



It'll never sell in Peoria

Publisher analyzes Solomon's Song of Songs

MEMO FROM: HOLINESS HOUSE PUBLISHERS, Jerusalem, Israel.

To: King Solomon

RE: *Song of Songs* ms.

Dear Sol:

The Editorial Board has read your latest manuscript and asked me to respond.

First of all, it is superb poetry. Of all the 1,005 poems you've written, this is probably the best.

There are some mechanical problems, such as the sudden transition from speaker to speaker and place to place which makes it difficult to follow. However, these could be corrected by editing.

Chapter Two is extremely well written. In fact it could almost stand alone. That Rose of Sharon and Lily of the Valley reference is beautiful (as long as you don't insist it is Messianic).

Not only that, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the charismatics don't come up with a catchy little chorus using your words "His Banner Over Me Is Love." The subsidiary rights using that phrase on banquet banners could be financially rewarding to us all.

However, the Editorial Board has serious questions about the rest of the manuscript.

Why, Sol, do you have to start off with all that kissing? It's not that the Board sees anything wrong with kissing, mind you. But to put it right up front?

We checked through the manuscript and found you use the word "kiss" three times. That's too many, Sol. Especially for our Bible-oriented audience. We suggest you modify verse two so it reads: "Let him shake my hand" rather than "kiss me with the kisses of his mouth."

Otherwise, you can simply write off the fundamentalist market.

And why all this reference to "virgins." Virgin to you may mean purity, but to most of our readers it has strong sexual connotations. That's a definite "no-no" in today's evangelical market.

We've been in touch with the Editorial Board over at Seraphim Publishers. They're the ones who've been publishing those Isaiah manuscripts which keep trickling in.

They've really gone round and round on the use of the word "virgin." Seems old Isaiah is a stubborn sort and insists the Lord himself told him to write it that way.

However, Seraphim says their editors

will win out—only they may have to wait until Isaiah dies. They feel the term "young maiden" is far more acceptable and much less offensive.

Another thing, Sol. Why do you have to keep bringing up this inter-racial business. I realize you're still hurting after all that criticism in the press about your relationship with the Queen of Sheba. But remember, a lot of us tried to warn you about associating with those Africans. Now it seems you're trying to justify yourself by making your heroine a black

way they are.

But all that is incidental to the thing that really bothers the Board. It has to do with all the raw sex in your manuscript. Now don't think we're prudes here at Holiness House. We just believe there are some things you shouldn't put into print.

We've gone over the manuscript with a sharp pencil and are alarmed at the use of so many dirty words. Not only do you use the words "kiss" and "virgin" but you use "bed" five times, "lips" four times, and worst of all, you use the word "breast" six

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woman—and the hero "white and ruddy."

It'll never sell in Peoria, Sol.

Do you remember all the trouble we had when we published our novel on Ruth? It was a financial disaster. The only way we struggled through was because your Dad picked up the tab.

We lost a lot of advertising over that one, Sol. The Hassidic *rebbe* actually told the members of his congregation to throw rocks at our building. At us—Holiness House—who have so long supported the orthodox cause. How quickly your friends turn against you!

What upset them was your father's insistence we identify Ruth as a Moabite woman. Our Board wanted to change the plot, making Ruth a Jewish girl who had been kidnapped over to Moab. But after his run-in with Nathan, your father got pretty sticky about the truth. We had to go along since he was paying the bill.

On top of that the TV station over in Jordan—they are the ones with the color transmitter, you know—used the book as propaganda to try to prove the Palestinians have as much right to the land of Israel as do the Jews—since your great-great grandmother was from Moab.

That's the reason, Sol, the Board thinks you'd be a lot better off if you made your heroine a white girl—or at least a "high yellow." We cannot afford another racial skirmish—not with the price of books the

times. Two of those times you refer to her "two breasts."

Don't you know how words like that inflame the base passions, Sol. Just because you have a thousand wives and are familiar with such things, others, even among the rabbis, simply cannot handle it.

You'll never sell this book to the evangelicals, Sol. I can guarantee that!

Why do you insist on being so blatant? You speak of "joints of thy thighs" and "navel is a round goblet." It's just too much, Sol, even for the liberated Jew.

If you were writing for the secular market it would be a different story. The ghost-writer who published all those things about your late father—you remember the slanderous stuff he wrote about Uriah and your mother—the only way he could get away with that was by selling the parchments in the streets.

No good evangelical would ever read that trash.

You've got to remember, Sol, our market is in the synagogues and in the Temple Book Store. (Actually TBS is our biggest customer.) Thus, if we get the chief *rebbe* angry with us, or if our prime distributor, MoneyChangers Inc. is offended, we might as well close shop and go home.

The problem, Sol, is the use of specific terms. If you were willing to tone things down we might be able to use the manuscript. But your insistence on using

"breast" rather than "bosom" (which is far more acceptable) puts us in a difficult position.

Dr. Hurvitz, the psychologist on our Board, says the problem is even more serious. He suspects you have a deep-seated rebellion against your mother.

This is especially evident as you come to the end of your manuscript. You go wild with all this sexual stuff. On page 7, paragraph 8, you compare the mammary glands with "clusters of the vine."

Then on the very next page, even before the reader has had time to get his thoughts back on the Lord, you actually compare the frontal anatomy of your heroine with the flat chest of her little sister.

The use of pornographic phrases such "breasts like towers" leaves us no alternative but to reject your manuscript.

Sol, when the rabbi on our Board read the manuscript he literally ripped his garments off his shoulders—so deeply was he offended for God.

I realize you stated in your cover letter that all this was symbolic, that it was metaphorical and set in Oriental imagery. Some on the Board felt you were trying to sneak in that old Messianic message again—some sort of pre-nuptial Song of Christ. But we quickly concluded that nothing this dirty or offensive could be messianic.

I'm sorry to write you like this, Sol. We've been friends a long time. We've done rather well with the book of poems your father sent us before he died. And your little "How To" book is having a brisk sales among the young people of Jerusalem. There you are willing to warn people of God's wrath towards adultery and prostitution. But here you use phrases like "He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts."

I hope you understand, Sol, but here at Holiness House we are dedicated to publishing only that which will bring glory to God. If this book ever gets into print it could bring shame and disgrace to the name of Jehovah for centuries.

We feel we are doing God a favor by refusing to publish it.

Regretfully,
Eliahu Shamir
Editor-in-Chief

P.S. We are also returning your other manuscript, Sol, the one where you begin by trying to pass yourself off as a preacher. We're sorry about the coffee stains on the cover.

The Board feels it is too negative. Too much stuff about vanity. Chapter Three about the seasons is good, but the rest of the book lacks redeemable qualities. I think you might hire a printer to pull out some of the catch phrases, such as "Cast your bread upon the water . . ." They would make good slogans for bumper stickers on chariots.

In short, Sol, stick to writing proverbs. ↪