

# Come Be My Love: The Song of Songs, *Paradise Lost*, and the Tradition of the Invitation Poem

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THE FINAL SPEECH IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST* BELONGS TO EVE, who urges Adam to hasten away with her, out of the garden and into the world below:

[B]ut now lead on;  
In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
Art all things under heaven, all places thou,  
Who for my wilful crime art banished hence. (12.614–19)

Eve's "In me is no delay" carries at least two important echoes. It recalls the first description of Eve in book 4, where she is characterized by "sweet reluctant amorous delay" (4.311).<sup>1</sup> But the words also recall—indeed, translate exactly—"In me non est aliqua mora," the final line of what has been termed "the most famous and perhaps the oldest of the earlier mediæval love songs" (Waddell 323). This tenth-century lyric, "Iam, dulcis amica, venito" ("Come now, sweet friend"), is a prime example of one of the most prominent and enduring genres of European love poetry, the invitation—in which the speaker urges the beloved to abandon one place and come away to another, better place. The tradition of the invitation poem begins with the biblical Song of Songs and flourishes in the medieval and early modern period, including such well-known poems as Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." Milton may not have known "Iam, dulcis" directly, but he was certainly familiar with the genre of love poetry that it represents, and he chose to cast the final speech of *Paradise Lost* as an invitation poem.<sup>2</sup>

Our understanding of Milton's poem is enriched if we recognize the traditional tropes and features of the invitation, since *Paradise*

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*Lost* contains no fewer than five speeches that clearly belong to the genre. This essay therefore begins by examining some of the history of the invitation poem and its chief characteristics, which have yet to be satisfactorily defined.<sup>3</sup> I start with the Song of Songs, which sets a number of important precedents for subsequent invitation poems, including the presence of a dialogic framework. Even more notable is the Song's use of displacement: although the invitation poem is a love poem, it devotes its attention not to the lovers themselves but to their destination—the *locus amoenus* (“pleasant place”), described in sensuous detail, to which the beloved is invited. Almost all the invitation's erotic energy is thus channeled into an account of the landscape; this sublimation of physical desire into locodescriptive fantasy turns what could be an abrupt demand (*Come to me, here*) into something more equitable: *Come with me, to a distant place we can share*. Yet the Song also introduces a troubling element, a concept of love as involving not only pleasure but self-sacrifice as well.

I then turn to two later examples of the genre, written six hundred years apart: “Iam, dulcis” and “The Passionate Shepherd.” I focus on these two not because they are necessarily the best-known invitation poems, or even the ones that Milton would have known best, but because they bracket and represent the postbiblical tradition that Milton inherited. “Iam, dulcis” is the oldest surviving medieval example of the genre; it closely imitates the Song of Songs but also alters its emphases in ways that become increasingly pronounced in later invitation poems. “The Passionate Shepherd,” meanwhile, is the first invitation poem in English, but it is also a culmination, since it draws both on the tradition stretching back to the Bible and on a separate, classical tradition of invitation poetry. Both works show tendencies that are typical of the genre's development. As the invitation poem evolves, the dialogue of the Song increasingly

gives way to monologue, and its mutuality to something more like seduction; similarly, the Song's imaginative concentration on a *locus amoenus* and its physical features yields to an emphasis on material goods. Hence, these later invitations, for all their beauty, are still more troubling than their model. In the Song, the trouble derives from the difficult, self-denying nature of love itself; in subsequent examples, it often derives more from the uncertain intentions of the speaker—the possibility of imposition or deceit.

In the invitation poem, therefore, Milton inherits a tradition that is both sacred and profane, capable of expressing extremes of both love and deception. In *Paradise Lost* he highlights the genre's double nature by giving the first two invitations to unfallen speakers—the first to the divine voice itself, the second to Adam—and the next two to Satan. In the final section of this essay, I argue that reading these passages in the context of the broader tradition reveals their full complexity. Doing so alerts us, for instance, to the element of threat or difficulty that exists even in the two “innocent” invitations. It also draws attention to an ominous omission: since the invitation poem is traditionally grounded in dialogue, it is particularly unsettling when Adam's stirring invitation to Eve at the beginning of book 5 receives no direct response.

Above all, an awareness of the invitation tradition transforms our understanding of Eve's final speech and hence of the whole concluding movement of the poem. In the passage quoted above, Eve draws attention to the fact that Adam's love for her has led to his exile (“Who for my wilful crime art banished hence”). But in the Song of Songs, and in many of the invitation poems that follow it, such self-banishment, though painful, frequently figures also as a positive force, a prelude to new growth. The hopefulness that Eve expresses in her speech can thus be seen to derive not only from the promise of Christian redemption that she and Adam

have been given but from her reconceiving of exile as invitation. Most important, the invitational tropes in Eve's speech allow us to recognize it as the long-delayed response to Adam's invitation in book 5. Despite her tone of submissiveness to, even dependence on, her husband, Eve in these lines is thus reasserting the mutuality of their relationship, continuing a conjugal dialogue that stretches across the apparent rupture of the Fall.

### The Song of Songs and the *Lech L'cha* Trope

The Song of Songs comprises a series of passionate erotic lyrics, spoken alternately by a woman and a man. It constitutes not so much a single, unified poem as a collection of lyrics in various styles: poems of yearning, poems of praise, brief narrative sketches. Critics disagree on how to divide up the poems, and sometimes even about whether a given verse is spoken by the man or the woman. But clearly the woman is given at least an equal role in the dialogue; indeed, her words begin and end the book. The Song thus differs from most of the love poetry that derives from it, in which the male voice tends to dominate; in the Song the two voices express reciprocal desire and emerge as equal participants.

The speakers' equality is reflected in the Song's three invitation poems, which form a small but crucial part of the dialogue: a recent analysis by Elie Assis considers the invitations as defining structural markers in the Song, the culminating points of each of its major movements (20–23). The second invitation, beginning at chapter 4, verse 8 (“Come with me from Lebanon”), is spoken by the man and the third, beginning at chapter 7, verse 11 (“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields”), by the woman. The first invitation, the longest and by far the most influential of the three, is shared. The man speaks, but for once his words are presented as reported discourse, repeated or perhaps imagined by the woman as she sits indoors:

The voice of my beloved!

. . . . .

Look, there he stands behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows, looking through  
the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me:  
“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;  
for now the winter is past, the rain is over  
and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of  
singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in  
our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines  
are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the  
covert of the cliff,

let me see your face, let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.”

(*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Song of Sg. 2.8–14)

The landscape to which the beloved is invited is in itself beautiful and fertile. But the true erotic power of these lines, as of every other invitation in the poem, depends on a simple but effective principle: namely, that the natural landscape being described is closely associated with the bodies of the lovers. This link has already been established a few verses earlier: “As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. / As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men” (2.2–3). The identification grows stronger as the poem progresses, notably through the Song's repeated use of what in Arabic poetry is known as a *wasf*, a poem of praise in which each part of the beloved's body is described figuratively in terms of natural features (Black 9–64):

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy. . . .

. . . . .

His eyes are like doves beside springs of water,  
bathed in milk, fitly set.

His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding  
fragrance.

His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.

(5.10–13)

Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with  
lilies.  
Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of  
a gazelle.  
. . . . .  
You are stately as a palm tree, and your  
breasts are like its clusters. (7.2–7)

Topography and anatomy are interfused. Every invitation to “come away” to a distant place is also an invitation to erotic exploration—and, equally, to self-discovery, since the *locus amoenus* reflects both the lovers.

The conflation of place and person is perhaps clearest in the second invitation, which also foregrounds a complication or tension that characterizes all three of the Song’s invitation poems: “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. / Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, / from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards” (4.8). Again, this landscape echoes the description of the beloved’s body a few verses earlier, where the woman is likened to a mountain on which animals dwell: “Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. / . . . / I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense” (4.1–6). But here the difficulty arises. The woman is compared to a slope, a mountain, a hill. Is the request that she “depart from the peak[s]” of Lebanon, then, truly an invitation to a more amenable place, as it seems at first? Or is it, more troublingly, an order to quit a familiar landscape for one that is more alien?

The tension persists in the lines that follow. Having invited the woman away from the wilds of Lebanon—presumably to the cultivated area of Jerusalem, where the poem is set—the man describes her thus: “Your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. / A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed / . . . / a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from

Lebanon” (4.11–15). Once more the woman is compared to the land into which she is being invited: she is a cultivated “garden,” and the “honey and milk” of her tongue recall “the familiar epithet of the land of Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey” (Landy, “Song” 314). Yet at the same time the woman is twice associated with the wild “Lebanon” she is being asked to abandon. The invitation is thus more complex than it seems, and this complexity becomes an important feature of subsequent poems in the tradition. The addressee is invited to a desirable and welcoming place, one that echoes her own features as well as those of her beloved. Yet the proposition is not simple, since she is being asked at the same time to take a difficult, even fearful, step, by leaving the familiar surroundings of home.

The same sense of conflict would seem to be absent from the first invitation in the Song, quoted above: the woman is invited out from behind a “wall” to enjoy a verdant landscape that resembles herself, a world where “the voice of the turtledove is heard,” just as she herself is compared to a “dove” whose “voice is sweet” (4.9, 12, 14). But even here there is an implied threat or difficulty. As Assis points out, in this archetypal invitation poem the Hebrew words *ulchi lach*, which have invariably been translated as “come away” (in the injunction repeated at the beginning and end: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away” [2.10, 13]), literally mean “go away” (83–90). For all its seductiveness, then, the poem culminates in what reads like an act of banishment. Yet the puzzling expression offers an important insight, since it points to a precedent that helps explain the ambiguity of threat and welcome, exile and homecoming, that characterizes all the invitations in the Song.

*Ulchi lach*—literally, “begone with you”—is the same command, only in feminine form, that God speaks to Abraham in Genesis 12.1: “Go [*lech l’cha*, or “begone with you”] from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will

show you.” These words mark a major turning point in Genesis, a transition from universal history to the story of a chosen people. God’s command constitutes both a serious test of faith, since Abraham is being asked to forsake everything that he has known, and a covenant, since God goes on to promise that a new homeland awaits, to be populated by the offspring that have eluded Abraham (“I will make of you a great nation” [12.2]).<sup>4</sup> The echo of these words in the Song is therefore apt, however discordant the phrasing may seem, since the invitation to a fresh and fertile new world (the garden of love, of sexuality) is at the same time an injunction to leave the familiar home of one’s parents.

Behind God’s command to Abraham, moreover, lies a yet earlier biblical formulation of the need to leave the parental home and seek abroad: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2.24). Taken by itself, this verse seems to prescribe exogamy: love and marriage require a going forth to find someone new. In context, however, the verse is far more ambiguous. Earlier in Genesis 2, God recognizes that “it is not good that the man should be alone” and therefore forms all the animals out of the ground to show Adam; but none is deemed fit to be his partner (2.18). Finally God forms Eve directly out of Adam’s body, prompting Adam’s triumphant cry: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; / this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken” (2.23). Does a man “leave his father and mother and cling to his wife,” then, because she is other—not his parents but a new and undiscovered world? Or is it because she is closer to him—not alien earth but “flesh of his flesh”?

This ambiguity resounds through the later command to Abraham to leave his father’s house—is Abraham being asked to go forth, or to come back to his true home?—and into the echo of that command in the Song of Songs. The Song has often been recognized as

a version of the story of Eden (Landy, *Paradoxes* 183–265). The love relationship depicted in the Song displays, at every level, the ambiguity suggested by Genesis 2: that love is both a going out from oneself toward another and a finding of oneself reflected or embodied in the other. The invitations are focal points of this ambiguity, with their double sense of going forth and coming back, their summons to take a frightening leap into the unknown and to return to a landscape of comforting familiarity.

The same ambiguity—what I call the *lech l’cha* trope—is reflected in the Song’s frequent fusion, or confusion, of outside and inside, nature and culture. The third invitation, spoken by the woman, seems to gesture outward, to a fresh new world of natural growth:

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the  
fields, and lodge in the villages;  
let us go out early to the vineyards, and see  
whether the vines have budded,  
whether the grape blossoms have opened and  
the pomegranates are in bloom.  
There I will give you my love.  
The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and  
over our doors are all choice fruits,  
new as well as old, which I have laid up for  
you, O my beloved. (7.11–13)

But this is followed immediately by a contradictory desire to retreat indoors, to the comforting familiarity of family love: “O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother’s breast! . . . / I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of the one who bore me” (8.1–2). On consideration, even the preceding invitation into the vineyard is not really a move out into the world, since the vineyard, like the enclosed garden of the second invitation (4.12), is a liminal space: outdoors, yet still private. Although the invitations are all directed outward into the natural world, they lead not into the wilderness but into something more tame and familiar: the garden and the vineyard represent nature, but nature cultivated and



prepared (“fruits . . . which I have laid up for you”). These intermediate spaces are apt correlates of a love object, who both participates in the great public world of the not oneself and also stands distinct from that world.

The Song of Songs thus sets a number of significant precedents for the invitation poem. It is, in the first place, radically dialogic. Second, it conflates place and person, so that an invitation to travel is simultaneously an invitation to love, and topographical descriptions of the proposed destination also function as suggestions of physical and emotional intimacy. Finally, the invitation always implies a dual movement. The journey is presented both as a return toward a safe, familiar place and as a banishment to the unfamiliar and unpredictable world outside the self.

#### “Iam, Dulcis Amica, Venito”: Sweet Impertunity

The tradition of the invitation poem flourished in the Middle Ages. It drew its inspiration from the Song of Songs but also introduced new features, which are already visible in the celebrated “Iam, dulcis amica, venito.” This lyric, which is preserved in three manuscripts dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries,<sup>5</sup> not only derives most of its imagery from the Song but also preserves its most definitive features. “Iam, dulcis,” like the Song, takes the form of a dialogue between a male and a female speaker, although scholars disagree about which stanzas belong to which voice (Dronke 243–52; Bradley). Once again, there is a clear erotic displacement: the speaker’s desire is channeled into a lavish description of the *locus amoenus*. And once again, together with the promise of pleasure comes a hint of anxiety, a recognition of the sacrifice that love entails, just as in the biblical model. “Iam, dulcis” differs from the Song chiefly in the disruption of the balance between its two speakers, a foregrounding of one’s more importunate desire.

The lyric begins in the voice of a man, who speaks through most of the poem:

Iam, dulcis amica, venito,  
quam sicut cor meum diligo!  
Intra in cubiculum meum  
ornamentis cunctis onustum!

Ibi sunt sedilia strata  
et domus velis ornata  
fioresque in domo sparguntur  
herbeque fraglantes miscentur. (1–8)

Come now, sweet friend,  
whom I love as my own heart!  
Enter into my chamber  
laden with all decorations!

There the couches are laid out  
and the house is hung with curtains,  
and in the house are scattered flowers  
and fragrant herbs mixed in.

These lines imitate the Song, sometimes verbatim;<sup>6</sup> yet the emphases have changed. This invitation is very much an *invitation*: the beloved is asked to enter (“Intra in”) an interior, curtained space. There she will find the usual flowers and herbs, but they have been artificially introduced to imitate wild nature (they are “scattered” through the house). The mixture of nature and culture, organic form and human artifice, echoes the gardens and vineyards of the Song, but with the emphasis clearly tilted toward artifice.

The description grows even more lavish in the stanzas that follow:

Est ibi mensa apposita  
universis cibis onusta;  
ibi clarum vinum habundat  
et quicquid te, cara, delectat.

Ibi sonant dulces symphonie  
inflantur et altius tybie,  
ibi puer doctus et puella  
pangunt tibi carmina bella. (9–16)

There the table is set,  
loaded with every food,

there clear wine abounds  
and whatever delights you, beloved.

There sweet harmonies resound  
and flutes play above them,  
there a learned boy and girl  
compose lovely songs for you.

Here the erotic displacement, the substitution of place for person, is made all but explicit in the figure of the boy and girl. The rich decorations, which have been described provocatively in terms of all five bodily senses, now culminate in a matched pair, a stand-in for the lovers themselves. Since the boy and girl are composing songs, moreover, they suggest a possible *mise en abyme*, a tantalizingly endless artistic deferral of the proposed erotic union: a man and a woman sing, together, of going to a place where a boy and a girl sing, together, perhaps of another place . . .

At the same time that the poem thus imitates, and even refines, the substitutive eroticism of the invitations in the Song, however, it introduces a new element: an almost crass insistence on luxury or excess. Whereas the Song offered images of natural fertility and repletion, “Iam, dulcis” seems to go out of its way to suggest superabundance: it repeats how the room is loaded down (*onustum, onusta*) with all possible (*cunctis, universis*) foods and ornaments. Yet this material luxury is soon rejected in favor of the amorous pleasures for which, in any case, it stands:

Non me iuvat tantum convivium  
quantum predulce colloquium,  
nec rerum tantarum ubertas  
ut dilecta familiaritas. (21–24)

Such feasting does not delight me  
so much as sweet conversation,  
nor the richness of such objects  
so much as loving intimacy.

It is not clear who speaks these lines. It could be the woman, rejecting the excesses of the earlier descriptions, or the man, clarifying

the true aim and nature of his invitation. Yet the confusion is appropriate: not only does it hark back to the Song, where many lines are impossible to attribute to one speaker with any certainty, but the blending of voices in the reader’s mind is fitting for a stanza that longs above all for dialogue (*colloquium*).

The crucial lines, which follow two stanzas later, are the only ones unquestionably spoken by the woman. The man repeats his invitation, and the woman replies with a speech that, as often happens in the Song, does not respond directly or logically. Her reply is engaged in the dialogue, yet it seems to hover above and apart from the rest of the poem:

Ego fui sola in silva  
et dilexi loca secreta;  
frequenter effugi tumultum  
et vitavi populum multum. (29–32)

I have been alone in the forest  
and have loved hidden places;  
I have often fled commotion  
and have avoided the multitude.

The lines are so striking partly because they are perfectly ambiguous. At a grammatical level, it is not clear whether the newly introduced perfect tense (“I *have loved* hidden places”) indicates that the speaker now renounces such places (I used to love them), or that they remain habitual for her (I have always loved them and still do). More fundamentally, it is not clear whether a love of solitude and sequestration would naturally lead her to accept the man’s invitation or to reject it. Is love social, in other words, or is it the opposite—a private retreat, where the only other people and things are mere reflections of the two lovers themselves? Once again, is the invitation to love a drawing outward or a drawing in?

This ambiguity is left unresolved as the man voices his final plea:

Karissima, noli tardare,  
studeamus nos nunc amare!

. . . . .  
 Quid iuvat differre, electa,  
 que sunt tamen post facienda?  
 Fac cita quod eris factura:  
 in me non est aliqua mora! (33–34, 37–40)

Dearest, do not delay,  
 let us apply ourselves now to love!

. . . . .  
 Why do you wish to put off, beloved,  
 what must be done in the end?  
 Do quickly what you will do:  
 in me is no delay!

Here a new note of urgency enters, audible not only in the rejection of deferral (“Quid iuvat differre?”), which heretofore has been the mode of the whole poem, but also in the sense of pleading, as if to overcome unwillingness—a sense almost wholly absent in the Song, where each party expresses a yearning for the other. The speaker in these stanzas proffers his invitation in terms of submitting to necessity rather than—or as well as—indulging in pleasure. This sense is reinforced by an ominous allusion to the Gospel of John, where Jesus at the Last Supper says to Judas, “Quod facis fac citius” (“Do quickly what you are going to do” [*Biblia*, John 13.27]), nearly the same words the speaker uses here (Dronke 250n). Yet even if the tone of urgency is new, the implication that love involves self-sacrifice follows directly in the tradition of the Song, with its constant undertone of *lech l’cha*. The connection is suggested by the final line, “in me non est aliqua mora,” which again echoes the language of the Song, recalling the phrase “Et macula non est in te” (“there is no flaw in you” [4.7]), phonetically (*aliqua/macula*) as well as syntactically. “Iam, dulcis” thus serves as a crucial link between the Song and the later tradition of the invitation poem. It maintains the sense of mutuality and the sublimated eroticism of its model, while foreshadowing later developments, in which a typically dominant male voice piles up physical enticements in an attempt to overcome or overwhelm the resistance of his addressee.

### Marlowe’s Seductive Shepherd

Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” like “Iam, dulcis,” reflects the precedent of the Song of Songs, while carrying increasingly troubling overtones of monologue and materialism. The sense of trouble or danger is even stronger in the later poem, because Marlowe draws not only on the Song but also on the even more ambiguous classical tradition of the invitation poem. “The Passionate Shepherd” is the first, the best-known, and the most influential invitation poem in English. By the time it was published, posthumously, in two different verse collections (1599 and 1600), Marlowe’s poem was already so popular that it had been frequently imitated, by dramatists as well as poets.<sup>7</sup> R. S. Forsythe traces its influence all the way into the twentieth century, citing dozens of poems and plays and noting that, “initiated by Marlowe’s poem and its frequent imitations, a literary device, ‘the invitation to love,’ became established in English literature and has persisted in it down to our own time” (692).

Forsythe finds no real precedent for this device in English, and he traces Marlowe’s use of it not to the Bible but to classical pastoral poetry. In this he has been followed by later scholars, who generally cite three closely related poems as models: Theocritus’s idyll 11, in which the cyclops Polyphemus tries to woo the nymph Galatea; Vergil’s eclogue 2, which imitates Theocritus but replaces the cyclops and nymph with a pair of shepherds; and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, book 13, which also recounts the story of Polyphemus and Galatea.<sup>8</sup> Each poem contains a passage in which the speaker invites the beloved to live with him and describes the rewards that await if he or she accepts. Although they form an independent tradition, these pastoral poems bear strong resemblances to the invitations in the Song of Songs and its successors, most notably in their implicitly dialogic framework. Theocritus’s and Vergil’s poems each feature a



single speaker, but both appear in collections in which dialogue is more standard, and both immediately follow poems in which speakers engage in conversation. Instead of seeming normative, then, the single lyric voice feels incomplete: the speakers of idyll 11 and eclogue 2 offer their invitations aloud, and much of the pathos lies in the silence that follows. Ovid's poem recalls the dialogic structure of the Song more closely. Like the first invitation in the Song (the woman's recollection of the voice of her beloved [2.8–14]), Polyphemus's speech in Ovid is nested within that of Galatea, who recounts the invitation she once heard him speak.

Yet despite these affinities, there is a crucial difference between the invitations in the Song of Songs and those of the classical tradition. In the Song, the eroticized *locus amoenus* is offered as its own reward, a place for the lovers to seek out and enjoy together. In the classical tradition, by contrast, the richly described places and objects are, essentially, bribes. The pastoral speakers offer material luxuries not *as* but in exchange *for* erotic pleasures. Theocritus's cyclops explains that, though ugly, he is wealthy, and Corydon, the speaker in Vergil's eclogue 2, frankly refers to the flowers and spices he has described as *munera*—"gifts" or "rewards" (line 56). In Ovid the situation is, once again, slightly more complex. The cyclops describes a landscape that deliberately echoes his earlier descriptions of the beloved herself; he offers a world of apples and grapes, kids and milk, to a woman he has just described as being goodlier than apples, sweeter than grapes, friskier than a kid, milder than milk (13.789–97, 810–30). Polyphemus thus seems almost to have taken his cue from the Song: the language of his invitation appears to offer a comforting sense of return. Yet unlike the speakers in the Song, he insists throughout that all these objects belong to him: "omne meum est" ("it is all mine" [821]). And he concludes by referring to them in the same terms used by Vergil's Corydon: "Now, Galatea, come, and

do not spurn my gifts [*munera*]" (839). All the natural descriptions are thus merely a means to an end: one physical asset is being bartered for another. By contrast, in the Song and "Iam, dulcis" the delightful destination is itself the focus of attention, as erotic attraction is sublimated into topographical fantasy.

The achievement of Marlowe's poem is to combine the pastoral tradition of the gift-giving shepherd with the sublimated eroticism of the Song. The first move toward sublimation occurs at the end of the second line: "Come live with me, and be my love, / And we will all the pleasures prove. . . ." Taken by itself the couplet is straightforwardly erotic, an invitation to amorous experimentation. But the second line turns out to be enjambed, and the succeeding couplet unexpectedly reassigns the "pleasures" to the exploration of nature:

Come live with me, and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That valleys, groves, hills and fields,  
Woods, or steepy mountain yields. (1–4)

Erotic energy is projected outward. The second stanza continues this trend:

And we will sit upon the rocks,  
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals. (5–8)

Much as in "Iam, dulcis," where a boy and a girl sing of a place where a boy and a girl are singing, here the shepherd-singer invites his beloved to experience a place of shepherds and bird-song. The delicacy of the proposition lies in the displacement, the way the figure of the amorous speaker is diffused through the landscape.

The following stanzas systematically associate the woman too with the landscape, as various natural elements are transformed into adornments for her body:

And I will make thee beds of roses,  
And a thousand fragrant posies,

A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,  
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,  
Fair lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold. (9–16)

Nature, which had originally appeared wild (valleys, woods, steepy mountain), becomes cultivated for the beloved's enjoyment, just as in the Song of Songs. An even more subtle echo of the Song comes in the way Marlowe combines the invitation and the *wash*, or part-by-part description of the beloved's body: each fragment of the landscape is converted into an article of clothing for a specific area of the woman's body. In contrast to the classical precedent, where these goods would be traded for erotic gratification, here the description itself provides that gratification. Douglas Bruster claims that "[w]ith each element building on the richness of the previous enticement, . . . the invitation of the Passionate Shepherd functions as a rhetorical version of the sexual act; the process of enumeration is intended to excite" (52). The self-conscious substitution of imaginative for physical pleasures is summed up in the word *posies*: "And I will make thee beds of roses, / And a thousand fragrant posies" (9–10). As Marlowe's editors point out, the word literally refers to bouquets of flowers but was frequently used to mean "poems"—and was, in fact, spelled "poesies" in the 1600 edition (Marlowe, *Collected Poems* 158n). The erotic energy of the invitation is thus displaced first onto the flowers (*Come to my bed . . . of roses*) and then onto the poetic description of them.

The movement from physical pleasures to abstract, metapoetic ones is visible again in the final stanzas:

A belt of straw and ivy buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs,  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing,  
For thy delight each May-morning.  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me, and be my love. (17–24)

The penultimate stanza feels conclusive: having offered adornments to each part of the woman's body, culminating in her belt, the speaker repeats his original invitation verbatim (compare the repetition of "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" [Song of Sg. 2.10, 13]). The poem has come full circle, like the belt; further elaboration seems unnecessary. Yet Marlowe provides an extra stanza that reaffirms the self-conscious nature of the proposition. First, the speaker again removes the focus from himself to an image of himself: "The shepherd swains shall dance and sing, / For thy delight each May-morning." The displacement suggests an endless deferral of actual erotic consummation, as reflected also in the promise of a changelessly recurring "May-morning." The speaker then rephrases his invitation in more specific terms: "If these delights thy *mind* may move." Unlike Polyphemus, Marlowe's speaker is asking above all for imaginative interaction.

Even Marlowe's highly refined and intellectualized invitation, however, is not entirely untroubled; but the trouble in this case arises not from the inherent difficulty of surrendering to love but from the phrasing of the proposal. Of the many responses and imitations to which "The Passionate Shepherd" gave rise in the Renaissance, a large proportion evince skepticism of the speaker's offer. Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," for instance, refuses the invitation because it is *too* abstract: such pleasures are tempting in theory, Raleigh's nymph points out, but have little meaning or value in the world as we know it. John Donne's "The Bait," meanwhile, recasts Marlowe's poem in terms of deception and entrapment. Bruster, who offers an excellent account of these and other responses, attributes them not only to readers'

consciousness of the classical precedent (in Ovid, Polyphemus's love quickly turns to violence) but also to their deep suspicion of "the potential danger of the monological" (54). Renaissance readers, that is, felt compelled to provide responses in part because the invitation assumes a different tone when the expression of desire is univocal.<sup>9</sup> Even more than at the end of "Iam, dulcis," the dominance of a single voice in "The Passionate Shepherd" becomes disturbing: the sublimation and displacement begin to suggest deviousness rather than delicacy. Certainly the history of responses to Marlowe's poem shows that readers, ever since the Renaissance, have found his invitation to be at once irresistible and troubling. The reassurance of its purely hypothetical, endlessly delayed pleasure is counterbalanced by a sense of dangerous seductiveness.

#### *Paradise Lost*: Sacred and Profane Invitations

The story of *Paradise Lost*, as William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden observe, ultimately centers on love relations: "everything in this lofty poem gets placed in the history of Adam and Eve's 'wedded love'" (27). It is not surprising, therefore, that invitation poems figure prominently in the epic. Both the first and the last human conversations we encounter contain an invitation, and the poem as a whole features a total of five. Reading these passages in the light of the broader invitation tradition not only revises our understanding of the passages themselves—including the sense of promise in Eve's concluding speech—but contributes as well to the long-standing debate among Milton scholars concerning Eve's equality with Adam, both before and after the Fall.<sup>10</sup>

The first invitation in *Paradise Lost*, which is recalled by Eve in a speech to Adam in book 4, is pronounced by a divine voice (4.467–75). The second, and the one that most resembles the invitations in the Song of Songs, is spoken by Adam to the sleeping Eve

at the beginning of book 5 (5.17–25). But this is immediately followed by the third invitation's perversion of the genre: Eve awakens and recounts a troubling dream she has had (inspired, unbeknownst to her, by Satan), in which a tempting voice invites her forth to sin (5.36–47). This dream invitation prefigures the fourth and most insidious instance in the poem, when Satan in the serpent invites Eve to accompany him to the tree of knowledge (9.626–30). But the genre is redeemed at the very end of the work by the fifth invitation, Eve's final words. Eve's last speech, quoted at the beginning of this essay, might not seem to participate in the tradition, not least because her words reverse the familiar pattern: Eve invites Adam *out* of Paradise and into an unsheltered, imperfect world. Yet recognizing her speech as an invitation poem allows us to understand its full effect, since it reminds us of the element of return, as well as exile, that underlies every invitation to love.

Like "The Passionate Shepherd," therefore, *Paradise Lost* reveals the invitation poem as a potential vehicle both of true love and of danger. Milton, however, divides these two aspects: the invitations spoken by unfallen characters in the poem are purely innocent, whereas those spoken by Satan are wholly deceitful. Milton thus distinguishes between two ways in which the Song has been understood and used by later poets. Yet Satan's error lies not, as we might expect, in employing the language of the Song in a literal (erotic) sense. A long line of commentators, both Jewish and Christian, condemned any reading of the Song that treated it literally, as a poem of sexual love, rather than mystically or allegorically.<sup>11</sup> But Milton appears to condemn Satan's invitation for almost the opposite reason—because he uses the biblical tropes of love nontransparently, to mask another intent. Satan is thus cast as the forerunner of a tradition that appropriates the language of the Song for the purposes of seduction or clandestine encounter (Schultz 23–26).

By contrast, the first two invitations in *Paradise Lost* make surprisingly literal use of the familiar tropes of the Song. This is particularly true of the second, Adam's invitation to the sleeping Eve in book 5. The paradisaical garden to which he invites his beloved really exists—and it really is Paradise. The association of the landscape with the bodies of the lovers is also literal: Adam, whose name means “dust” or “earth,” was formed from the “[d]ust of the ground” (*PL* 7.525), and while Eve was not formed directly from the soil she too, as James Grantham Turner explains, is presented as a counterpart of the landscape of Paradise. The garden and Eve, Turner notes, are presented by God to Adam in precisely parallel dream visions (*PL* 8.287–311, 452–84), and Adam responds to his first sight of Eve by claiming that she encapsulates all of nature: “what seemed fair in all the world, seemed now / . . . in her summed up, in her contained” (8.472–73; see Turner 239–40). When Adam invites Eve forth into the garden, therefore, he is inviting her toward an emblem of themselves. Far from employing the biblical tropes in a mystical or allegorical sense, Adam uses them straightforwardly. His invitation could be seen as the original, from which those in the Song, with their more complex metaphoric figuration, derive.

The same could be said of the first invitation in *Paradise Lost*. In book 4, both Satan and the reader encounter Adam and Eve for the first time. In the earliest conversation we hear between them, Adam begins by praising God as Creator; Eve responds by recalling her own creation and in particular her very first action: immediately after being born, she discovers her reflection in a lake and lingers to gaze upon it. There, she says, she would have remained forever, had not a divine voice invited her forth toward Adam. The invitation that follows is thus recollected speech, nested within Eve's speech, just like the first invitation in the Song. As Eve recalls:

[T]here had I fixed  
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,  
 Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou  
                   seest,  
 What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,  
 With thee it comes and goes: but follow me,  
 And I will bring thee where no shadow stays  
 Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he  
 Whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy  
 Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear  
 Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called  
 Mother of human race. (4.465–75)

Here too we find a literal version of one of the Song's chief motifs, the trope of *lech l'cha*. The love toward which Eve is being invited requires a relinquishing of herself (the image in the lake), while also promising a return to herself—Adam, from whose side she sprung and “[w]hose image” she is. As in the Song, the invitation is welcoming and unsettling at once. Eve is being called away from a barren reflection toward a truer image of herself, with the further positive promise of “multitudes like thyself.” Yet the goal is still described in negative terms (“no shadow”), and the invitation still takes the form of a command (“thou shall”). Eve's response to this primal invitation is appropriately ambivalent: on seeing Adam, she first flees back to the comforting reassurance of her own reflection, before finally accepting him and accompanying him to the nuptial bower.

It is only fitting that this original invitation to love and marriage should be embedded in a dialogue. Throughout his writings, Milton insists on conversation as the defining feature of love relationships. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), for instance, he traces the institution of marriage to man's need for “an intimate and speaking help,” and he goes on to cite the Song (8.6–7) in support of his argument: “this pure and more inbred desire of joyning to it self in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly call'd love) *is stronger then death*, as the Spouse of Christ thought, *many waters cannot quench*



*it, neither can the floods drown it*" (251). The interchange between "fit conversing souls," which is so prominent in the Song, is similarly foregrounded in book 4. The dialogue between Adam and Eve is juxtaposed to the two long soliloquies that have just been pronounced by Satan (4.32–113, 358–92). Soliloquy, as critics have noted, is a debased form of discourse in the poem, used only by fallen characters.<sup>12</sup> Adam and Eve, by contrast, express their "conjugal fellowship" through dialogue.

When Adam offers his own invitation to Eve in book 5, therefore, we expect the discourse to be dialogic. But Satan has already muddled the perfect balance of conjugal conversation that we (and he) witnessed in book 4. After Adam and Eve go to sleep, Satan creeps into their bower and whispers in Eve's ear, troubling her dreams. As a result, when Adam wakes with the dawn in book 5, he finds to his surprise that Eve is still asleep—apparently something that has never happened before. But Adam as yet has no cause for concern, and his waking before Eve gives him occasion to pronounce his great, beautifully untroubled poem of invitation:

Awake

My fairest, my espoused, my latest found,  
Heaven's last best gift, my ever new delight,  
Awake, the morning shines, and the fresh  
field  
Calls us, we lose the prime, to mark how  
spring  
Our tended plants, how blows the citron  
grove,  
What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy  
reed,  
How nature paints her colours, how the bee  
Sits on the bloom, extracting liquid sweet.

(5.17–25)

Again, many of the tropes that characterize the Song and subsequent invitation poems are found here, but in their most innocent form. Adam refers, for instance, to a "gift"; yet unlike the speakers in Renaissance invitation poems

who, following the classical pastoral tradition, offer rewards to the beloved, Adam recognizes that Eve herself is a divine gift. Similarly, we find, as usual, indications of cultivation in the natural description ("tended," "paints," "extracting"). But the cultivation contains nothing artificial, since nature appears to be cultivated only by nature: nectar is distilled into honey by the bee; nature herself "paints her colours." The plants have been "tended," but the phrasing manages to efface the human agency that word implies. The garden to which Adam invites Eve is thus as pristine as can be imagined while still being distinguished from total wilderness. And yet even here, in this gentlest and least threatening of invitation poems, there is still the slightest sense of urgency, and even loss: Hurry, says Adam, "we lose the prime."

The real trouble, however, comes in the imperfect dialogue that follows. Eve, startled awake by Adam's words, speaks, but she does not respond to his invitation. Instead she describes the bad dream that Satan inspired. In place of invitation and response, therefore, we get an innocent invitation followed by a deceitful parody of one. In the dream, Eve recounts, an invisible voice calls her forth:

[M]ethought

Close at mine ear one called me forth to walk  
With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,  
Why sleepest thou Eve? Now is the pleasant  
time,  
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields  
To the night-warbling bird, that now awake  
Tunes sweetest his love-laboured song; now  
reigns  
Full orb'd the moon, and with more pleasing  
light  
Shadowy sets off the face of things; in vain,  
If none regard; heaven wakes with all his eyes,  
Whom to behold but thee, nature's desire,  
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment  
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze. (5.35–47)

As Howard Schultz notes, although Satan's speech begins in a familiar vein, it soon drifts



into something different: “if Milton meant an allusion to the Song of Solomon, he achieved it by contrast, for he carefully inverted the pictures, changing the dove for a nightingale and keeping only the sensuous delights” (24; see also Lewalski 106–07). Satan’s invitation reverses that of the disembodied voice of book 4, which called Eve away from her self-reflective gaze, and indeed reverses the whole *lech l’cha* trope. Eve is asked not to turn her attention away from herself toward an external object but the opposite; the speech begins by directing her gaze outward but concludes by focusing exclusively on her. In her dream Eve responds immediately to this false invitation, in terms reminiscent of the Song: “I rose as at thy call, but found thee not” (5.48; cf. *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Song of Sg. 5.5–6: “I arose to open to my beloved . . . but my beloved had turned and was gone”).

When Satan next addresses Eve, in book 9, he uses another trope of the invitation tradition—the equivalence of person and place—to terrible purpose. Approaching in the guise of the serpent, he flatters Eve, telling her that although all the beasts gaze at her admiringly, only he is able to appreciate her “celestial beauty” (9.540). When Eve asks how he has acquired human speech, he describes the Tree of Knowledge in the same terms: it is the “fairest” (9.577), just as Eve is “[f]airest” (9.538); and while the other beasts gaze on it with dumb longing, only the serpent is capable of appreciating its full powers. Having thus associated the tree with Eve and described it in sensuous detail, Satan invites her toward it:

Empress, the way is ready, and not long,  
Beyond a row of myrtles, on a flat,  
Fast by a fountain, one small thicket past  
Of blowing myrrh and balm; if thou accept  
My conduct, I can bring thee thither soon.  
(9.626–30)

The disastrous effectiveness of this invitation derives partly from Satan’s canny description,

and partly from the fact that he closely echoes the invitation that Eve heard Adam speak just as she was waking in book 5. Satan’s “blowing myrrh and balm” condenses Adam’s invitation to mark “how blows the citron grove, / What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed” (5.22–23). The difference is that whereas Adam received no reply to his invitation, Satan again receives an immediate affirmation: “Lead then, said Eve” (9.631).

Satan thus twists the traditional tropes of the invitation poem, but in familiar ways. The most disturbing elements of Satan’s invitations—their insinuating importunity, their tendency toward narcissism rather than mutuality and toward overvaluing something material (the tree)—are the same ones found in “Iam, dulcis” and “The Passionate Shepherd.” Just as Adam’s invitation in book 5 can be seen as the true original of the invitations in the Song, so Satan’s provide a prototype for certain aspects of the later (medieval and Renaissance) tradition of the invitation poem. But Milton is not willing to give the last word to Satan, and this is why it is so important to recognize Eve’s final speech in book 12 not only as a form of invitation but as the tragically belated response to Adam’s in book 5. The contexts for the two speeches are parallel, though reversed. In book 5 Adam expects Eve to be awake but finds her asleep, and he wakes her with his invitation. In book 12 he descends from the mountain expecting to find her asleep, but she is awake, and she preempts him by offering her own invitation out into the fallen world:

Descended, Adam to the bower where Eve  
Lay sleeping ran before, but found her waked;  
And thus with words not sad she him received.  
Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst,  
I know;  
For God is also in sleep, and dreams advise,  
Which he hath sent propitious, some great  
good  
Presaging, since with sorrow and heart’s  
distress

Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;  
 In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
 Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
 Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
 Art all things under heaven, all places thou,  
 Who for my wilful crime art banished hence.  
 (12.607–19)

At long last Eve responds to Adam's gentle exhortation to hurry: "lead on; / In me is no delay." More important, she uses two crucial invitational tropes. First, person as place: earlier in the poem the angel Michael had urged, "Where [Adam] abides, think there thy native soil" (11.292), and here Eve accepts the identification—Adam is to her "all places." Second, departure as return: Eve's striking declaration "with thee to go, / Is to stay here" encapsulates the *lech l'cha* paradox. With these words she acknowledges that the banishment she shares with Adam—to the land outside the garden, from the dust of which Adam was made—also represents a form of restoration.<sup>13</sup>

Eve's invitation, once we recognize it as such, reveals the same duality as every other invitation poem, only with the proportions reversed: it is essentially a poem of exile, but tinged with a sense of new beginning, as well as of welcome return. (Just after Eve speaks, she and Adam are implicitly compared to a tired laborer "[h]omeward returning" [12.632].) Consciousness of the invitation tradition thus allows us to understand why Milton characterizes her words as "not sad": love, even in Paradise, demands a form of exile or self-sacrifice, but it also promises a fit reward. The same consciousness alerts us, above all, to the way that Eve's speech restores the conjugal dialogue that Satan began to disturb with his false invitation in book 5. In spite of the new, more unequal gender roles that their transgression has brought about, Eve's invitation to Adam reaches across the Fall to reassert a sense of radical mutuality.

## NOTES

1. On Eve's delay, see Kerrigan and Braden 43.
2. Milton's early poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" both allude to the invitation tradition; their concluding couplets echo the close of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd." On Milton's incorporation of lyric genres into *Paradise Lost*, see Lewalski, esp. 173–95.
3. Bruster; Cheney; Dronke; Forsythe; and Schultz have produced notable work relating individual poems to a broader invitation tradition. The tradition continues well beyond the Renaissance and includes such prominent examples as Charles Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage" (1855).
4. Thus, the medieval commentator Rashi understands *lech l'cha* not so much as "begone with you" as "go for yourself"—i.e., "for your benefit and for your good" (Silverstein 66).
5. I use the text of the Vienna manuscript, which is the most complete; all translations of "Iam, dulcis" are mine.
6. Dronke notes that "Iam, dulcis" closely imitates the language of the Vulgate translation, with occasional borrowing from the older (Hexaplaric) Latin version (237).
7. Many of these responses and imitations are reprinted in Marlowe, *Collected Poems* 159–68. I use the 1600 text of the poem, which has become standard.
8. See esp. Theocritus, idyll 11, lines 42–48; Virgil, eclogue 2, lines 45–55; and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.810–39. The precedents are discussed by Forsythe 692–96; Bruster 50–51; Cheney 69–71.
9. In this sense Marlowe's invitation resembles the *carpe diem* tradition, which is also typically univocal and also associates the beloved with the landscape. The difference between the two genres lies in the nature of the threat: the *carpe diem* poem warns of the danger of growing old, while the invitation poem acknowledges the difficulties of growing up.
10. Wittreich offers a classic account of this debate (1–15, 83–109); see also Turner 271–87. Among more recent criticism concerning ontological and rhetorical distinctions between Adam and Eve on either side of the Fall, see Polydorou; Revard; Labreche; and esp. Rogers.
11. Thus, Rabbi Akiva (early second century CE) wrote, "Whoever trills his voice singing the Song of Songs in a banquet hall, regarding it as a common song, has no part in the world to come" (Bergant viii). Origen, the most important early Christian commentator, is equally insistent on an allegorical interpretation (Astell 1–24). In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton clearly understands the Song literally, as a poem of erotic love, as well as allegorically (McColley 92–98; Flinker 145–59).
12. See Fowler's note to *Paradise Lost* 4.32–41 (Milton, *PL* 217).
13. Eve's speech, besides recalling Adam's book 5 invitation, also echoes his speech in book 9, when he grants her request to separate from him: "Go; for thy stay, not

free, absents thee more" (9.372). Eve presents the same paradox—to go is to stay—but her concluding invitation joins back together what Adam's (unwilling) dismissal had put asunder. On the intricate rhetoric of Eve's speech, which is both an invitation poem and a blank verse sonnet, see Wittreich 103–05.

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