a flock of freshly washed sheep.

2. To get the idea we need a little information about the sheep indigenous to Israel in the tenth century B.C.:

Tenney, Merrill C. (ed.). *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 5:386:

Sheep. Western man is so used to seeing white sheep that any other color seems odd. Early sheep were probably brown, but in Egypt there were white, brown, and black forms before 2000 B.C., perhaps much earlier. It is traditional to regard Biblical sheep as white; this is largely correct. It is assumed that the sacrificial animals had to be white, without spot. The sheep became pre-eminent in offerings and sacrifices, and very large numbers were used every year.

3. In the ancient Near East it was customary to wash sheep before sheering them. Solomon compares the whiteness of the Shulammite's teeth to a flock of newly shorn sheep. He then compliments them individually:
4. "Every one bears twins" indicates the Shulammite has a full set, sixteen in both the upper and lower jaw. Each tooth has a partner on each side and the opposite jaw. There are eight incisors: four in the upper and four in the lower jaw. Her canines are two and two; bicuspid four and four; molars six and six. "None barren among them" means that none of them are missing.
5. In the ancient world dentistry was very poor. Loss of teeth required the insertion of plugs, a rudimentary forerunner to the bridge. These were generally wooden although those who could afford it had bronze.
6. An idea of what ancient oral hygiene was like is provided by discoveries from ancient Assyria-Babylonia. The first prescription dealt with the removal of plaque. It was a mixture of salt of Akkad (ancient Akkadia), ammi \am' mī\ (a type of carrot), Lolium (rye grass), and pine turpentine that was intended to remove film and deposits on the teeth, whiten discolored teeth, and prevent bad breath. The mixture was applied to the teeth and then rubbed with the finger. Then the mouth was to be rinsed with a mixture of "kurunnu-beer" (made from spelt which is an ancient variety of wheat), oil, and honey".
7. The second prescription describes a method of cleaning the mouth and in particular when an individual has "mouth trouble". An ancient dental record reads:

If a man's mouth has mouth trouble, thou shalt mix Lolium in well water, introduce salt, alum, and vinegar therein. Thou shalt leave it under the stars. In the morning, thou shalt wind a linen round his forefinger; without a meal thou shalt cleanse his mouth.
8. We cannot speculate if the Shulammite used either of these prescriptions but her set of pearly whites were sparkling enough for Solomon to describe them in Pick-Up Line #9 as white as newly-shorn sheep:

SOS 4:2 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #9] "Your teeth are as white as a flock of newly shorn ewes coming up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is missing.

v. 3 - [KS: Pick-Up Line #10] "Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. **[KS: Pick-Up Line #11]** Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate behind your veil."

9. The compliment about her lips makes reference to their coloring not their shape. They were naturally red or scarlet. She was not wearing lipstick since this was not introduced until the time of the Roman Empire and then by prostitutes.
10. The phrase, "Your mouth is lovely" misses the point made by Solomon. The word for "mouth" is מִיתְבָּר *mithbar* and refers to her speech.

11. Attractiveness has to do with the physical assets of a member of the opposite sex. Compatibility involves thought and because the Shulammite is smart and can hold her own in a conversation with the king of Israel, Solomon is also attracted to her intellect.
12. Conversation is how a couple is able to advance beyond the attractiveness stage of romance. However, because a man and a woman can have an in depth conversation does not necessarily mean they are right for each other.
13. Solomon is impressed with the fact this woman, found in a vineyard, is both intelligent and articulate while maintaining poise and grace in his presence.
14. To be impressed with one's demeanor and intelligence does not mean that the person is your right person. In this case, Solomon is fascinated with the Shulammite's social graces and her ability to communicate. But he does not really know her because he hasn't had time enough to become acquainted with her soul.
15. The Shulammite is using doctrine to withstand Solomon's advances, but she has no interest in him beyond the fact he is her king.
16. Solomon on the other hand continues his dissertation on the Shulammite's anatomy:

SOS 4:3 - **[KS: Pick-Up Line #10]** "Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. **[KS: Pick-Up Line #11]** Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate behind your veil."