

PART I

Song of Songs

The three chapters gathered here on the Song of Songs share a common agenda: to challenge “literal” readings of the Song, ones that assumed and continue to assume in various ways that the Song is about human love and sex (rather than about divine love).¹ How this can be a literal reading is beyond me, for it merely substitutes one allegory for another, a carnal allegory for a divine allegory. The Song has as much to say *directly* about human sex and love as it has about divine love—that is, almost nothing. So interpretations that take, in all the senses of the word, the Song literally as about sex between human beings must make allegorical moves comparable to the long-standing patristic and medieval tradition, which took it as an allegory of God’s love for Israel or the Church. In my *Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door*, I began the process of disputing such “literal” readings by taking them as far as they will go. Responding to a challenge from Stephen Moore (personal communication), I attempted a carnal allegory of the Song, a pornographic reading titled “The Schlong of Schlongs.”² That carnal allegory touched on a range of questions regarding the function of sexual language and poetry, narrative and sexual description, explicitness and realism, repetition, fetishism, and the range of sexual practices suggested in the Song, such as sex between variously gendered partners, bestiality, intergenerational sex, group sex, water sports, menstrual sex, fisting, discipline, and so on.

The first chapter, “The Second Coming,” carries on that task of constructing a carnal allegory, although now I zoom my voyeuristic and porn-tinted lens in on a very specific question: Why does repetition, the compulsion to repeat, feature so prominently in the Song of Songs? The answer takes us deep into Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan before emerging to read the Song in a very different way.

The second chapter, “A Fleshly Reading,” continues to challenge the orthodoxy that the Song speaks about human sex (and love). The first sought to push what is really another allegory, a carnal allegory, to its logical conclusion: you

want humans fucking and sucking, it says, well, here they are. By contrast, the second chapter moves on from such concerns, via a treatment of sadism and masochism, to ask what it may mean to focus on the metaphoric screen that so many try to pull aside to see what is “really” going on in the Song. But what if we look at the screen itself? Since it talks about nature, does that mean that plants and animals have their own fleshly sensuality? Here is the first emergence of a widening and thickening interest in paraphilias that will become obvious as the book proceeds.

The third chapter, “Making It, Literally,” takes this concern with the metaphoric screen to another level, seeking a rigorously literal reading that cuts the metonymic transfer of metaphor, delivering us a succulent, oozing, dripping, and sensuous flora and fauna with, at one level, scant concern for human beings and that, at another level, suggests an economics of allocation.