ON KILLING THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE: A STUDY OF
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S RESPONSE TO COVENTRY PATMORE'S
THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

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On Killing the Angel in the House: A Study of Virginia Woolf's Response to Coventry Patmore's

_The Angel in the House_

In her 1931 essay, "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf, long an ardent and outspoken pacifist, advocates no less than the "murder" of a besetting "phantom" (236), a phantom she calls the "Angel in the House" after the heroine of Coventry Patmore's enormously popular Victorian poem by the same name. Describing her own past struggle with this formidable Angel, Woolf emphatically declares, "Had I not killed her she would have killed me" (238). "Killing the Angel in the House," Woolf goes on to say, "was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (238).

When Woolf urges the "killing" of this Angel in the House, she is responding to what she sees as a circumscribed view of women and their roles in society, a view epitomized for her and countless others by Patmore's _The Angel in the House_ (1854-63). The ideal of female perfection promulgated in and popularized by this work was most certainly to play a prominent role both in Woolf's personal life and in her art. Her art, however, became a
central arena wherein her own internal battles with the Angel in the House were very often acted out.

While Woolf openly opposes Patmore's prescription for womanhood in her non-fiction writing, her approach at the level of her fiction is decidedly less polemical and, as such, perhaps more revealing of her own personal difficulties in coming to terms with this prevalent ideal. I intend to argue in this thesis that Woolf, despite the strong and confident pronouncements of "Professions for Women," found it exceedingly difficult to "kill" the Angel in her fiction and that such a "killing" had not, in actuality, been totally effected at the time Woolf wrote her bold essay proclaiming the Angel's demise. Angel figures pervade, even dominate, a significant portion of Woolf's early fiction. They occupy a central position in such works as The Voyage Out (1915), Mrs. Dalloway (1925), Mrs. Dalloway's Party (1922-1927), To the Lighthouse (1927), and Orlando (1928). Although an implicit attack on Patmore's Angel is woven intricately into such writings, Woolf still yields to the power of her own Angel figures and remains essentially unable to deal with them determinantly, to slay them.

It is not until the novel The Years (1937) that Woolf is able to eliminate effectively, to "kill" on the fictional level at least, the heretofore indomitable Angel
in the House. Drawing directly on The Angel in the House, Woolf takes Patmore's ideas and turns them upside down in The Years. Woolf begins her novel with the "killing off," in both body AND spirit, of the normative Angel figure. Woolf then proceeds to shatter other illusions central to Patmore's poem, illusions regarding the nature of home, of love, of woman, and of life itself. Ultimately, Woolf's machinations with Patmore's work in The Years involve more than a final fictional destruction of the troublesome Angel ideal. Woolf not only "kills" this old heroine at long last, but in the process she also creates a new heroine as well. From The Years emerges Woolf's own view of an "angel," an ever-questioning, ever-seeking, and ever-imperfect woman freed at last from the weighty chains of Victorian convention.

"So long as you write what you wish to write," Virginia Woolf exhorts female authors in the essay A Room of One's Own (1929), "that is all that matters" (110). But writing what one wishes to write, as Woolf makes clear in this and subsequent essays, was not necessarily the straightforward matter it might appear; it was, rather, a most extraordinary accomplishment for the woman writer of her (or perhaps any) day. Avoiding the sacrifice of "a hair of the head of [one's] vision, a shade of its colour in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his
hand or to some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve" (ROO, 110) could be at best an exacting and exhausting task, at times a struggle to the death with a formidable and insidious foe who would willfully and often subtly inhibit one's freedom of expression.

Such a foe for Woolf was the "Angel in the House." This Angel was the "dragon" that Woolf herself had to slay before she could write what she wished to write. As fictitious as Patmore's Angel was, she was nonetheless a formidable and very real force in the Victorian world. Killing the Angel in the House was a monumental task for Woolf, in part because the Angel and the work which inspired her occupied such an important place in the society in which Woolf grew to young womanhood. The Angel in the House was a work that totally captivated the Victorian imagination, its influence transcending its pages and flowing into the very heart of the Victorian home.

Frederick Page, in his study of Patmore and his work, entitles one of his chapters "The Poem of the Age." The now neglected poem to which Page refers was once so eagerly devoured by its reading public that it went into five editions in a nine-year period and sold, from the time of its first publication in 1854 to the poet's death in 1896, well over a quarter million copies (Reid 3). The reputation of The Angel in the House grew steadily and was
singularly enhanced in England by its avid reception in the United States, where it was almost instantaneously successful. Such literary greats as Emerson and Hawthorne greeted the work with enthusiasm (Derek Patmore 83-84). Among others back in England, Tennyson, Carlyle, Rossetti, Landor, and the Brownings sang the poem's praises, and in 1858 Aubrey de Vere wrote a favorable review of the piece in the *Edinburgh Review* (Gosse 101-106). John Ruskin became a great admirer of the poem and referred to it often in his lectures and writings; his own 1865 work *Sesame and Lilies* reiterates many of Patmore's themes and ideas.²

When Coventry Patmore penned his "poem of the age," his stated intention was to celebrate the passion and the virtue of married love (Derek Patmore 85), the epigraph of his poem being: "Par la grace infinie, Dieu les mist au monde ensemble" (27).³ In 1863 Patmore even considered giving his poem a new title—*English Love* (Page 84). Patmore critic J. C. Reid argues convincingly that Patmore intended the "bisexual Angel of Love," rather than the female protagonist, to be identified as the "heroine" of the tale and, subsequently, as the Angel in the House (136, 167-70). Nevertheless, it is clear that a Christian view of love and marriage lies at the heart of Patmore's work, and in an introduction to the cited edition of *The Angel*
in the House, Alice Meynell says of Patmore, "Love was to him theology, and the key to the parable of life" (10).

Whatever Patmore's intentions, however, his enthusiastic reading public was to respond to his work according to its own lights. The majority of Patmore's readers were more likely to identify the Angel of the title with the woman of the house than with the abstract idea of love. Some of Patmore's readers, for instance, may have been familiar with the 1834 poem by his father's friend Leigh Hunt, also entitled "An Angel in the House" and from which Patmore took the title for his own work. Hunt's fourteen-line poem reads in part:

Alas! we think not what we daily see
About our hearths,—angels, that are to be,
Or may be if they will, and we prepare
Their souls and ours to meet in happy air;—
A child, a friend, a wife whose soft heart sings
In unison with ours, breeding its future wings.
(Hunt 354)

Some Victorian readers perhaps remembered this earlier poem and its linkage of "wife," "hearth," and "angel."

"The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating," write Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic, "is always an angel" (20). Victorian literature was indeed replete with the "angel" creations of innumerable male authors. "Women become cloistered beings," writes Patmore scholar E. J. Oliver of
the Victorian Age, "and their angelic qualities were the theme of many novelists" (54). Nina Auerbach notes, in Woman and the Demon, that "[w]omen and angels proliferate most freely in novels of the 1840s and 1850s" (82). And in The City of Dickens, Alexander Welsh discusses this Victorian "angeology" at length (180-194), giving particular attention to the appearance in literature of the Victorian "Angel of Death," a selfless woman who hovers at the deathbed and "assists at the translation of the dying to a future state" (184).

Victorian readers were also quite likely to be well acquainted with the innumerable "fair ladies" of Scott and with such characters as the Prince's mother in Tennyson's popular The Princess who, as Martha Vicinus notes, bears much resemblance to Patmore's Angel in the House. This sainted mother is "all dipt / In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise, / Interpreter between the Gods and men, Who looked all native to her place..." (Vicinus 154). Readers of the day were also inundated with the long-suffering and virtuous heroines of, among others, Dickens and Thackeray, who frequently called such excessively good creatures of the hearth and home as Agnes Wickfield in David Copperfield or Laura Bell and Helen Pendennis in The History of Pendennis, "angels." Agnes, for example, whose presence is regularly heralded by the jingling of the
household keys, is at once a consummate housekeeper and a heavenly being. David Copperfield says of her: "Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things!" (916). David, who repeatedly associates Agnes with a stained-glass window in the church, calls her "the better angel of my life" (912). Readers of Dickens most likely concluded that Patmore's similar embodiments of female perfection and "heavenly" influence, Honoria and Jane, were, either or both, the "angel in the house" to whom the poem's title referred.

Women and angels tended often to be linked in the Victorian mind. Michael Slater remarks, in Dickens and Women, that in the ideology as well as the literature of the times, woman served an "exalted function" as "a sort of natural priest, closer to God than man, and a source for him of spiritual strength and encouragement" (307).

Furthermore, according to Janet Murray in Strong-Minded Women and Other Lost Voices of the Nineteenth Century, the economic isolation of women "gave rise to a new ideology—the cult of the domestic angel" (5). Publications of the period, such as Dickens's Household Words, Macmillan's Magazine, and Isabella Beeton's Beeton's Book of Household Management (1861), were replete with innumerable directives for just such a woman. Beeton writes, "As with the
Commander of an Army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment..." (84).

"Angelic" women were, apparently, not only the age's literary heroines but also its real-life heroines as well, heroines much suited to the tastes and mores of the times. For an increasingly secular nineteenth century, it became necessary, perhaps, to lessen the gap between Heaven and earth, to bring purity closer to home, to replace the Virgin Mary, long the preeminent model of female purity, with a more widely acceptable standard-bearer. In Victorian society, according to Gilbert and Gubar, it came to pass that "the eternal type of female purity was represented not by a madonna in heaven but by an angel in the house" (20).

It follows, then, that Patmore's tale, coming after the appearance of so many widely read, angel-worshipping forerunners, and replete with such saintly embodiments of female purity as Honoria and Jane, was a most timely one. Patmore did indeed become the "natural laureate" (Oliver 54) of the "angel and hearth" sentiment of his age, his domestic poem capturing the prevailing spirit of the times. The poem's heroine came to be recognized as a new madonna, a primary model of desirable (if hardly attainable) female behavior, the very epitome of Victorian womanhood, "making
Patmore's title," as Nina Auerbach notes, "a convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be" (67). The phrase "the Angel in the House" was undoubtedly on the lips of many in those days, and as this term made its way into popular usage, it came to have a powerful influence not only on women's behavior but, as Virginia Woolf realized, on the way women writers dealt with women's experiences.

While Patmore was not the sole contributor to this Victorian view of women nor the only writer to link woman and angel, he and his work, with its captivating and influential heroines, were vastly important to the culture of his time. Yet surprisingly, very little of his work is currently available, and even educated readers know little about Patmore, his poem, or his extraordinarily influential heroines.4

Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), a religious philosopher and eventual convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism, was an often enthusiastic member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Characterized by his various biographers5 as a complex and sensitive person always deeply interested in the arts, he was the author of innumerable essays on topics ranging from aesthetics and theology to literary criticism and architecture. Though a man of numerous interests and modes of expression, Patmore was
viewed by his contemporaries primarily as a poet, and as such he was, as previously noted, a not inconsequential figure on the Victorian literary horizon.

The Angel in the House, Patmore's most famous but probably not best poem, was originally published anonymously and is sometimes termed a "novel in verse" (Page 80). A lengthy work intended to be of epic proportions, it evolved gradually over a period of many years. The work's initial segment, The Betrothal, was first published in 1854. At the time of its publication, Patmore had already put several years of effort into this project which, as early Patmore friend and critic Edmund Gosse relates, Tennyson termed an "immortal poem" (64) and Patmore himself hoped would be comparable to, and even greater than, Dante's Divina Commedia (64). Another section of the poem, entitled The Espousal, was published in 1856. Within these first two sections unfolds, in octosyllabic quatrains, a tale about the courtship, marriage, and undying love of Felix and Honoria Churchill. Much of the tale is expressed as a poem within a poem, being Felix's poetic tribute to his beloved wife. These first installments of the poem have often been judged, perhaps rightly, as the best part of the work and, wrongly, its only part. The two parts of the poem were eventually
published together in 1858 under the title *The Angel in the House*.

Patmore continued to add to his work, however, publishing in 1860 a companion volume entitled *Faithful for Ever*, a work which, as Gosse states, eventually "melted" (76) into its successor, *The Victories of Love*. *The Victories of Love* first appeared serially in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1861 (although one passage of it had appeared as early as 1850 in Dickens's *Household Words*) and later in a revised book form in 1863. These two later sections, unlike the first two, were epistolary in form and were written in octosyllabic couplets. They chronicle the course of the difficult marriage of the indifferent Frederick to the spiritual and devoted, but long-suffering and self-abnegating Jane. A number of the letters that make up the poem are written by Frederick to his mother; several are written by secondary characters, and several by Jane, one of the most noteworthy being the deathbed letter she writes to her husband. Two other sections originally planned to complete the poem were never undertaken, most likely because of the untimely death of the author's own beloved wife and source of poetic inspiration, Emily Patmore. Consequently, Patmore's "finished" work became an epic of four parts eventually published together as a
single volume under the now all-encompassing title, *The Angel in the House* (1863).

The story that forms the basis of *The Angel in the House* is thin, yet it was, as Gosse makes clear, this weak story that captured the attention of its Victorian audience. Patmore's plot, over and above its illustration of the sacred nature of married love and the domestic nature of woman's role, centers on the love of country gentleman and former Cambridge scholar Felix Vaughan for the beautiful Honoria Churchill, daughter of the Dean of Close cathedral and sister to Mary and Mildred. Love blooms one balmy day at a picnic, where Felix adores Honoria in her airy muslins and Honoria likewise adores Felix, and it never dies despite the fact that Honoria's Aunt Maud vociferously prefers she marry Lord Clitheroe. Felix's love is so all-consuming that he tends to neglect all else; most certainly he neglects a dear university friend, Frank, who later confesses to Felix that he too is deeply in love. Felix's love and strong sexual urges find a suitable pre-marital outlet in poetry, a means of expression that later develops into the more mature poetic work that stems from his marital experience.

Honoria's cousin Frederick Graham also loves her passionately but is doomed to suffer the intense disappointments and torments of unrequited love. Honoria
chooses the worthier Felix, the more educated, refined and well-to-do man. Frederick must then seek an outlet for his physical and emotional passion. He decides to make a marriage of convenience rather than to wait to marry for love. He weds not a dean's but a chaplain's daughter, thus finding an acceptable means of sexual release in a less attractive and second-best alternative to his desires. At first Frederick remains extremely indifferent to his wife, but following the deaths of two of their children, he gradually begins to appreciate her beautiful nature. Tragically, this incipient love is frustrated by Jane's premature death.

This work revolves around its two major heroines, Honoria and Jane, who have been the subject of much of the criticism and the praise directed at the poem. Patmore's heroines, although superficially different, are both deeply revered, inherently charming, and extremely compassionate and selfless women. Furthermore, they are creative and potent figures, bearing within themselves the seeds of immortality.

Patmore's heroines inspire reverence above all, and they often influence others for the good. Honoria, for example, exhibits "heavenly" qualities, and, as her name implies, she inspires others to honor her. She deepens the faith of those who know her. Of the "Rose of the World,"
of the ideal woman his Honoria represents, Felix lyricizes:

Her disposition is devout,
   Her countenance angelical;
The best things that the best believe
   Are in her face so kindly writ
The faithless, seeing her, conceive
   Not only heaven, but hope of it . . . . (51)

Honoria is Felix's Angel. Awed cousin Frederick likewise sees Honoria's "holy" qualities and, recognizing an uncommon purity in her blushing smiles, "chastest brow," and "apprehensive innocence" (199), writes, "Heaven and Earth / Sealed amity in her sweet birth" (199).

Jane, a "dear, good," (237) girl, does not possess the extraordinary beauty and social grace of Honoria. Unlike Honoria, she has neither great wealth nor the deep affection of her husband. Nevertheless, as a result of her inner beauty and purity of spirit, Jane elicits the admiration and respect of all. She is so patient, loving, and saintly that she converts even the hardened heart of an unfeeling and uncharitable husband both to herself and to Christianity.

Patmore's heroines are both ingenuously charming. Despite her beauty, grace, and comfortable financial and social position, Felix can write of his Honoria:

   How artless in her very art;
   How candid in discourse; how sweet
The concord of her lips and heart;
   How simple and how circumspect;
How subtle and how fancy-free;
Though sacred to her love, how deck'd
With unexclusive courtesy. . . . (52)

And despite her husband's indifference, Jane's
guilelessness is so attractive that even condescending Lady
Clitheroe, Honoria's society-minded sister, notes Jane's
simple but appealing ways. Lady Clitheroe remarks Jane's
"sense / Humility, and confidence" (269), the innocent
manner by means of which she unknowingly disarmed and
"charm'd" (269) the men and women with whom she came in
contact.

Both Jane and Honoria live almost entirely for
others; they live "to please" (48), to serve. As eldest
daughter, Honoria takes over the duties of the household
for her widowed father, passing along these duties to her
unmarried sister Mary only on the eve of her own wedding.
Honoria's and Jane's efforts for "the poor" are very
frequently noted throughout the poem. "All poor folks
liked me" (296), writes Jane proudly in her deathbed
cd lettre. And according to Felix's housekeeper, "'The Poor
love Miss Honor's ways / Better than money'" (145).

Jane retains the staunchly Christian viewpoint that
her husband is her head despite his often cruel and
indifferent treatment, despite the "Eight wedding-days gone
by, and none / Yet kept" (258); she bears Frederick's
children and, as their caretaker, delights in her new
"usefulness" to her husband. "It's nice to fancy," Jane writes, "if I died, / He'd miss me from the Darling's side" (252). Later, when Jane is indeed dying, she reminds her husband of her unquestioning submission to him. "Remember that I never did / A single thing you once forbid" (295). She is so utterly selfless that in dying she leaves not only her blessings but also her wedding ring for her husband's next wife.

Honoria, once married, likewise engages in "a rapture of submission" until there's "nothing left of what she was" (160), deriving her greatest pleasure from her husband's praise--"How proud she always was / To feel how proud he was of her!" (30)--and persisting, no doubt as her mother did, in "The fiction of the Christian law / That all men honourable are" (34). Both Honoria and Jane undoubtedly illustrate the poem's overt view of woman's role in relation to man:

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; (82)

and:

Her will's indomitably bent
On mere submissiveness to him;
To him she'll cleave, for him forsake
Father's and mother's fond command!
He is her lord, for he can take
Hold of her faint heart with his hand. (124)
Patmore's heroines are creative women. Apart from their biological capacity to bear children, both Jane and Honoria take up as their personal charge the creation of a lighted, safe haven, the establishment of a home which is to become:

A tent pitch'd in a world not right  
It seem'd, whose inmates, every one,  
On tranquil faces bore the light  
Of duties beautifully done . . . . (36)

In spite of their differing circumstances, both these women strive to create a domestic atmosphere in which others can flourish. They work to create a cohesive, loving community of family members; they work to create a larger community of persons around themselves, often serving, as Honoria does at her home in High-Hurst Park, as organizer of and congenial hostess to a group of highly diverse individuals.

Honoria and Jane, despite their inherent gentleness and meekness, are also women of great power. Both draw others irresistibly to themselves. Felix writes that Honoria is "Fatal in force yet gentle in will / Her power makes, not defeats, but pacts" (84). Honoria has the power to draw out Felix's own creative powers, becoming his Beatrice, his Laura. Felix Vaughan will spend years trying to paint a reverent picture of his wife, a lyric picture in words that will do justice to his beloved. He wishes, he says, "to live her laureate all my life" (38) and to create
"a worthy hymn in woman's praise," to order his art "With rhapsodies of perfect words, / Ruled by returning kiss of rhymes" (37).

Such feminine power extends itself across the borders of life itself. Both Honoria and Jane bear within themselves the seeds of immortality, of a life that lasts beyond the grave. As Christians, both shall presumably inherit the eternal life promised by the Bible. But more to the point, Honoria is immortalized in the art, the poetry, for which she serves as an inspiration, poetry which shall live long after she has died. Jane's letters, and most especially the final letter she leaves for Frederick to read after her death, gives her too an immortality, a potent means of casting her light over others after she herself has ceased to be. "I'll write to you / Daily some words," she tells Frederick, "which you shall have / To break the silence of the grave" (290).

Jane and Honoria enjoy another kind of immortality as well, the immortality involved in the implied continuance of their female roles, in their "Angeldom." Just as Honoria earlier came to take over the home that was Felix's mother's, so another "angelic" woman will take her place when she is gone. Her "presence" will be continued by yet another "angel" who will assume the selfsame duties she herself has shouldered. When Jane dies, another woman
may come to take her place in the life of her husband, and another woman does indeed come to take her place in the life of her son. Patmore's poem ends with the marriage of Honoria and Felix's daughter, Emily, to Jane and Frederick's son John, a union whose "chief font" is to be "babes" (330) and a union which, as the work's closing "Wedding Sermon" points out, encourages the perpetuation of the roles played out by the couple's mothers:

By Heaven's kind, impartial plan,
Well-wifed is he that's truly man
If but the woman's womanly,
As such a man's is sure to be. (334)

A "womanly" woman is sure to be an Angel in the House.

At the time "Professions for Women" was written, Woolf's feminist attitudes were not new to her audience, and it hardly comes as a shock to modern readers that Woolf would react "violently" to a work containing such "womanly" women, such self-denying and submissive heroines as those Patmore created. Woolf's wrangling with Patmore was not new either. Ten years previously, on May 26, 1921, she had published a review of Patmore's *Courage in Politics and Other Essays* in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Here she objected to Patmore's narrowness, his tendency as a critic "to state his principle and shut the door" ("Patmore's Criticism" 38), and she attributed the "oddity" of his
viewpoint to none other than the Angel in the House. What is surprising, however, is the extent of Woolf's entanglement with Patmore and with his work and ideas. And interestingly, Woolf was not the first member of her family to respond strongly to Coventry Patmore and his writing.

"My Dear Mrs. Jackson," writes Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, to his future mother-in-law, "I am really sorry to have offended you, though I hope for forgiveness."

In this letter, dated 1877, Stephen continues as follows:

I see now that I spoke rather roughly and expressed myself too much in the sarcastic method, which wounds sympathetic admirers. I hoped that it would amuse you to see my ferocity; but you have taken some phrases too literally. I burlesqued C.P. a bit to bring out his meaning, and show what I disliked about it. But you are one of those eccentric people who don't enjoy hearing your friends abused; so you felt my reproaches, and I am sincerely sorry. (Maitland 314)

The "C.P." of Stephen's letter, the criticism of whom had wounded Maria Pattle Jackson, was none other than Coventry Patmore, long-time and intimate friend of the mother of the woman Stephen was about to marry. Maria Jackson was such a passionate devotee of both Patmore and his work that she had even convinced her physician husband to set up a practice in Sussex so as to bring her nearer her young "idol" (Love 56). Soon after she met Leslie Stephen, Mrs. Jackson had tried to interest her future son-in-law in the poet's works. Despite the apology, Mrs. Jackson's fondness
for Patmore was not diminished by Stephen's arguments. Nor was she deterred from continuing her close friendship with the writer, who said at her death, "To me she was always as tender as to a real son" (Maitland 313). Furthermore, Stephen's antipathy to Patmore was never overcome. In his December 3, 1896, The Mausoleum Book entry, he notes Patmore's death during the preceding week and states: "I never liked him, nor he, I suspect, me" (102).

What Jackson's daughter Julia Stephen believed about Patmore and his writings remains a matter for conjecture. But it is known that Virginia Woolf's mother brought to her marriage a copy of the fourth edition of The Angel in the House, an 1866 edition inscribed: "Julia Jackson with the kind regard of Coventry Patmore." The Stephen library eventually contained several Patmore volumes passed along to Julia by either Patmore himself or her mother (Gillespie 11). When Woolf sat down many decades later to write about "killing" the Angel in the House, she was in possession of an interesting dual legacy: her father's low regard for Patmore and her mother's personal connection to the poet and personalized copies of his works.

The Angel in the House was more than a "phantom" for Woolf. She was flesh and blood as well. In "Professions for Women," Woolf states that in the days of
Queen Victoria, "every house had its Angel" (237). Her own home, it would appear, was no exception. Despite Leslie Stephen's view that Patmore let "his feelings get the better of his intellect and produce a cowardly view of life and the world" (Maitland 314), he apparently shared Patmore's perception of woman as domestic angel; he certainly did not object to having his own "Angel in the House." He was, to borrow the title of Lytton Strachey's book, an "eminent Victorian," a man very representative of his time, a man whose expectations of and reverence for his wife were much like Felix Vaughan's for Honoria, or Coventry Patmore's for Emily. Shortly after the death of Julia Stephen on May 5, 1895, Leslie began The Mausoleum Book as a means to assuage his enormous grief. In this work, he refers to Julia as his "beloved angel" (196). He portrays her as little short of a saint: "a perfect mother" (83), "the best of nurses" (82), always "the noblest person present" (92), whose greatest achievement was "the outpouring of a most noble and loving nature, knitting together our little circle, spreading its influence to others, making one little fragment of the race happier and better and aware of a nobler ideal" (96).

Leslie Stephen, whose own disposition was far from angelic, depended on his wife's calm and resolute strength. In her study of the relationship between Julia Stephen and
Virginia Woolf, *The Invisible Presence*, Ellen Rosenman remarks that "Julia's vocation was to smoothe, to pacify, to nurture" (7). When Julia Stephen died, her elder daughter, Stella Duckworth, took over as mother to the thirteen-year-old Virginia and the other children and as housekeeper to her step-father, moving easily into her mother's role as "Angel in the House." As Virginia Woolf writes in the autobiographical *Moments of Being*, "Stella inherited all the duties" her mother had "discharged" (44), and, as Woolf's nephew Quentin Bell notes, she became Leslie Stephen's "legitimate prop" (Vol. I, 41). When Stella married, Leslie Stephen appeared to greet her decision as a great personal affront.

That Burne-Jones would select Julia Stephen as the model for the Madonna figure in his *Annunciation* seems quite apt. Virginia Woolf retained throughout her life a vivid recollection of her mother, pure and angel-like as she stood in her "white dressing gown on the balcony" (*MOB*, 81), and she later wrote that her mother was "one of those invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life" (80). Her mother's presence, Woolf also was to remark, "obsessed" (80) her long after Julia Stephen had been laid to rest. Bell tells us that visions of her mother so wound themselves around Woolf's heart and mind that they persisted even during Woolf's lapses into
insanity (Vol. II, 24). Julia Stephen was her daughter's as well as her husband's "Angel in the House," but for the daughter, she proved a frightfully powerful and haunting one.

Thus the Angel in the House loomed large on the horizon of Woolf's life and world. Not surprisingly, this selfsame Angel found her way into Woolf's art, where she yet again loomed large. In "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf memorably describes the tenacious adversary who had haunted her for decades. Ironically, the fierce foe so capable of strangling Woolf's creativity was a feminine, ethereal, utterly pervasive household presence who was, in Woolf's words, always "immensely charming," "intensely sympathetic," and "utterly unselfish" (237). Woolf goes on to explain:

She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. (237)

For Woolf, this Angel was a Being who wielded enormous power, a spirit who decades after she was birthed in Coventry Patmore's domestic epic still exerted such an influence that she remained a force with whom a woman artist, and with whom women in general, were invariably
forced to enter into mortal combat. Writes Woolf, "[W]hen I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room" (237). The most assuredly melodic voice of this Angel whispered to the woman writer, Woolf declares, to be ever so considerate of the ego of the male author or reader, to be "sympathetic" and "tender," to "flatter" and "deceive," to "use all the arts and wiles of our sex" (237). With every dip into the inkpot, the Angel attempted to guide a woman writer's pen. Woolf found the attempt disastrous:

For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel in the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must— to put it bluntly— tell lies if they are to succeed. (238)

And so, Woolf says of the Angel, "I turned upon her and caught her by the throat" (237).

In 1931, when Virginia Woolf described her confrontation with the Angel in the House, Angel figures had already appeared prominently in her fiction. Woolf, however, was not able to deal with these figures in fiction as straightforwardly, as boldly, as she had done in this essay. Her treatment of such figures in her novels and short stories seems tellingly equivocal. One conjectures
that Woolf struggled to find a point of balance between herself and that Angel in the House who so permeated the atmosphere of her daily existence; that Woolf's fiction at times became the stage on which this struggle was acted out; that the war between the Angel and the artist was unconsciously subsumed into the artist's art. While Woolf implicitly attacks the Angel in the works where she appears, in none of them is she successfully able to "kill" her. The Angel figure remains a potent one.

In Woolf's 1928 novel Orlando, for example, the reader finds a scene quite similar to the one described in "Professions for Women." An artist encounters a force that would suppress her art. Orlando, the Elizabethan nobleman and poet whose strange existence brings him from the Renaissance to modern times, from manhood to womanhood, confronts in the nineteenth century the "spirit of the age," a spirit akin to the Angel in the House, who demands "deep obeisance" and is highly opposed to all "contraband" (265) thoughts. Orlando finds that as an unmarried Victorian woman writer, her pen can emit only one "lachrymose blot after another" (243). Only after a transaction of "infinite delicacy" between herself and the spirit of the age--"by putting on a ring and finding a man on a moor, by loving nature and being no satirist, cynic or psychologist" (266)--only after a working relationship
between herself and the spirit is established, can she, a woman writer, write. Orlando, like Woolf herself, struggles with a "spirit of the age," but unlike Woolf, Orlando does not even attempt to "kill" the Angel that hovers about her; instead she learns to coexist with her foe in an unholy sort of compromise. The Angel's power, though mitigated, remains.

Comparable situations can be discovered elsewhere in Woolf's fiction. Angel figures appear. An attack against their "Angel-ness" is implicit within the work, but the figures are not "killed" and always retain their potency. Such a character is Mrs. Dalloway, who appears in the novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and in a number of short stories written between 1922 and 1927 now published together as *Mrs. Dalloway's Party*: adored and charming, submissive and compassionate, creative and inspirational, potent and "immortal."

In *The Voyage Out*, Clarissa Dalloway is the object of young Rachel Vinrace's admiration. Clarissa exudes, besides a pervasive, intoxicating, and "curious scent of violet" that Rachel associates with her own deceased mother (47), great charm, a charm that links her also with artistic inspiration. She is a "pretty creature" (51), a "fascinating" woman, and "astonishingly like an eighteenth century masterpiece" (47). Clarissa is a woman of
extraordinary warmth and vitality, a woman whose presence seems to linger, like her violet scent, long after she herself has gone. Like other of her "Angelical" counterparts, Mrs. Dalloway is a woman who takes on the duty of service to others, a woman of compassion who finds herself deeply affected by "a poor, hungry, dirty little face" (45) she sees in the streets. She is submissive; she feels her husband is "morally her superior" (52); she defers to the male intelligence, content to leave to men the greater affairs of the world. "The men always are so much better than the women" (50), she says.

In the novel named for her and in the short stories of Mrs. Dalloway's Party, Mrs. Dalloway acts as a superlative orchestrator of events. She functions as a creative influence who can bring together, for the moment at least, diversities, who can fling into "the whirlpool" as Lily Everit expresses it in "The Introduction," all those persons she touches and chooses to bring together. She is adept at making introductions; she is a beautiful, charming, and consummate hostess. She possesses the urge "to combine, to create" (MD, 185).

At first glance, Mrs. Dalloway seems but a variation on the theme of Patmore's Honoria and Jane in The Angel in the House. Woolf's Angel, however, differs
greatly from Patmore's. Woolf's Angel is brought down to earth, humanized rather than canonized.

The reader is certainly aware that the Mrs. Dalloway of *The Voyage Out* is a shallow or, at least, an undeveloped individual, an imperfect woman, one obsessed with furs and champagne, chatter and parties, and the distinctions of social class. Woolf herself worried that readers of *Mrs. Dalloway* might perceive Clarissa as lacking depth. In this novel, Clarissa, unlike Patmore's self-sacrificing heroines, seeks an escape from a role that seems often to constrain her. She attempts to escape the pressures to be an Angel and silently seeks her own center, her own inviolable self. She is sometimes at odds with the circumstances of her life and wishes to defy, to throw over, all that she knows so well. She has always envied the young Sally Seton who had "a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything" (48). Mrs. Dalloway nourishes regrets. "She had gone up into the tower alone and had left them blackberrying in the sun" (70). She retreats within herself to find her "treasure" (281), her own "diamond"-like inner core, her own uniquely fashioned self--"pointed; dartlike; definite" (55).

Still, despite Woolf's weakening of Clarissa's Angel qualities in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf does not "kill" the Angel. Mrs. Dalloway's presence remains a potent and
ubiquitous one, one that disseminates itself mightily into the very crevices of others' lives. Mrs. Dalloway stirs Doris Kilman's hate—and love. In Peter Walsh, Clarissa Dalloway has "sapped something," "permanently" (241). Her influence makes itself felt even when she herself is not present. Clarissa herself feels a part of everything; she suspects that she will survive as part of the trees, as part of her home, as part even of those persons she has never known, "being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen trees lift the mist" (12). She is a compelling but often inscrutable "mystery," like an angel in white, flowing robes who might well appear on the balcony in one's memory. Peter Walsh pictures Clarissa as just such a misty spirit:

Thus she had come to him on board ship; in the Himalayas; suggested by the oddest things . . . . She had influenced him more than any person he had known. And always in this way coming before him without his wishing it, cool, lady-like, critical; or ravishing, romantic, recalling some field or English harvest. He saw her most often in the country, not in London. One scene after another at Bourton. . . . (232-33)

The essence, the "ecstasy," the "terror" (296) that is Clarissa lingers when she herself is not present. And at the end of the novel, one feels the "immortality" inherent in her "Angelic" role as her daughter Elizabeth, whose development as a young woman parallels her mother's,
literally takes her mother's place at her father's side. "So she went to him and they stood together, now that the party was almost over, looking at the people going, and the rooms getting emptier and emptier ... (295).

In the 1927 novel To the Lighthouse, Woolf's most obvious and potent Angel figure appears. Herein Julia Stephen serves once again as model for a portrait of a "divine" nature. Just as Mrs. Ramsay and her child are the unwitting models for awe-stricken artist Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse, so Julia Stephen and family become the subjects of Woolf's art. As Virginia Woolf makes clear in Moments of Being, Mrs. Ramsay is an impressionistic portrait of her mother, an artistic (and cathartic) portrayal of the "presence" that had, in life and after death, both warmly nurtured and greatly encumbered her.

Ellen Rosenman describes Julia Stephen as "an apparently perfect embodiment of Victorian womanhood, a great beauty, an accomplished hostess, a self-sacrificing and adored mother of eight" (viii). So too is Mrs. Ramsay. Like Julia, Mrs. Ramsay becomes an object of worship to those around her, a source of great admiration, inspiration, even art. Mrs. Ramsay is, of course, adored by her husband and children. Her beauty and charm cause her effortlessly to compel others, such as Charles Tansley, William Bankes, Lily Briscoe, to reverence, to idolize her.
"She put a spell on them all," (152) thinks Lily Briscoe.
Lily spends years trying to grasp the essence of Mrs.
Ramsay, trying to transfer to canvas what she calls Mrs.
Ramsay's "perfect goodness" (300) and to capture the
recurrent Madonna-and-Child vision that she has of Mrs.
Ramsay and her son James:

Knitting her reddish-brown hairy stocking, with her
head outlined absurdly by the gilt frame, the green
shawl which she had tossed over the edge of the frame,
and the authenticated masterpiece by Michael Angelo,
Mrs. Ramsay smoothed out what had been harsh in her
manner a moment before, raised his head, and kissed her
little boy on the forehead. (48)

Like other Angels, Mrs. Ramsay is a woman whose
life is subservient to, often subsumed by those around her.
She is a woman with a social conscience, a woman who cares
for the less fortunate and feels passionately about
"hospitals and drains and the dairy" (89). She is a woman
who cares for and shelters her children, who manages her
home, who arbitrates and softens family disagreements. She
is a woman who protects her husband from as many of the
unpleasantries of household existence as possible and from
criticism or any knowledge of his failures. "Indeed, she
had the whole of the sex under her protection" (13). She
allows her husband to pursue his intellectual pursuits,
being a woman who chooses to place her husband at her head,
and she carries the brunt of more mundane affairs. She
"did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband" (61). With instinctive knowledge about life, a "knowing without having learnt" (48), Mrs. Ramsay nevertheless trusts and relies on "masculine intelligence" and lets it "uphold her and sustain her" (159).

Mrs. Ramsay is a creative force and the central figure of any social or family gathering. She is a potent figure and is not only the mother of a family but the creator of a series of "communities." "And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her" (126). Mrs. Ramsay is a superlative hostess, gracious and generous, warm and accepting, drawing together by the gentle but irresistible influence of her beauty and personality persons otherwise incompatible. She provides in her home a haven of light and safety in the midst of life's sea, bringing "a coherence in things, a stability . . . in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral" (158). Mrs. Ramsay's presence dominates the landscape of her family's daily life, much as the lighthouse dominates the landscape of her actual world, and Mrs. Ramsay's illuminating presence serves to keep her world afloat and together. "And directly she went a sort of disintegration set in" (168) notes Lily.

Mrs. Ramsay is indeed an Angel figure. Nonetheless, Woolf once again weaves into her work an implicit attack on Patmore's brand of heroine. Like
Clarissa, and unlike Honoria and Jane, Mrs. Ramsay appears "earthly," human. She is capable of being, at times, self-oriented rather than other-oriented. She, like Clarissa Dalloway, needs her private space. She searches out her own small corner of the world, eagerly charting an isolated territory in which "to be silent; to be alone. All the being and doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (95). In the midst of her most successful dinner party or her most intimate moment with her husband, Mrs. Ramsay seeks to slip away to her own little island of self, to reach the protected cove of her own "dream land" (140).

There is in Woolf's works an often mordant awareness of the difference between a character's inner attitudes and her outer behavior, a distinction not discernible in Patmore's poem. Jane's innermost thoughts, at least as she expresses them in her letters, are revealed to the reader, and her devotion to a cruelly inattentive husband seems total and inalterable. She writes to her mother-in-law:

But to judge him is not for me.
Who myself sin so dreadfully
As half to doubt if I should care
To go to Heaven, and he not there.
He must be right; and I dare say
I shall soon understand his way. (253)
While Patmore never allows his reader to get inside Honoria's mind—we see her only through the eyes of others—the reader feels that her inner devotion to her husband is as unquestioning as that she displays. The reader cannot help but feel that Honoria, whose greatest desire is to please her husband, would never entertain the thought, as does Mrs. Ramsay, that her husband's "last book was not quite his best book" (62).

Mrs. Ramsay, of course, will never tell her husband what she suspects about his book, and she harbors other thoughts that would be unthinkable to the unswervingly devoted Jane or Honoria. Mrs. Ramsay resents the things she must keep to herself. Sometimes she protests inwardly against her situation, silently decrying the necessity "to hide small daily things, and the children seeing it, and the burden laid on them..." (62). There are lapses in her affection for her husband, and she occasionally allows herself to wonder what she has done with her life. She is often at odds with life itself, "always trying to get the better of it" (92); at times she feels the need to be rid of her "attachments" (95), of the responsibilities and the dependent personalities that engulf her.

In To the Lighthouse, Woolf once again depicts an Angel figure who falls short of perfection, and once again Woolf cannot "kill" her. It is indeed true that Mrs.
Ramsay dies in the course of the novel, but Woolf makes her death a mere parenthetical event, something alluded to but never actually experienced by the reader. Mrs. Ramsay may undergo physical death in the course of the novel, but the essence that IS Mrs. Ramsay cannot be slain. Like the lighthouse itself, Mrs. Ramsay is a pulsating and continuing presence. Her spirit lives on even after she dies.

As she thinks of a newly engaged couple, Mrs. Ramsay herself ponders her own immortality:

It flattered her, where she was most susceptible of flattery, to think how, wound about in their hearts, however long they lived she would be woven; and this, and this, and this, she thought going upstairs, laughing, but affectionately, at the sofa on the landing (her mother's); at the rocking-chair (her father's); at the map of the Hebrides. All that would be revived again in the lives of Paul and Minta; "the Rayleys"--she tried the new name over; and she felt with her hand on the nursery door, that community of feeling with other people which emotion gives as if the walls of partition had become so thin that practically (the feeling was one of relief and happiness) it was all one stream, and chairs, tables, maps, were hers, theirs, it did not matter whose, and Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead. (170-1)

Mrs. Ramsay's immortality finds its source in both her role, one which will be carried out by other women after her death, and in her own compelling personality.

In life and death, as with Julia Stephen, Mrs. Ramsay's presence does indeed wind itself around the hearts of her family and friends. Most certainly Mrs. Ramsay's
presence "winds about" and unsettles the heart of Lily Briscoe. "Ghost, air, nothingness," says Lily of the dead Mrs. Ramsay, "and then suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus" (266). After her death, Mrs. Ramsay's presence continues to invade Lily's thoughts and emotions, ultimately visiting her in the form of an "odd-shaped triangular shadow over the step" (299). The appearance of this shadow allows Lily to capture at last the essence of Mrs. Ramsay that she has so long sought to incorporate into her painting. Lily grasps for an instant the pervasive but elusive spirit of the woman who haunts her, and Mrs. Ramsay is thus immortalized in her completed work of art. For Lily, as for Virginia Woolf at this moment of her artistic life, the Angel is yet a living spirit, a spirit yet too potent, too meaningful, to slay, but one with whom, like Orlando, she must creatively come to terms.

Woolf, then, deals directly in her non-fiction and indirectly in her fiction with the entity known as the Angel in the House. She responds both explicitly and implicitly to the idealization of woman Patmore presented in The Angel in the House. Her fiction frequently includes an Angel figure, but Woolf's depiction of that figure is often ambiguous, containing an acknowledgement and reverence of the being's power and influence while attempting, in some way or another, to strike out against
it. It is not until Woolf writes *The Years* in 1937 that she is able to respond to Patmore's work and premises as forthrightly on a fictional level as she did in her 1931 essay.

*The Years* represents a major step in Woolf's fiction, a step radically beyond *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and some of her short fiction, beyond even *To the Lighthouse*. While Woolf's response to Patmore's Angel is undoubtedly a response directed against the standards of Victorian society in general, *The Years* seems Woolf's rather direct counterstatement to *The Angel in the House* in particular. As "Professions for Women" is Woolf's answer to Patmore and his Angel, so too is *The Years* an answer--this time an answer in the form of fiction to parallel and countermand Patmore's fiction, an answer incorporated within Woolf's art as befits an artist freed at last from the stranglehold of the Angel in the House.

That Patmore and his poem were on Woolf's mind at the time she was working on *The Years* is more than probable. In a diary entry dated July 24, 1934, Woolf refers to a somewhat argumentative discussion of Patmore, important enough to her to have warranted inclusion in her diary, a discussion in which she apparently took part and which occurred during the writing of *The Years* (IV, 230). Furthermore, it is not unlikely that Woolf was thinking
about Patmore and his work at the very moment she conceived the novel. Citing another entry in Woolf's diary, both Mitchell Leaska and Grace Radin note in their studies of *The Years* and its precursor novel-essay *The Pargiters* that the idea for what eventually became *The Years* came to Woolf in the bathtub as she was contemplating the essay she hoped would encompass the material of a January 1931 lecture to be given the very next evening, a lecture centering on her struggle with Patmore's *Angel in the House* (Radin 2; Leaska xv). Woolf's idea was to write a novel "about the sexual life of women" (*Diary, IV, 6*) and to base the work on the paper she was about to read.

The germ thus engendered grew into a novel begun some twelve months later. This novel underwent numerous changes. Woolf's first plan was to intersperse relevant essays, eventually published independently in 1938 as *Three Guineas*, amidst fictional episodes, and her preliminary work was variously entitled *The Pargiters, Here and Now, Music, Dawn, Sons and Daughters, Daughters and Sons, Ordinary People, The Caravan*, and, finally, *The Years*. While Woolf was far too original and complex a writer to have based her work entirely, or even closely, on that of another, there are some rather interesting affinities between Patmore's *The Angel in the House* and Woolf's *The Years*, affinities which deserve a closer look. Despite the obvious differences between the
two works written about eighty years apart, there are some equally obvious similarities.

Patmore's work has been characterized as "a novel in verse," and it is not extraordinary for Woolf's works, with their frequently lyrical prose, to be characterized as poetical. Woolf herself talks about the "poetry," the rhythmical and fluid prose she hopes to incorporate into The Years. More significant, however, is the fact that the two works are quite comparable in overall structure. In the first half of his poem (the second half is epistolary and decidedly different), Patmore divides the verses of each of the two volumes into twelve distinct and self-contained Cantos, the entire section being introduced by a "Prologue" and closed with an "Epilogue." Each successive canto presents a specific occurrence or concept advanced chronologically and introduced by philosophical "Preludes." These preludes, "The Paragon," "The Rose of the World," "The Wife's Tragedy," and "Platonic Love," to name a few, while containing no action within themselves, set the tone for succeeding events. The "Epilogue" of this first half of the poem serves to bring Honoria and Felix up to the "present day" in their lives. "The Wedding Sermon," the only non-epistolary segment of the poem's second half, The Victories of Love, serves as a "summing up," an epilogue
not only to this second portion of the poem but to the entire work as well.

The format of Woolf's work is, while not so formal, not very dissimilar. Woolf divides her novel into ten self-contained chronological chapters, each bearing the name of a specific year--"1880," "1891," "1907," and so forth. An eleventh chapter, entitled "Present Day," functions as an epilogue. Like Patmore's "Epilogue," it brings the characters back to the present time, sums up their past, and gives direction to their future. Woolf, too, introduces each chapter with a "prelude," an introductory paragraph or two that sets the tone--"It was an uncertain spring," "The autumn wind blew over England," "The sun was rising," her chapters begin--but does not advance the narrative. These "preludes" were not added until the last months before the book was published, indicating that their addition was a deliberate stroke.

Both authors choose to deal with "the ordinary," with such daily things as household bills and expenses, babies and rambunctious children, tea-time, bread and butter, love letters, picnics, parties and social gatherings, visits to the opera, work with the poor, family dogs, aunts, the sexual instinct, and the quotidian intricacies of family living and relationships. Such prosaic concerns are to be discovered in both works. One of Edmund Gosse's less kind assessments of his friend
Patmore characterized the poet as a "laureate of the tea-table, with his humdrum stories of girls that smell of bread and butter" (The Athenaeum, June 1886). In The Years hardly a chapter goes by without at least a reference to the taking of tea. Undoubtedly the references by both authors can be explained by the popularity of the custom--Woolf notes in Moments of Being how centered around the tea-table life in the model Victorian home was--but the taking of tea takes on symbolic significance in both works. Someone MUST take charge of father's tea, and who that "someone" is is a matter of importance in each work. In Woolf's novel, moreover, Mrs. Pargiter's rose-covered tea-kettle, one that does not boil, becomes a central symbol of the work, a symbol of the impotency and inefficacy of Victorian family life.

In Patmore's case, such a proclivity for the mundane was an anomaly in view of the high-minded and noble type of poetry he wished to write, but he felt the attention to "domesticities" and a "modest and unpretentious" (Gosse 79) style was crucial to the point he wished to convey, the point that heaven and earth converged in the context of Christian married love and domesticity. For Woolf, this preoccupation with the more prosaic concerns of life and the deliberate resumption of a more conventional style represented a departure from her own
more recent experimental fiction. She had just completed *The Waves*, a novel she characterizes in her diary as possibly "my first work in my own style" (IV, 53). That she would return to an earlier style seems odd except for the fact that she too felt a desire to comingle practical and abstract concerns in her art. She yearns to write a novel dealing with "real life" (AWD, 297) yet teeming with "millions of ideas" (AWD, 198), a novel, as she says, that is "a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like, admire, hate" (AWD, 198).

More striking than any of these details, however, is the similarity in overall plan between *The Years* and *The Angel in the House*. Both works afford the reader a long view into the lives of several interrelated families through a series of ordinary events as they occur in these lives year after year. The major events of life—the journeys, the births, the weddings, and the deaths—tend to occur during the intervals between the more prosaic scenes, alluded to but remaining unseen by the reader. As Woolf writes in *The Years*: "Slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, the weeks, the years passed one after another across the sky" (4). So indeed the years pass as the story unfolds in both works. Woolf's novel covers a span of somewhat over fifty years, from 1880 to the "Present Day" (the 1930s), and deals primarily with three generations of closely related families. While
Patmore's families and time span are more compact, his work follows an almost identical course, the events spanning a twenty-year period and dealing similarly with three generations and several closely related families. Both works ultimately deal with all the concepts that Woolf herself considered as titles for her own work, with the here and now, with daughters and sons, with music and dawn, with ordinary people, with a caravan of persons and places, and above all, with an ever faster progression of years.

Furthermore, these two seemingly disparate works present characters with striking resemblances. One of Woolf's first titles for her novel was The Pargiters. Interestingly, both her work and Patmore's center on pargetters, on persons like Julia Stephen who shoulder an Angelic role and who do what pargetters do--plaster, smooth over, cover up, and whitewash. Jane Graham, for example, tries to smooth over, to patch up, her own highly imperfect relationship with Frederick. Eleanor who functions as "the smoother, the maker-up of quarrels, the buffer" between family members and the "intensities and strifes of family life" (14), likewise tries to cover up all the rough and dirty spots of family life. Jane Marcus writes, "Eleanor is the pargetter in The Years. She spends her life literally plastering the ceilings of the slums, fixing leaky roofs, and cleaning smelly drains" (39).
In *The Years*, Woolf picks up a narrative thread similar enough to that of *The Angel in the House* to appear borrowed. Combining features of both Felix and Frederick, Edward is a comparatively well-off gentleman/scholar (an Oxford man) who has fallen in love with his cousin, don's rather than dean's daughter Kitty Malone. For Edward, love has also bloomed at a picnic where Kitty, like Honoria in a flowing, white muslin dress, has powerfully attracted him. His strong feelings cause him, as they did Felix, to neglect his university friends, one of whom we later discover will marry Edward's sister. Kitty does not return his love, choosing instead to marry the "worthier," wealthier Lord Lasswade, whom her mother has favored. Edward, in the throes of frustrated passion, vents his feelings, like his counterparts in Patmore's poem, in poetry. His literary energies ultimately find expression in his life's work, a translation of *Antigone*, a defiant and magnetic character with whom he has always associated Kitty. Edward's work provides an acceptable but incomplete outlet for his frustrated sexual desires and, as in Frederick's case, serves as a second-best solution for the emotions he experiences.

A number of characters and circumstances in *The Angel in the House* have their counterparts in *The Years*. Aside from the already noted relationships between Felix, Frederick, and Edward, one can draw numerous other
parallels. Honoria's meddlesome, old-fashioned Aunt Maud, the aunt who at first obstinately opposes the love match with Felix in favor of an arranged and more practical match, meets her match in the obstinate but bright-eyed Aunt Warburton, a vestige of a former way of life whom Martin Pargiter characterizes as "the nineteenth century going to bed" (266). The only specifically delineated members of the Angel's third generation, Emily and John, have their counterparts in the only specifically delineated members of The Years's third generation, Peggy and North. Even the Churchill family dog, Wolf, who is always underfoot, has its counterpart in the Pargiter dog, who is always sleeping at the foot of the stairs.

The widowed patriarch of the Churchill family, the Dean, and the soon-to-be widowed patriarch, Colonel Pargiter, are likewise counterpart characters. Their positions are parallel. Both men experience the death of a spouse and are left (like Leslie Stephen and Coventry Patmore) to raise a large family without the assistance of a wife. Servants such as the Dean's Mrs. Fife and the Colonel's Crosby can ease the load, but each man must count on unmarried daughters, Mary and Eleanor respectively, to manage the household, and, of course, to serve the tea.

Similarly, Dean Churchill's three daughters, Honoria, Mildred, and Mary, are paralleled in Woolf's
novel. In *The Years*, the central family is that of Colonel Abel Pargiter whose four daughters, Eleanor, Milly, Delia, and Rose, are pivotal female characters; their brothers Edward, Martin, and Morris; Morris's children, Peggy and North; their cousins Maggie and Sara Pargiter and Kitty Malone also play important roles in the course of the novel. In *The Angel in the House*, Honoria is a primary heroine and a model daughter, a daughter who follows her culture's most praiseworthy pattern and marries for love. Delia Pargiter and cousin Maggie Pargiter also apparently marry for love, each woman hanging her hopes on a man for whom she appears to care deeply.

Mildred Churchill is the Angel's "giddy" (153) daughter, a flighty young woman concerned with her prize roses and material pleasures, excited by letters from Bonn and "plums from Spain" (36). Mildred reads Mme de Genlis and likes, as her letters in *Victories of Love* reveal, to give advice. Unlike Honoria, Mildred marries for security, for wealth and social position. She is the sister who does, in fact, become Lady Clitheroe, and she devotes herself to such grave concerns as the fact that "[p]oor Mrs. Graham has never been / To the Opera!" (270). Her counterpart in *The Years*, Milly, always "voluminous in draperies proper to her sex and class" (373), establishes a conventional relationship with a conventional but socially well-placed man (her brother's university friend, Hugh
Gibbs). Having attained both financial security and social position, her life will be marked by a succession of children and servants, an endless stream of social events, literary lectures, and hunting parties. Cousin Kitty Malone follows suit. While not wanting to be a don's wife, she takes up, as previously noted, another of her mother's prescriptions for marital happiness. Kitty chooses to enter into a conventional and convenient marriage; she becomes Lady Lasswade.

Mary Churchill, the third daughter, never marries, by choice, being "heavenly overmuch" (35) and an intense and sensitive girl who is torn between her filial duty to a widowed father and her burning devotion to the Anglican God. Her rejection of a qualified suitor and of a woman's conventional domestic role evidently brings her father's surprised protest. Mary responds:

I grieve for my infirmity,  
And ignorance of how to be  
Faithful, at once, to the heavenly life,  
And the fond duties of a wife.  
Narrow am I and want the art  
To love two things with all my heart. (303)

There are four single women prominent in _The Years_, characters who recall Patmore's Mary. Sara Pargiter, too, has her "infirmity." She is deformed; her physical limp symbolizes her emotional imbalance, and she, too, is unable to follow the expected course, to fit the normal mold. She
mimics the words and actions of others, unable to dance like her sister Maggie, unable to thrive in society as others seem naturally to do. Rose Pargiter's singleminded, narrow pursuit of a variety of social causes, causes such as women's suffrage, will ultimately lead to her incarceration. Imagining herself the leader of a mighty army, she will never surrender; she will accept any consequences in order to promote the causes she champions. Rose will choose never to marry. Peggy Pargiter is also a single-minded woman, a woman who has a strong focus. In choosing to be a doctor, Peggy, like Mary, rejects the conventional woman's role and, in so doing, experiences a sense of extreme isolation. Eleanor Pargiter is Virginia Woolf's example of the single woman who, like Mary, inherits the cares of her father's household and must subsequently consider the needs of others before she may consider her own.

The similarities between the two works provide the basis for much interesting speculation, but these connections being established, it is then in the differences between them that Woolf's response to Patmore gains clarity and potency. Upon close analysis, Woolf's counterparts become Woolf's counterpoints, as sharp as shards of glass. The parallels woven between the two works become the basis upon which Woolf spins out a response to
the characters and situations presented in *The Angel in the House*.

Woolf's first step in untangling the warp and woof of Patmore's vision is this time to "kill," on the fictional level, the Angel in the House. This Angel is to wield no more power, and she must be removed from both mortal AND immortal planes in the fictional work.

To this end, Woolf begins her tale of years where Patmore's ends—with the physical death of an "Angel." Despite the fact that Mrs. Pargiter dies in the very first chapter of *The Years*, Woolf's inclusion of her death at the very beginning of the novel was a deliberate and yet an emotionally taxing step for her. Woolf writes about *The Years* in her diary:

> I am rearranging it all too, all the first part, so as to bring it together. The death happens in the first chapter now... I have just killed Mrs. P. and cant shoot ahead to Oxford. For the truth is these little scenes embroil one, just as in life; & one cant switch off to a different mood all in a second. It seems to me the realness of the beginning is complete. (IV, 173)

Dealing with any drawn-out dying can be an agonizing and painful ordeal. Colonel Pargiter's "wife was dying; but she did not die" (14). Mrs. Pargiter, on the brink of death, would rally and continue the fight. Like the Angel mentioned in "Professions for Women," like the Angel Virginia Woolf claimed to have at last dispatched, Mrs.
Pargiter "died hard" (238), unexpectedly "creeping back" time and time again. "Killing" her was not an easy task for Woolf.

While we know too little of Mrs. Pargiter to compare her closely with Jane, Honoria, or Mrs. Ramsay, it is evident that she once played a role not unlike theirs. Mrs. Rose Pargiter is an Angel figure: the reader's first glimpse of her is as the fresh and innocent subject of a Victorian portrait, "the portrait of a red-haired young woman in white muslin holding a basket of flowers on her lap" (10). She makes but one more appearance, clothed in the white sheets of her deathbed hours. Her hand "with the simple ring, the white and wasted hand," (25) evokes ideas of long-suffering and faithfulness, the qualities of a Jane Graham. Mrs. Pargiter must be a woman long in the habit of "doing for others." Even as she lies dying, she remembers Uncle Digby's birthday. In a rare moment of lucidity, noticing another clean tablecloth on the table, she worries about the washing bill. Such concern reveals a woman long immersed in the management of domestic affairs. And not without significance is the detail that Mrs. Pargiter, like Julia Stephen and Mrs. Ramsay, is a Victorian woman, a woman with a large family for whom the role of domestic angel would certainly have been normative.

Although the reader does not learn if she possessed the influence of an Honoria or a Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Pargiter
is nevertheless a potent figure. Her impending death
wields an undeniable power over her family. As long as she
remains in the shadowy land between life and death, a
condition in which her physical power over others wanes but
her emotional power increases, her family's lives are more
than ever controlled by hers. "The girl in white seemed to
be presiding over the protracted affair of her own death-
bed with a smiling indifference that outraged her daughter"
(45). Delia, guilt-ridden by her lack of sorrow over her
mother's impending death, nonetheless intensely desires the
end of that protracted dying so that her own life, for all
practical purposes called to a halt, might begin again.
Eleanor waits, the Colonel waits, Milly waits. Life is
continually interrupted by the invalid's unpredictable
crises. Dying by inches, Mrs. Pargiter unconsciously
emanates "power"—the lives of others, for the time being
at least, must revolve around what is left of her life.

The death has been a slow and agonizing one, but
Woolf finally slays the Angel in a fictional work. Mrs.
Pargiter dies in The Years; she dies in both body AND
spirit. The Angel dies here, and with her dies her
influence, her power. There is no immortality in store for
this Angel. Daughter Delia describes the dying Mrs.
Pargiter as "an impediment to all life" (23), but once she
is dead, Mrs. Pargiter is an impediment no longer. "I am
the Resurrection and the Life" (85), intones the priest at Mrs. Pargiter's funeral. But there will be no earthly resurrection of the Angel Pargiter. After her death, there appear no potent Angel figures in The Years. Neither the earthy Maggie, nor the dutiful Eleanor, nor the worldly Milly, nor the mimetic Sara, nor the romantic Delia, neither the sophisticated Kitty, nor the liberated Peggy, nor the fiery Rose wield the influence, possess the charm, inspire the reverence of an Angel. Kitty literally turns her back on an "Angelic" portrait of herself, a portrait that reveals her physical resemblance to Mrs. Pargiter and which presides over the room from which Kitty desperately yearns to, and does indeed, escape. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pargiter's own portrait, as no one gets around to cleaning it, becomes significantly more and more faded as each day passes, and a little blue flower in the picture is finally completely obliterated by the dirt.

Virginia Woolf's counterpoint to The Angel in the House, beginning with the unequivocal, once-and-for-all death of the Angel, is not limited to this important event. Other distinctions effectively subvert the moral vision of Patmore's work. Woolf's opposing version of the Victorian home is, essentially, that of a home in shambles, a home in decay. Delia cannot wait to escape it; Edward cannot bear to return to it. This home offers precious little sanctuary and is like a purgatory. Colonel Pargiter's
home, Abercorn Terrace, was no "tent pitch'd in a world not right," but rather, as Delia and Martin later say, "It was Hell!" (417).

Love as it appears to exist in The Years differs radically from love as it is purported to exist in The Angel in the House. Love in The Years is hardly the sacred emotion described in Patmore's work. Edward's "slighted" friend Ashley, for instance, is not merely a conventional university pal; his jealousy seems evidence that he is Edward's homosexual lover. While Frederick assuages his grief over Honoria's rejection of him in frequent letters to his mother, to whom he is obviously devoted, the point is clearly made in Woolf's novel that Edward cannot be compelled to write to his mother, even though she is dying. Colonel Pargiter seems the diabolical opposite of Patmore's wholesome and loving husband, Dean Churchill, who bows in reverence before the shrine of his late, sainted wife. While his wife is dying, the insensitive Colonel Pargiter, a deformed man with a "hand that had lost two fingers" (9), pays yet another visit to his pregnant mistress, a far from "Angelic" woman whose household includes a set of filthy children, a pile of dirty laundry, and an eczematous dog. And how far from the Colonel's actions are those of a chastened Frederick who attends his dying wife with a flood of fervent prayers!
Delia, who like Honoria marries for love, weds a man she thinks the image of Parnell, the idol of her passionate youth. Patrick, the "magnificent figure of a man" (398) she has chosen as "her lord," turns out to be extraordinarily conservative, painfully dull, outrageously slow, and annoyingly deaf. He is no revolutionary, no fiery martyr to a cause. He is no Felix, no gifted singer of his wife's praises. He seems merely Delia's echo, standing dumbly beside her, "digging his hands in front of him like a bear on which coats are hung in a hotel" (365). Patrick, in this alone like Delia's hero Parnell, cannot live up to the romantic ideal he appears to embody. "For the thousandth time he had dashed her dream" (398). Love, for Delia, leads to disillusionment.

Patmore's Dean sermonizes on the joys of sacred married love whose vows are "inviolate through the year or years" (327). Such a description seems strangely ludicrous as the reader considers Delia and Patrick and other married couples in The Years. As young North watches Milly and Hugh Gibbs, he ironizes:

That was what it came to--thirty years of being husband and wife--tut-tut-tut, and chew-chew-chew. It sounded like the half-inarticulate munchings of animals in a stall. Tut-tut-tut and chew-chew-chew as they trod out the soft steamy straw in the stable; as they wallowed in the primeval swamp, prolific, profuse, half-conscious, he thought . . . . (375)
Patmore's domestic Angels have been, as North's statement well indicates, literally brought down from heaven to earth--very close to the earth--in *The Years*. The nature of woman, of her domain and actual experiences, is reinvestigated. The hearth is no longer the altar of woman's life. Unlike a Patmore heroine, Kitty escapes whenever possible from her well-appointed hearth; she hastens to return to her childhood home, to her roots, to the very earth from whence she came:

She threw herself on the ground, and looked over the billowing land that went rising and falling, away and away, until somewhere far off it reached the sea. Uncultivated, uninhabited, existing by itself, for itself, without towns or houses it looked from this height. . . . A deep murmur sang in her ears--the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased. (278)

In the earth's very soil Kitty finds meaning, and if she could have chosen her destiny, she says she would have been a farmer.

Maggie's domain seems to lie deep in the center of the earth, as symbolized, perhaps, by that damp, cellar cave where she serves her guests dinner during an air raid. Maggie lives in a world fraught with earthly war, not heavenly peace. Unable to ward off some "implacable destiny" (190), she, like Woolf's Susan in *The Waves*, is an "earth mother," a primeval-like woman who speaks very little but seems in harmony with the primordial voice of
womankind. Her friend Nicholas calls her "Magdalena" (278), a name suggesting both the earthiness of a Mary Magdalene and the primitiveness of a Magdalenian, a Stone Age, culture.

To Sara, the world is indeed a cave, a cave in which she is destined to spend her life inhaling the unpleasant stench of her own existence. Alone except for her sister Maggie and barely subsisting, Sara encounters difficulties that would have been unimaginable to domestic angels Jane and Honoria. Existence for Sara means laboriously hollowing out a tiny place in the very crust of the earth. The world she inhabits is, she repeatedly insists, "a cave of mud and dung" (293). Even as a very young woman, Sara looks like an aged and "cadaverous" woman, a woman worn out by a life of childbirth, debauchery and crime.

"In time to come," she said, looking at her sister, "people, looking into this room--this cave, this little antre, scooped out of mud and dung, will hold their fingers to their noses"--she held her fingers to her nose--"and say, 'Pah! They stink.'" (189)

Patmore's "Rose of the World," that beautiful, perfect flower of purest and most sacred womanhood, is brought down from Heaven, ultimately "deflowered" in the all-too-human, earthy, sometimes stinking world of The Years. The dead Angel's namesake, young Rose Pargiter,
"Rose of the flaming heart; Rose of the burning breast; Rose of the weary world—red, red Rose" (164), is an imperfect bloom of an imperfect earth. Rose never recovers from the shock of her encounter with a man who exposes himself to her when she is just a little girl. Rose is sexually blighted as a result of her experience; man becomes an enemy to her, never a lover. There will be no sacred hearth for Rose. The red of the rose's petals, the red of Rose's hair, will mingle with the red of the blood that flows from her cut wrists. The heavenly blooms fall to the earth. The delicate aromas, the dewy bouquets, the prize roses, the violets, and, of course, the amaranth of Patmore's poem give way to the blighted roses, the "withered" (174) and rotting violets, the falling petals of The Years.

But what does Woolf mean to say with all this counterpointing? In The Years, Woolf aims to undo the closely woven myth which supports the view of the world in The Angel in the House, to rework the very fabric of that vision of society and of human life itself. In her novel, Woolf rewrites Patmore's story, suggesting a new way of seeing the world, not an elaborately constructed or necessarily better way, certainly, but one unequivocally more true, more just.
Patmore's work begins and ends with certainties, with the sure and lyrical tones of an invocation to married love and with "The Wedding Sermon." Woolf's novel, on the contrary, begins and ends with uncertainties. "It was an uncertain spring," the novel begins, and it ends with the knot in Eleanor's handkerchief--with a character fraught with uncertainties, forgetting even the questions she had desired to ask. The novel begins and ends with many questions. The dying Mrs. Pargiter's "Where am I?" (23) is echoed by most of the characters in the book as they attempt, in one way or another, to extricate themselves from the morass of uncertainties in which they flounder. "Where am I?" asks Eleanor (43), and Kitty, and Delia. "Am I this? or am I that?" (140) asks Maggie. Says Sara, "What's 'I'?" (140). The novel ends with Eleanor's final question, "And now?" (435). And this question is understandable. Once the Angel is killed, what is the next step for a woman? The Years is Woolf's exploration of the question she herself raised in "Professions for Women": "The Angel was dead; what then remained?" (238).

For Woolf's characters, what remains is the freedom to make new choices in life. In her celebrated essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf asserts that somewhere "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (194). With this change, she goes on to say, came a shift in the
nature of all human relations. New freedoms arrived; new choices could be made.

The somewhat arbitrary date given in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" takes on great significance in The Years. The "1910" chapter in The Years is crucial to the novel and to its characters. Its importance lies in more than the fact that after 1910, no one really sits down to have tea—coffee is served; wine is served; one refers to, perhaps, but never takes, tea! In 1910 many representatives of the old order are already dead. Miss Pym, teacher and vestige of an old educational system wherein women received a meager (and impractical) education from private tutors rather than from important institutions, is dead. Queen Victoria is already dead; the Angel is already dead. Gone are the "authorized images of womanhood" (Rosenman 49) of Victorian days, those models so central to The Angel in the House.

The 1910 chapter ends with the death of the King, an event which, in both the Woolfs' and the Pargiters' world, was to usher out an old regime and to usher in a new and modern one. In The Years, importantly, 1910 is the year in which Colonel Pargiter dies as well. In the following chapter, "1911," Eleanor pays an August visit to her brother.

Every summer she came to visit Morris at his mother-in-law's house. Seven times, eight times she had come,
she counted; but this year it was different. This year everything was different. Her father was dead; the house was shut up; she had no attachment at the moment anywhere. (195)

Significantly, this chapter begins: "The sun was rising" (192). Eleanor's father, the last vestige of an old authoritarian society from which arose the Angel in the House, was dead. Indeed, the King was dead. But for Eleanor, at age fifty-five, life was just "beginning" (213).

Death, then, brings forth a new kind of life. It brings freedom—and choice. "When shall we be free?" Eleanor has asked. "When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave?" (297). When old societal supports are gone, the future can no longer be so narrowly prescribed for a woman (or for a man, for that matter). Perhaps a man or woman can actually pursue a chosen course, can do more than merely dream about what he/she MIGHT have been. Kitty can be a farmer, Martin an architect. A woman may freely choose to retreat into the roles of the past, experiencing the subsequent stagnation and powerlessness if she so desires, but she may also choose a path heretofore travelled only by men. A woman may choose to create a means of escape from her controlling or intolerable circumstances. Or a woman may look to an entirely new future, entering upon an active, though often
discouraging, quest to carve out her own unique place in the world.

For Milly, on one hand, life is to be a continuation of the familiar. She proceeds much as her mother did, and as her mother's mother did before her. Eleanor notes that Milly as a young girl always brought "the conversation back to marriage" (32). And marriage, conventional, secure marriage is Milly's choice. She settles into a comfortable, stagnant form of life, leaving in her wake hardly a ripple on the surface of the world.

Rose, on the other hand, does what she has always done--she seeks to escape from her circumstances, from intimacy. As she escaped from the nursery on the night of her "terror," she escapes into the world of political causes, throwing herself into the fight for this cause or that one, forming no alliances but those factional ones of the moment. Rebellion is, for her, an escape from emotional contacts, from life, from fear. Rose proceeds like a "military man," brandishing her sword like Wagner's Siegfried, escaping men, escaping close emotional contacts. Kitty, too, chooses to escape, albeit temporarily, from her too confining life. "I need to do nothing, she thought, nothing, nothing, but let myself be drawn on" (270-71).

Facing a world of new choices, or facing a world of many possible choices, has its pain. It is often easier to remain in one's trench. "Getting out of grooves is damned
unpleasant" (354), doctor Peggy is to say. In *The Years*, Woolf seems to concur with Florence Nightingale's view of the unique position of modern woman:

But now she is like the Archangel Michael as he stands upon Saint Angelo at Rome. She has an immense provision of wings, which seem as if they would bear her over earth and heaven; but when she tries to use them, she is petrified into stone, her feet are grown into the earth, chained to the bronze pedestal. *(Cassandra 809)*

Yet "Here's to the New World!" (292) toast some of Woolf's characters, and one glimpses at least the possibility of a "new world" on the horizon of the Partigers' lives. This new world is perhaps no better than the old--it is certainly more challenging and intimidating--but it is a world that works toward "freedom and justice," a phrase often reiterated in *The Years*. Peggy Pargiter has become a doctor; she has sought out choices and avenues largely unavailable to the women of her grandmother Rose's day. Life is different. Peggy functions in a new world, in a new way. Still, despite her new power and status, Peggy finds it no easier to make contact with others, to communicate. Loneliness surrounds her. Breakthroughs are seldom complete, even when there are keen new awarenesses, but breakthroughs there are in the Pargiters' lives.
What emerges from *The Years* is a new kind of "heroine," a new kind of unorthodox and earthly "angel" who supplants the Angel of *The Angel in the House*. This angel must be fit to survive in a new and uncharted world. This heroine must do more than submit to or try to escape her circumstances. This new heroine enters into the fray, at first clumsily, running headlong into life as it is, and embarking on an active though errant quest for a new kind of future. This heroine is very much like the twentieth-century Orlando who, though with difficulty, throws off the old constraints and prepares to cross "the narrow plank to the present" (299) into the waters of an uncharted future. She seeks to find a "real self" (314) amongst the many that seem to spring from within, and without, herself.

Such a heroine is Eleanor Pargiter. The name "Eleanor" seems an echo of the name "Honoria," and the women have something in common. Eleanor is indeed characterized as an exemplary Victorian woman. While not an Angel, while not beautiful, charming, or saintly, she is a helper of the poor, a faithful and rather exemplary Victorian daughter who uncomplainingly does her duty by the family. She takes over her mother's household, her mother's duties, her mother's desk. "It'll be my table now" (34), thinks Eleanor.

Eleanor is the one character not totally released by the death of her mother. It is not until her father
dies that Eleanor begins to taste freedom, that she is released from the burden of the past and can make a choice about the direction of her life. As she does so, she becomes Woolf's rather reluctant heroine. "What shall I do now?" (195) wonders Eleanor. She begins to make choices; she travels, she explores Spain, Greece, India, the world at large, as her sisters will perhaps never do. She experiences her new-found freedom. She explores new intellectual territory: she reads Renan. She explores new moral territory too; she charts a friendship with a homosexual man.

Interestingly, it is only Eleanor who has the ability, however imperfect, to relate to everyone. She alone seems in touch with all the other characters, major and minor, with Morris and Peggy, with North and Sara and Maggie and Renny and Nicholas. She keeps up with Crosby and Martin, Kitty, Delia, and Rose. She has a gift for establishing points of contact, however faulty, with other human beings. Moreover, she has the gift of searching, of continually asking questions of life and of other people, of opening her eyes to new possibilities, however fleeting, however elusive. She is neither obsessed with the past nor intimidated by the present. She is willing to "cross the narrow plank of the present," to see the unknown future emerge from a distant shore:
She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding. (428)

Eleanor comes to the realization that she has too often lived her life through others. She, too, often loses her way. "But where was she? In what room? In which of the innumerable rooms? Always there were rooms; always there were people. Always from the beginning of time" (426). But Eleanor responds to the faint promise of the future, the man and girl alighting from the taxi. "We know nothing, even about ourselves," thinks Eleanor. "We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there" (428). Eleanor will extract all she can from her dim and transient moments of understanding.

A world stripped of its old illusions is a cold and uncomfortable one in which to exist. Virginia Woolf was well aware of that fact. When she wrote The Years, she was responding to her own unique vision of a "New World," a world free of the old encumbrances so strongly epitomized for her by Patmore's The Angel in the House. Killing that Victorian spiritess, the Angel in the House, and responding to the work that gave rise to much of the Angel's power was not only a personal challenge for Woolf but a challenge that entered into her art. The Angel had deeply influenced her world, her life, and her work, and The Years was her
final counterstatement to the work of Patmore. The Years was Woolf's cathartic work, a work that accomplished what even her most personal work of fiction, To the Lighthouse, had failed to do. The Angel in the House was at long last purged in The Years. The Angel was dead, and in the character of Eleanor a new kind of angel heroine, struggling, questioning, and imperfect, stumbled into existence. The old forms were dead; the new had yet to be fully born, but the faint glimmer of a dawn was at hand. "The sun had risen," Woolf was to write at the end of The Years, "and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity, and peace" (435).
NOTES

1"Phantom" is a word previously used by Florence Nightingale in Cassandra (407) to designate the forces encouraging women to resist all course but submission to male domination. As Alex Zwerdling notes in Virginia Woolf and the Real World, Nightingale seems to anticipate Woolf's response to the Angel in the House (219).

2Not all attention, of course, was favorable. Swinburne's famous parody of The Angel in the House, entitled "The Person in the House," is a notable example of the derision Patmore also faced in his own lifetime.

3"By His infinite grace, God put them in the world together."

4It is unfortunate that The Angel in the House is now out of print and presently difficult to find in its entirety, even in major libraries. If the work is not deemed important in terms of its intrinsic literary value, it is without doubt an important work because of its literary and social influence.

5Patmore's biographers include Osbert Burdett, The Idea of Coventry Patmore (1921); Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore (1905); E. J. Oliver, Coventry Patmore (1956); Frederick Page, Patmore (1933); Derek Patmore, The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore (1949); and J. C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore (1957).

6Interestingly, the time span involved closely parallels that of Woolf's own life.

7Phyllis Rose notes that the date 1910 was significant in the life of Woolf as well. It was the year of the Dreadnought affair, a hoax in which she participated and an important event for Woolf in that it represented "the acting out of her own rebellion against paternal authority" (102). It was in the next year, 1911, that Woolf was to enter into a cooperative living arrangement with J. M. Keynes, Duncan Grant, and Leonard Woolf.

8While reading about Eleanor's sense of freedom upon the death of her father, one cannot help but recall Woolf's reaction to her own father's death. She writes:
He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known: but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable (AWD, 138).
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