The Origin of the World

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The famous psychologist, professor Lacan, was the last owner of Courbet's *The Origin of the World*. He loved the painting so much that he couldn't even bring himself to look at it. Instead, he hid it behind a "safer" painting.

The Chinese called it the "valley of the roses" (watch out for the thorns!), the Persians, the "honey-pot" (watch out for the bees!), and the Greeks, "the mound of Venus" (mind the steep climb!); to each era its fantasies and its theories about the feminine mystique. Then there are the testimonies of poets, painters, and even of some famous psychiatrists. *The Origin of the World* is a work of art only suitable for lovers of intrigue.



Gustave Moreau

Cleopatra, 1887 Watercolour and gouache highlights, 39.5 x 25 cm Musée du Louvre, Paris

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Song of Songs

- ³ All night long on my bed
- I looked for the one my heart loves;
- I looked for him but did not find him.
- ² I will get up now and go about the city,

through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves.

So I looked for him but did not find him.



Sleeping Venus

Giorgione, c. 1508-1510
Oil on canvas, 108.5 x 175 cm
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, Dresden





³ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city.

"have you seen the one my heart loves?"

⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves.

I held him and would not let him go

till I had brought him to my mother's house,

to the room of the one who conceived me.

⁵ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you

by the gazelles and by the does of the field:

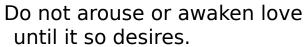


Venus Rising from the Sea ("Venus Anadyomene")

Titian, c. 1520
Oil on canvas, 75.8 x 57.6 cm
National Gallery of Scotland,
Edinburgh







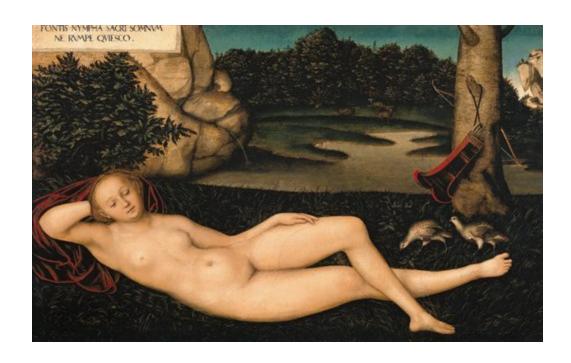
- ⁶ Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?
- ⁷ Look! It is Solomon's carriage, escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel,
- 8 all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle,



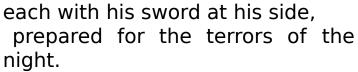


The Nymph at the Fountain

Lucas Cranach the Elder, c. 1530-1534 Oil on wood, 75 x 120 cm Thyssen Bornemisza Museum, Madrid







⁹ King Solomon made for himself the carriage;

he made it of wood from Lebanon.

¹⁰ Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold.

Its seat was upholstered with purple,

its interior inlaid with love. Daughters of Jerusalem, ¹¹ come out,

and look, you daughters of Zion.





Venus of Urbino

Titian, 1538 Oil on canvas, 119 x 165 cm Galleria deglia Uffizi, Florence





Look on King Solomon wearing a crown,

the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.

He

⁴ How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.





The Three Graces

Peter Paul Rubens, 1630-1635 Oil on wood, 220.5 x 182 cm Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid





² Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.

³ Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil halves of like the are pomegranate.



⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David.

built with courses of stone:

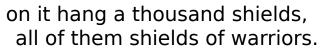


Danaë

Rembrandt, 1636 Oil on canvas, 185 x 202.5 cm The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg







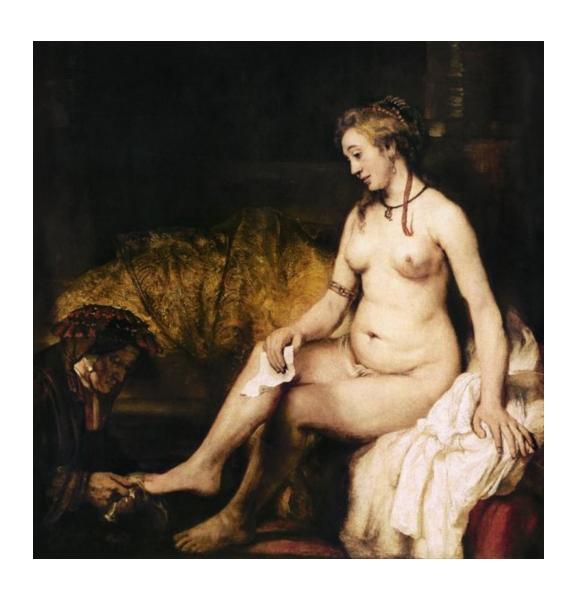
- ⁵ Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies.
- Ontil the day breaks
 and the shadows flee,
 I will go to the mountain of myrrh
 and to the hill of incense.
- You are altogether beautiful, my darling;
 there is no flaw in you.





Bathsheba with King David's Letter or Bathsheba Bathing

Rembrandt, 1654 Oil on canvas, 142 x 142 cm Musée du Louvre, Paris





8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,

come with me from Lebanon.

Descend from the crest of Amana,
from the top of Senir, the summit
of Hermon,

from the lions' dens and the mountain haunts of leopards.

⁹ You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.





Young Woman Sleeping

Anonymous, 18th century French miniature painted on ivory





¹⁰ How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!

How much more pleasing is your love than wine,

and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice!

¹¹ Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride;

milk and honey are under your tongue.



The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.



Nude Maja

Francisco de Goya, 1797-1800 Oil on canvas, 98 x 191 cm Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

