The title of Patrick Hunt’s book promises an exposition on the poetry in the Song of Songs. In eleven chapters the author elaborates on different aspects of Song of Songs. It is not so much a book on the poetic style, forms, and structure as one might expect from the title but an analysis of “the imagery as the language if [sic] love” (18). After the editor’s preface and Hunt’s own prologue, he presents an opening chapter on the focus, history, and hermeneutics of the book and gives as well a short eclectic outline of its influence on art and literature.

In the first chapter, Hunt briefly touches on the question of authorship, classifying Song of Songs as “pseudepigraphically attributed to the legendary King Solomon” (4). He presents different proposals for the dating of the book. He seems to favor a late date but is noncommittal toward the issue. Hunt claims that his approach to Song of Songs is “overwhelmingly literal in love lyric celebrating physical love” (13).

The following chapters are a special kind of commentary not structured according to the sequence of the text but pointing either to figures of speech or to the imagery used. The subjects are: the figurative language of desire (ch. 2); subtle wordplay: concealed paronomasia and secrets (ch. 3); sensory imagery (ch. 4); the lovers’ garden: fertility...
imagery in flowers, fruits, and spices as eroticism (ch. 5); animal imagery: stags, gazelles, and flocks as virility and wealth (ch. 6); the lovers’ banquet (ch. 7); the lovers’ dualisms: binary language in poetic parallelisms (ch. 8); protection, power, and priceless worth: love’s displays of wealth, authority, and security (ch. 9); the lovers’ transformations: similes (ch. 10); and the lovers’ synthesis: metaphors (ch. 11). A bibliography and an index of keywords close the book.

In chapter 2 the author identifies two literary mechanisms. These are “individual arousal through literary descriptions of sexual behaviour” (21) and “mutual arousal by role-playing between individuals who can externally act out what is portrayed verbally” (22). Hunt introduces thirty figures of speech. For the classification, he relies on the classical tradition, acknowledging that dependence is not required. Sometimes he points out that no Hebrew term exists for the figure of speech presented.

For the connectedness of observation, he follows Quintilian on four levels of similitude: “animate to animate, animate to inanimate, inanimate to animate and inanimate to inanimate” (26). Some of these figures of speech are taken up in later chapters. Most of the time these figures of speech are in accord with other studies presented on the subject. Hunt makes the reader aware of these figures of speech and enables the reader to apply these methodological tools.

Hunt has pioneered for the figure of speech “subtle or concealed paronomasia” in earlier articles. He expounds on it in chapter 3. In this inspiring chapter he introduces this lost or forgotten figure: “The word suggested [but not used] should be a synonym of the one and a rough homophone of the other. Quite often the word which appears by substitution in the text will be the more obscure or less common one than the one not used” (69).

In chapter 4 Hunt describes a poetic landscape of textual images as multiple sensory clusters. He emphasizes how the visual, gustatory, tactile, olfactory, and auditory senses enrich one image “by multiple sensory evocation” (85). He classifies the images of sixty-six verses into these five types according to the number of senses involved in order “to provide an immense landscape of sensuality” and to make “the memorability fuller and therefore more satisfying” (100–101). He rightly observes that the richness of the sensory images in Song of Songs supersedes every biblical book, if not any other literature at all.

Chapter 5 considers the lovers’ garden and its fertility imagery in flowers, fruits, and spices, which all contribute to eroticism. Hunt lists the textual images from different contexts, regardless whether they belong to the garden, the open field of the countryside, the mountains, the vineyards of En-Gedi, or the house of wine. He presents abundant comparative material from biblical, Greek, Roman, and ancient Near Eastern sources. He
refers also to the cult in medieval cathedrals and contemporary English phrases (104–5). All this is done to support his argument that flowers, fruits, spices, and perfumes contribute to eroticism in love lyrics, having the effect that they are “all intended as aphrodisiacs” (128).

Hunt elevates the *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) as “not only one of the most famous but also the dominant theme in the book” (107). Even if the term appears only once in Song of Songs (4:12), it reveals one of the most concentrated images and might refer to the paradise garden. The lovers’ garden has a figurative function as a “vehicle to fantasize sensuality and eroticism” (138).

In chapter 6 Hunt covers the subject of animal imagery and interprets stags, gazelles, and flocks as symbols of virility and wealth. Therefore, he draws on animals in the epic of Gilgamesh and in Egyptian religion as well as in Greek sources, with the purpose of establishing “virility, swiftness and strength, uninhibited play and sexual expression … as natural extensions of the animal world” (145). He also points out the wealth associated with the possession of animals. Of interest might be that Hunt develops his own classification of the animals. Thereby he detects the “hoofed animal motif” and judges that the wild animals of the “natural openness of the Levant’s hills and mountains … are metaphors for virility and youthful strength, capable of great sexual appetite and great energy to pursue desires for a great length” (160).

Chapter 7 discusses the lovers’ banquet. When referring to the lovers’ banquet, Hunt does not develop the banquet motif found in 2:4 but deals with those texts that “show both the semantic and poetic symmetry shared by appetites for food, wine and sexual experience” (163). Accordingly, he interprets these texts as banquets of love as well as of food. He tends to interpret the details in an allegorical way. For example, when the woman goes to the garden of nut trees (6:11), he interprets the “coveted seeds with hard shells … as ‘walls within walls’ or doubly enclosed in this protective metaphor of the *hortus conclusus*” (174).

In chapter 8 Hunt returns to literary questions and deals with the lovers’ dualism expressed in parallelism. He has taken note of the major studies of Lowth, Kugel, O’Connor, Watson, Berlin, Schökel, and Mariaselvam and attempts to identify further parallelisms. He introduces causal, intensifying or anabatic, elaborative, mirror, metaphorical, embedded, diminishing or catabatic, topographical, interrogative, and resultative parallelism. These figures of speech are densely arrayed. They enforce the sensuality and eroticism of the poetry of Song of Songs. Parallelism is concerned not only with the structural mechanism, a structural device of binary or ternary connections, but also with the content and the logic of the argument.
In chapter 9 Hunt is concerned with wealth, authority, and security as displays of love. The different subjects of images he touches on are broadened by “images conveying military strength and wealth as a complement to the fertility imagery” (245). This leads to a balanced presentation of material from male and female viewpoints. Hunt postulates that “any rigidly exclusive gendering of authorship must be avoided” (246).

Hunt presents the subject in three subparagraphs: (1) love protectively displayed as military strength and security; he investigates eighteen different phrases; (2) love’s power displayed as royal authority; here he expounds on the figures king, queen and prince; and (3) priceless love displayed as great wealth; he is concerned with the different precious materials of gold and silver, gems and jewelry, ivory, trees, purple, textiles, clothing, and spices.

Chapter 10 takes up the simile as a figure of speech, already introduced in chapter 2. Hunt understands similes as mere comparisons used to express the lovers’ transformations. He emphasizes that, besides the density of correspondence, the density of dissonance enriches the textual landscape. Once more Hunt relies on Quintilian’s fourfold typology of animate and inanimate things and develops new object categories: zoomorphic, botanical, architectural, topographic, artifactual, celestial, comestible, and others. In addition to the object categories, Hunt develops seven types of similes (284) for the analysis of Song of Songs. After a short appreciation of the imagery of the body (284–86), he scrutinizes twenty-seven similes in Song of Songs according to these seven types and the object categories. From the evaluation he draws the questionable conclusion that Song of Songs “acts as a bridge … between older Mesopotamian or Nilotic West and possibly younger Classical West” (319).

In his final chapter Hunt attends to metaphors as the lovers’ synthesis. He again relies on Quintilian and uses the same object categories as in the preceding chapter and applies them to twenty-one phrases with approximately thirty-one metaphors. He finds consonance between the metaphors and the entire text and praises Song of Songs for representing “the highest level of literal achievement in poetic form” (347).

Hunt presents a literary analysis of Song of Songs. He sees Song of Songs as an anthology of love poems expressing eroticism. This starting point influences his interpretation and the extrabiblical evidence used for the exegesis. In some chapters he is concerned with the literary devices of figurative language, similes, and metaphors. He develops new classifications and makes a significant contribution with his studies on subtle wordplay and clusters of sensory images.
The other chapters have an encyclopedic style, compiling all the references somehow contributing to the themes of the lovers’ garden, banquet and dualism, animal imagery and protection, and power and priceless worth as male-oriented expressions of love.

Hunt considers a huge amount of sources from different times and cultures. He refers to the ancient Near East and Egypt as well to Greek and Roman authors. He does not limit himself to them but refers also to all sorts of relations such as Shakespeare, Freud, British folk sayings and Kama Sutra, to name just a few.

A lot of the comparative material and the additional information is far-fetched and does not contribute to the interpretation. For example, Hunt writes about the qinah lament in Ps 137 and that the exilic Jews as slaves of the king had seen the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and also that “excavations at Nineveh have produced strong indication of imported soil on the Kyunjik mound, which can even be perceived via recent aerial photo interpretation in geoarchaeological and GIS research” (107). Here a methodological problem presents itself. This huge amount of material lacks a critical evaluation. Often long excurses give lots of information but do not support the argument. This broad range of textual comparisons contributes under the aspect of association for the interpretation of an image but usually not for its usage within the context. Accordingly, diachronical questions play only a minor role.

Occasionally Hunt falls short in proving his argument. He explains the declaration “Your stature compares to a palm tree” (7:7) with a reference to the usage of the branch of the palm tree in the Egyptian language: "Related to the date palm (from the Middle Egyptian sign list of a planted palm branch), one of the ancient Egyptian names for Egypt was t3-mri or ‘Ta-meri’ “) (176) Thereby he asserts that the Egyptians would have associated the name of their country with the palm tree. He does not consider that t3-mri usually means “the beloved country” and that the palm branch is probably used merely for sportive ideographic intention. Otherwise the term b’j (palm risp) or w—3 (palm tree-pole) would have been expected. Even if the Egyptians associated their land with the palm branch, as they are grew especially in the Delta area, its contribution to the interpretation of the biblical text remains obscure.

In 3:6–11 the king Solomon is coming on a sedan through the wilderness. Hunt neglects this context and images the palace as place of action for 3:7: “That such guards are around the bed here, i.e. nearby, would suggest that the fine bed is in a large palace or it would otherwise be an extremely crowded context without any privacy” (251). He speculates that the lover might have “the combined strength of sixty men for legendary lovemaking” (251).
Concerning the literary analysis, a thorough differentiation between syntactical and semantic observations would have contributed to the argument of the book. Sometimes an expected discussion does not take place. For example, when dealing with animal imagery (ch. 6) one would have expected a discussion on the topic of using the gazelles and does (2:7; 3:5) as euphemistic wildcards for the names of God as El Shaddai and Elohim Sabaoth. This had been suggested, for example, by Murphy (The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 133). A “ground breaking study” as the cover claims would be expected to have utilized earlier basic research such as H.-P. Müller, Vergleich und Metapher im Hohenlied (OBO 56; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1984).

On the formal side, the book contains a lot of repetitions, the longest being twelve identical lines on pages 54 and 68–69: “Outside Song of Songs … the word not used.” In a second edition some typing mistakes should be corrected: if – of (18), mosr – most (61), sitz im leben – Sitz im Leben (2), Uber – Über (67, 357), allegeminen – allgemeinen (67, 357), wrods – words (70), hs3t – μς3τ (143), Handworterbuch – Handwörterbuch (349), Aberglobens – Aberglaubens (349), uber – über (350), fünf – fünf (350), Lieber – Lieder (353), Holilied – Hohelied (354), Grunzuge – Grundzüge (355). Once the series and the author have been confused, thus creating an unknown author Nicot instead of Longman (111). The reference to A. Leonard is misplaced (354).

Apart from these critical annotations, Hunt presents an extensive study useful for those who are interested in literary figures and creative allusions of extrabiblical texts. This study would be even more useful if an index of biblical references could have been added to make proper use of the book for identifying the classifications, interpretations, and allusions the author found. This book can be recommended to those who are interested in a huge amount of extrabiblical texts alluding to similar topics as Song of Songs. Since Greek and Hebrew are always transliterated and translated, the book is accessible for the nontheologian. The strength of the book is the great knowledge of the author drawing on many sources, especially classical ones, pointing to many allusions, but they need the careful evaluation of the academic reader.