

# Early 20th century writers

Literature



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Virginia Woolf spells it out most explicitly when she discusses the idea of the Angel in the House: " She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily ... 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 if -- she was pure" (2: 245). Parker says this as well, but in a more roundabout fashion as her character speaks to the man she is dancing with as compared to the voice in her head. The story starts out with this comparison as she tells him she'd love to dance with him, but is thinking, " I don't want to dance with him. I don't want to dance with anybody" (2: 490). In both cases, it is clear that the woman is not supposed to have any thoughts or opinions of her own, but is instead expected to just do what everyone else wants her to do. There are differences between the two pieces, however, in the degree to which the woman speaking feels she is able to fully express herself. Woolf clearly states her independence and encourages other young women to stand up on their own: " You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able, though not without great labor and effort, to pay the rent. You are earning your five hundred pounds a year. But this freedom is only a beginning -- the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared" (2: 247). This is a very different attitude from the woman in Parker's story who feels very trapped in her situation and can do nothing about it. " I'm past all feeling now. The only way I can tell when he steps on me is that I can hear the splintering of bones. And all the events of my life are passing before my eyes" (2: 493). The types of events she lists are all disasters of one kind

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or another, yet she says, " Ah, what an easy, peaceful time was mine, until I fell in with Swifty, here" (2: 493).