

# ***The Angel in the House: The Ideal Victorian Woman***

The Victorian ideal of a woman was that of an angel in the house. The phrase “Angel in the House” comes from the title of a popular poem by Coventry Patmore, in which he holds up his angel-wife as a model for all women.

## **Extract from *The Angel in the House* – Canto IX, Book I, ‘The Sahara’ (1854)**

Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condoled necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself.  
How often flings for nought, and yokes  
Her heart to an icicle or whim,  
Whose each impatient word provokes  
Another, not from her, but him;  
While she, too gentle even to force  
His penitence by kind replies,  
Waits by, expecting his remorse,  
With pardon in her pitying eyes;  
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,  
A comfortable word confers,  
She leans and weeps against his breast,  
And seems to think the sin was hers;

Paraphrase the action of the poem

What does this tell us about how women and men should behave during this time period?

In comparing women to an angel, do you think this is a way of elevating or restricting them? Explain.

In 1931, British novelist Virginia Wolfe said, “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.” Given that a woman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” (in 1892, closer to Patmore’s time than Wolfe’s), how does Gillman portray women? As ‘Angels in the House’ or as free thinkers? Explain.