

# “The Angel in the House”



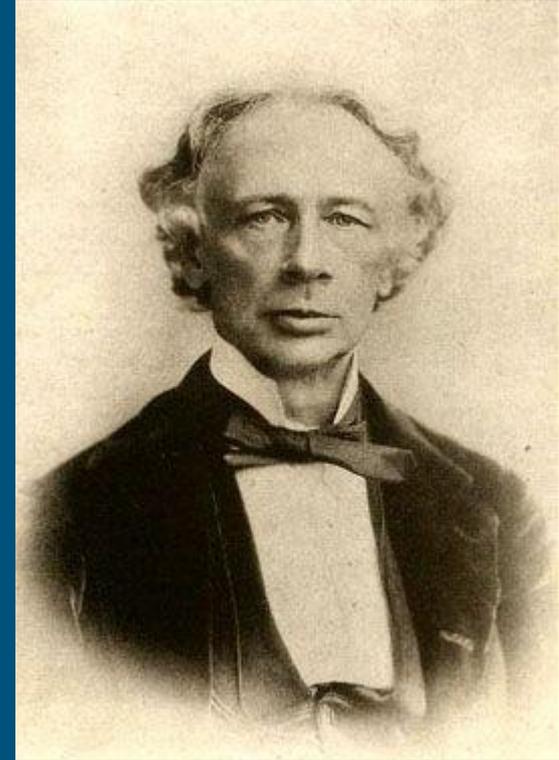
Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem voices the cultural expectations for wealthy, European women in the era.



# Background

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- Published in 1854 by Coventry Patmore
- The popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman came to be "the Angel in the House"; she was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband.
- The Angel was passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all--pure.

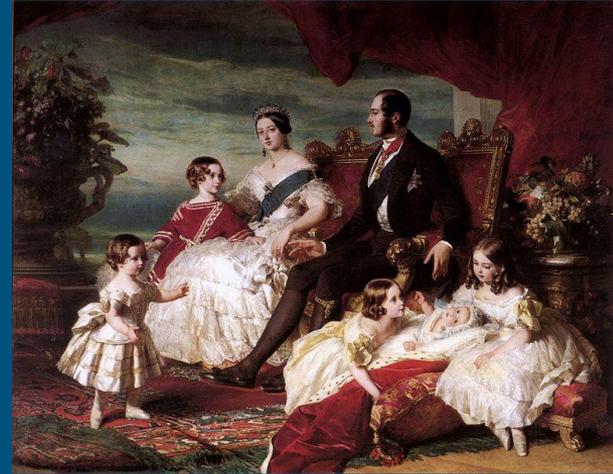


Coventry Patmore 1823-1896

# Background

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- Believing that his wife Emily was the perfect Victorian wife, Patmore wrote "The Angel in the House" about her.
- For Virginia Woolf, the repressive ideal of women represented by the Angel in the House was still so potent that she wrote, in 1931, "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer."



# The term “The Angel in the House”

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- The poem describes a Victorian marriage, but is written from the husband’s point of view.
- Main idea of poem: women are inferior to men with the sole purpose of aiding their husbands
- This might seem like a love poem however Patmore’s praise for women only relates to their ability to benefit men
- Objectification of women was customary for that period and remained a consistent theme throughout European Victorian literature

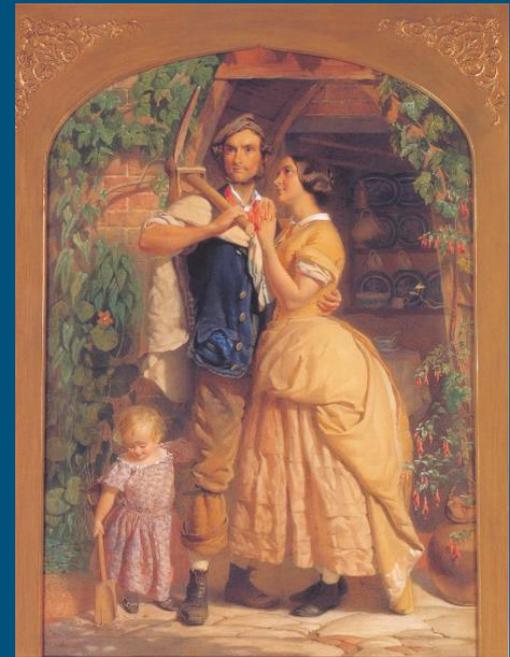
# The term “The Angel in the House”

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- Applied exclusively to middle- and upper- class women of the period
- Young women
  - educated but not taught any skills beneficial to them outside of the home
- Tasks that young women learned
  - Piano
  - needlework
  - fine arts (ex. painting)
  - on occasion, charity work with their mothers
- Easy to keep innocence
  - never been exposed to the hardships of the world

# Theory of Separate Spheres

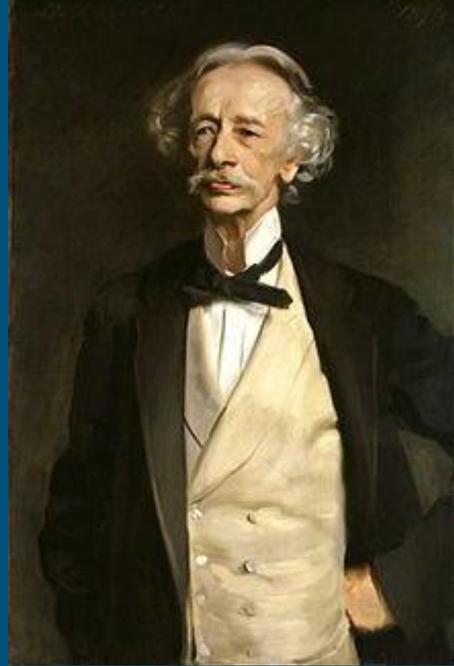
- Victorian theory that men and women by nature were separated to excel at different aspects of society
- Women were supposed to take care of children, be submissive towards the husband, and engage in the private sphere of domestic life.
- Men were meant to interact with the public sphere - exploring politics, economy, commerce, and law
- The theory was based on 'the will of God' and has a prevalent influence on the Victorian middle class



# Connection to Virginia Woolf's Writing

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- Both Patmore and Woolf
  - Write about ideal happy marriage
- Coventry Patmore
  - writes from a male perspective
- Virginia Woolf
  - writes from a female perspective
  - Wants to break gender stereotypes



# Works Cited

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