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Paper 2 (Prompt 1)

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**Domestic Adam: How a Reversal of Gender Roles in *Paradise Lost* Caused the Fall**

In *Paradise Lost*, when Satan first comes across Adam and Eve in Eden in book four, he contemplates their appearance, describing the pair as standing "God-like erect, with native honor clad / In naked majesty seemed lords of all" (*Paradise Lost* IV: 289-290) identifying their class above the other inhabitants of Eden. Equally important, Satan adds to their characterization a few lines later, detecting inequalities between the Edenic couple. Satan senses that Adam seems made for "contemplation and valor" and Eve for "softness" and "sweet attractive grace" (*Paradise Lost* IV: 296-297). Here, Milton designates specific gender expectations for the pair early in his epic. The words "contemplation" and "valor" establish Adam's intended role in Eden as both the muscle and decision-maker, while Eve's descriptions of "softness" and "grace" establish her as the more caring and nurturing one, suggesting that their prelapsarian gender roles likely did not differ much from the postlapsarian ones of Milton's day. To illustrate, Milton reassures his seventeenth-century audience that Adam, as a man, holds dominion over Eve and is responsible for her actions in the garden; going out of his way to stress that the pair is "Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed" (*Paradise Lost* IV: 295). Thus, Milton positions Adam as Eve's hierarchical superior, a position appointed to Adam by God himself, who creates Adam "for God only" and Eve "for God in him" (*Paradise Lost* IV: 298-299). Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton repeatedly scolds Adam for being an ineffective superior. He places the majority of the blame for the fall on Adam's refusal to fulfill the intended duties of his gender. This paper

will argue this claim by first providing textual evidence that indicates Adam and Eve were both cognizant of their appointed gender roles and spotlight Eve's initial willingness to accept her station. Then, it will demonstrate how Adam, who initially desired an equal partner, failed to treat Eve as his inferior, provoking her to question Adam's place over her in God's hierarchy, ultimately leading to a dangerous reversal of the couple's gender roles in book nine that proves the main cataclysm responsible for their fall.

In book eight, Adam indicates that he comprehends his intended place while discussing Eve's creation with Raphael, saying, "For well I understand in the prime end / Of Nature her th' inferior, in the mind / And inward faculties" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 540-542). Here Adam clarifies that he understands God created Eve inferior to him while also conveying to Raphael that he understands God intends for them to serve different roles. Identifying one of his roles, Adam notes that Eve is "inferior in the mind," meaning that as the man, he understands he has a duty to be the decision-maker in Eden, while Eve, the "sweet" and "graceful" woman, should be concerned with assisting and comforting her husband. However, despite showing occasional instances of being displeased, it is Adam, not Eve, who rejects God's intended patriarchy in *Paradise Lost*. For example, at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Eve shows that she understands these set roles and intends to follow them. In book five, when Raphael comes to Eden, Eve acts accordingly to the expectations of her gender, performing the role of the perfect hostess, gathering food and setting the table "With Angels' Food, and rubied Nectar" that flows "In Pearl, in Diamond, and massy Gold" (*Paradise Lost* V: 633-634). Later, after the dinner, Eve displays another instance of understanding her place in God's hierarchy when she leaves Adam alone with Raphael, explaining, "Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd / Before the Angel, and of him to ask / Chose rather: hee, she knew, would intermix / Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute /

With conjugal Caresses" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 52-56). Here, Eve displays an understanding of her place in God's hierarchy and role as Adam's wife, acknowledging that Adam is "for God only" and that God sent Raphael to communicate God's word not to her but to Adam, who will relay God's message to her later, just as God intended. Eve looks forward to this opportunity for Adam to perform his intended role, "solving" God's message. In this scene, Adam and Eve's role is comparable to that of a working husband and housewife. Eve, acting accordingly to gender expectations, eagerly waits at home for her husband to finish his job, talking with Raphael, and anticipates his return home, which promises "conjugal caresses."

However, despite looking forward to Adam's chance to perform his gender roles and showing she understands, Adam is made "for God only shee for God in him," Eve waits for three books, listening to Raphael's discussion of Satan in book five and six, and the creation in book seven before leaving. Since Eve has accepted God's appointed gender roles, the most likely explanation for Eve's delayed action is that Eve intends to test her superior. She behaves like a new employee, gradually testing their laid-back boss to see what she can get away with. Adam treats her like an equal. He does not dismiss Eve; she dismisses herself, a moment that later foreshadows Eve's decision to challenge Adam's refusal to separate in book nine. Adam's reluctance to perform his role is likely because he never wanted to be Eve's superior. In book eight, Adam tells Raphael about Eve's creation, a scene of extra importance in *Paradise Lost* because of Adam's request to God. Adam says, "Hast thou not made me here thy substitute, / And these inferior far beneath me set? / Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 381-384). Interestingly, Adam asks explicitly for an equal, but in Eve, God gives him an inferior. This presumably frustrated Adam, whose reasoning for wanting Eve in the first place was because, as God's "substitute" in Eden, he felt he

had no genuine "fellowship" with anyone; thus, Adam reasons he needed an equal to fill this gap. Therefore, when God gives him another inferior, Adam rebels by giving Eve more freedom than God intended.

In response, God sends Raphael both to warn Adam of Satan and to chide Adam for failing to fulfill the responsibilities of his gender, to whom Adam confesses his anxiety concerning Eve. Adam tells Raphael, "when I approach / Her Loveliness, so absolute she seems / And in herself complete, so well to know / Her own, that what she wills to do or say, / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discrettest, best; / All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her. Loses discount'nanc't, and like folly shows; / Authority and Reason on her wait" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 546-554). Adam understands that while he wanted an equal, God intended Eve to be his hierarchical second, and his word is final. However, intoxicated with her "loveliness" Adam senses that God made Eve the superior creation, enviously recognizing that Eve is "in herself complete." In response, Raphael elucidates to Adam that Eve seems "in herself complete" because she hath done her part," praising Eve for fulfilling the expectations of her gender, then reprimands Adam, saying, "Do thou but thine" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 561-562). Additionally, Raphael warns Adam, clarifying to him that Eve is "worthy of thy love / Not thy subjection" (*Paradise Lost* VIII: 569-570), reminding Adam that he is Eve's superior and needs to behave that way, cautioning Adam not to let his passion for Eve overcome his reason. Interestingly, like Eve, Raphael is also testing Adam here. Before leaving for Eden, God orders Raphael, "thou hear'st what stir on Earth / Satan from Hell scap't through the darksome Gulf / Hath rais'd in Paradise, and how disturb'd / This night the human pair, how he designs / In them at once to ruin all mankind. / Go therefore, half this day as friend with friend / Converse with Adam" (*Paradise Lost* V: 225-230). God instructs Raphael explicitly to converse

with Adam, not Eve, presumably expecting Adam to relay his message to her as intended. However, Raphael never dismisses Eve despite having specific instructions from God only to speak with Adam. He, too, chooses to wait and see if Adam will perform his role, likely prepared to relay his failure to God on his return.

Raphael's warning to Adam in book eight foreshadows the chief reason for the couple's fall, Adam's inability to treat Eve as an inferior. Despite often using superior language when speaking with her, Adam's actions represent a man so enchanted by his spouse that he positions himself beneath her. For example, during the separation scene, Adam pleads to Eve to "leave not the faithful side / That gave thee being, still shades thee and protects. / The wife, where danger or dishonor lurks, / Safest and seemliest by her Husband stays, / Who guards her (*Paradise Lost* IX: 265-269). Adam's words again recognize Eve as his inferior and show that he understands he has a duty to watch over her. However, despite knowing he is "superior in inward faculties" and God's intended decision-maker in Eden, he fails to enforce his authority over Eve. Instead of telling Eve that his word is final, he treats her like an equal, listens to her argument, and decides to give Eve "permission" to go off alone despite knowing Satan's threat. Notably, at the end of Adam's plea to Eve, Milton writes, "So spake domestic Adam" (*Paradise Lost* IX: 318). Here, Milton emphasizes the state of Adam's relationship with Eve for his readers. Unlike in book eight, "Domestic Adam" implies that Adam is currently in charge of running their home, which is supported by Eve's leaving Adam to do her work in the garden while Adam hangs back preparing a gift for his wife. Again, this is something that readers of Milton's day would undoubtedly recognize as inverted gender roles; Adam performs the wife's duties while Eve performs the husband's. However, Adam's disobedience goes much further. As foreshadowed earlier in *Paradise Lost*, Adam feels that Eve is God's superior creation. Thus, while away,

Adam "Waiting desirous her return, had wove / Of choicest Flow'rs a Garland to adorn / Her Tresses, / and her rural labors crown, /As Reapers oft are wont thir Harvest Queen (*Paradise Lost* IX: 839-842). Here, Adam is prepared to literally "crown" Eve when she returns.

Considering his later statement declaring Eve the "fairest of Creation, last and best / Of all God's Works (*Paradise Lost* IX: 896-897), the reader can infer that Adam intends to discredit God's hierarchy and "crown" Eve, not as an equal but as his superior. Thus, it is no surprise that when Eve offers Adam the apple, he needs little convincing, assuming her ability to reason is superior to his.

This effeminate behavior on Adam's part paves the path for how Satan approaches his temptation of Eve. Satan's disobedience was caused by his frustration with his position in God's hierarchy beneath someone he deemed unworthy, a situation he recognizes in Eve. As Anna Michaels explains in her paper, *How a Damaging Inferiority Complex Led to Eve's Fall*, Eve shows that she is inquisitive despite trusting easily. In book four, when first meeting Adam, Eve refuses him because she views him as "less fair" than herself (*Paradise Lost* IV: 478). Michaels argues that "Eve dismisses Adam because she perceives that he is inferior to her. Her choice to not submit to this masculine figure demonstrates her independent nature and reveals a deeper sense within Eve to question whether she must be subservient to someone that she observes as unequal. When Adam eventually convinces Eve that she was made for him, she yields."

Therefore, despite accepting her place beneath Adam throughout *Paradise Lost*, it is apparent that Eve has doubted that she is the inferior creation since the beginning. Eve's recent challenging of Adam's order in book nine suggests that after Adam's earlier failure to dismiss her, she, like Adam, no longer views him as her superior. Recognizing this, Satan sculpts his temptation accordingly. He lowers Eve's guard with flattery before revealing his trump card,

telling her, "Ye Eat thereof, your Eyes that seem so clear, / Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then / Op'n'd and clear'd, and ye shall be as Gods" (*Paradise Lost* IX: 706-708). Here, Satan offers Eve the chance to ascend to the status of "gods." A master manipulator, Satan's use of the plural "ye" is intended to give the illusion of not suspecting Eve's intentions, so he includes Adam in his offer. However, he knows that Eve will see this as an opportunity to place herself over the unworthy Adam.

Ultimately this tactic proves successful as Eve eats the apple and falls. Then, instantly realizing her mistake, Eve voices, "but what if God have seen, / And Death ensue?" Here, Eve panics and fears the repercussions of her disobedience, deciding that if she should fall, so should Adam stating, "Confirm'd then I resolve, / Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe" (*Paradise Lost* IX: 826-831). Here, Eve recalls Adam's earlier failure to control her and places his lack of responsibility as the explanation for her fall. A belief supported by the Son in book ten, who, when Adam tries to blame Eve for the fall, declares, "Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey / Before his voice, or was shee made thy guide, / Superior, or but equal, that to her / Thou didst resign thy Manhood, and the Place / Wherein God set thee above her" (*Paradise Lost* X: 145-149), criticizing Adam's failure to manage Eve. The Son also reprimands Adam's earlier attempt to crown Eve, echoing similar language as Raphael in book eight. He stresses that Eve was "lovely to attract / Thy Love, not thy Subjection" (*Paradise Lost* X: 153). Thus, the Son, as the mouth of God himself, places the majority of the blame for their fall on Adam's failure to express the intended roles of his gender.

In *Paradise Lost*, instead of exacting his right as the decision-maker in Eden over Eve, Adam treats Eve like an equal, listening to her inferior logic and cowardly allowing her to disobey him and leave his protection. Therefore, since God created Adam to be his "substitute"

in Eden, responsible for matters of "contemplation and valor," Adam's utter failure to meet the intended duties of his gender in book nine proves to be the primary cause of his fall and, by extension Eve's. A belief communicated by God himself, the final voice of judgment within the book, through the Son.