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# Adam And Eve: Misogyny in Paradise Lost

## Introduction

The story of Adam and Eve is one of the most well-known stories from the Bible. Despite being a popular story, the bible doesn't give readers deeper insights about how the characters felt before and after the fall. Paradise Lost fills in the details missing from the biblical story, and helps readers understand the consequences of Adam and Eve's actions. Adam and Eve share an interesting dynamic in their relationship that forms a major part of Milton's Paradise Lost. Although Milton's Paradise Lost is a beautiful story about the fall of Adam and Eve, it has many misogyny elements surrounding the treatment of Eve compared to Adam.

## Beautiful and Submissive

The introduction of Adam and Eve mark the first signs of misogyny in Paradise Lost. Adam is introduced as being an intelligent, strong, and faith driven individual. He is the example of a perfect man that was created in God's image. Adam will serve as the basis for every son, father, uncle, etc. Milton does not give Adam any negative attributes when it comes to his appearance and character, but instead uses Adam's deep love for Eve as his weakness.

Milton's portrayal of Eve suggests that he believes that women are to be submissive to men. Eve is introduced as being beautiful beyond comparison and is created as a mate for Adam. She is created from a rib from Adam and is seen as inferior to him. She doesn't possess the knowledge and reasoning skills that Adam has. Eve is unable to possess the same knowledge because she is not given the opportunity to talk to the angel Raphael or see the visions of Michael. Despite not having access to information, Eve appears un-phased by the inequality she is exposed to and is content with being led by Adam. Milton's views women as pleasing to the eyes with little knowledge which makes them dependent on the men and follow their every order.

## Easy To Be Deceived

In book four and nine of Paradise Lost, Milton repeats his belief that women are inferior to men through the dialogue of Satan, Raphael, and Eve. Satan states that Adam and Eve's relationship is comparable to the relationship between a king and his servants. Satan views Eve as a servant of Adam instead of as his equal. In book four, Eve describes her first meeting with Adam, and how she submitted to him without hesitation. Eve is seen as the weaker sex in this encounter and is described as helpless compared to the masculine Adam. In book six of Paradise Lost, the angel Raphael tells Adam "warn the weaker" and "let it profit thee to have heard by terrible example of disobedience" (book 6, lines 909-911). Raphael agrees with Satan's view of how Eve is more susceptible to being deceived and is seen as inferior to Adam.

Book nine of Paradise Lost emphasizes Eve's weakness to be deceived. Adam and Eve are preparing for their morning chores and they are overwhelmed with the amount of work they must complete. Eve suggests they split their workload and finish the chores independently.

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Adam is hesitant on letting Eve do a portion of the chores alone and is afraid that she might be more susceptible to Satan's trickery. Eve persists on and convinces Adam that she is strong enough to fight Satan's temptations. Adam still has doubts in his head about leaving Eve alone, and reluctantly lets her do her chores independently. During the exchange, Eve assumes the role of the weaker individual in comparison to Adam. Adam's weakness is not questioned despite him being left alone. Why is Eve's integrity questioned, and Adam's is not?

## **Vain**

After Adam and Eve split up to complete their chores, Satan approaches Eve disguised as a serpent. Satan expresses his pleasure of running into Eve instead of Adam. He believes that Eve has less intelligence compared to her counterpart Adam. Satan is convinced that he will be able to use the lack of intelligence against Eve and take advantage of her. Eve is curious about the tree that had the power to give the serpent the ability to talk and she finds the powerful tree. Eve is hesitant about eating from the Tree of Knowledge because God has forbidden Adam and her from doing so. Satan then tells Eve that the fruit from the tree wanted him to seek out Eve and worship her beauty. Eve is flattered by the serpent's words and becomes severely tempted to take a bite from the tree. In this scene, Milton suggests that women are vain when it comes to their appearances. Milton could've expressed Eve's temptation by her willingness to follow the serpent but wanted to emphasize the belief that women hold their beauty to higher standards in comparison to their other qualities such as integrity, honesty, and faithfulness.

## **Render Herself More Equal**

Eve then picks a piece of fruit from the tree and takes a bite. Eve is flooded with new knowledge and begins to question whether she should share this newfound knowledge with Adam. Eve briefly considered keeping the information to herself so that she could "render herself more equal" (Book 9, line 825). This is the first instance of Eve questioning her inferiority to Adam in *Paradise Lost*. Despite Milton's negativity towards women in *Paradise Lost*, could this be Milton attempting to point out a problem in his society's view on women?

Eve decides to share the fruit of knowledge with Adam so they can become equals. Adam is overwhelmed with the idea of losing Eve and realizes that he cannot live without her. This suggests that a man's life achievement should be obtaining a wife. Milton suggests that women have negative qualities about them but believes that men should find their worth in a woman. Milton develops hypocritical views in this scene- is he giving women more value in this scene or describing a weakness of man?

## **Scapegoat**

Milton emphasizes his distrust for women through Adam's dialogue in *Paradise Lost*. He chooses to take a bite from the fruit and the couple fall asleep for a short time. When they wake up, Adam and Eve are disappointed to realize that the only knowledge they gained is the evil they had let into their life. This angers Adam greatly, and he ends the chapter explaining how he has too much trust for women. Adam also believes that women are the bearer of evil, and that anybody who trusts them should prepare for their own downfall.

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Milton is quick to blame women for man's shortcomings in chapter ten of *Paradise Lost*. God is

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saddened by the news of the fall of humankind, and sends his son down to serve justice to Adam and Eve. The son questions the couple about their knowledge of their nakedness and the shame they carry with them. Adam explains to the Son that it is Eves fault that they partook in the fruit, and she initiated the downfall of man. Adam's response reveals that man are quick to use women as a scapegoat instead of taking responsibility for their actions. This sheds a bad light on Milton's view of women.

The Son is displeased with Adam's answer, and scolds him for following Eves demands to eat the fruit. He explains that Adam was given the power to rule over Eve, and had the power to resist her demands. The Son tells Adam that he shouldn't have believed Eve because she is imperfect, and that he is held partially responsible for the fall. The beginning of book ten, Gives the reader more insight on Milton's distrust of women, and their inability to hold positions of power. He suggests that women shouldn't be given the power of choice because they make foolish decisions that have lasting consequences for men.

## **Conclusion**

Paradise Lost portrays Milton as someone who sees women as vile human beings, but is it possible that Milton was writing about how society viewed women during his lifetime? During Milton's time, readers wouldn't notice the inequality between Adam and Eve. In the modern world, readers can easily point out the differences between Adam and Eve, and realize that Eve was being seen in a negative light throughout Paradise Lost. Milton may not have intended his work to become a feminist piece, but Paradise Lost emphasizes how women can be portrayed as evil using the public's general opinion about them. If we can see the inequality in Milton's work, how can society prevent those views from becoming mainstream again?