

Characteristics of the Angel (taken from Gilbert & Gubar, 1979)

Self-less	Unselfish	Asexual/virginal	Gentle	Modest/humble
Graceful	Proper	Simple	Pure	Delicate
Civil	Compliant	Reticent	Chaste	Affable
Polite	Contemplative	Fair	Dependent	Weak

An angel is a “proper” woman who concerns herself with the needs of the husband/father; she is asexual or virginal, depending upon the situation; she leads a life of contemplation, caught inside her domestic duties and not concerned with the matters/troubles of the world; she does not seek to know herself outside of the context of wife/mother/daughter.

The angel, historically, begins as “the dispenser of salvation”—as in the Virgin Mary, who cares for the needs of the Father/Son/Spirit with no thought of her own desires. She is simply a vessel for carrying the gift of salvation.

Later, women become the angels of the house—moving from the transcendent, celestial, and contemplative existence to the domestic, pragmatic, yet still contemplative existence.

These women have lives “whose story cannot be told as there is no story to tell.” To speak their story would be to give existence to their lives outside of contemplation, thus imposing their existence onto the masculine other.

The characteristics of the Monster

Bodily	Physical	Sexual	Filthy	Cunning
Assertive	Aggressive	Active	Vocal	Violent
“unfeminine”	Diseased	Deathly	Strong	Subversive

Monsters are the antithetical mirror images (foils) of angels; she is the representative of Otherness, incarnates the damning Otherness of flesh; focused upon desires as opposed to “angelic humility.”

For every portrait of an angel, there is a mirror image of a monster, the negative embodiment of the sacrilegious.

The monster is any woman who is not angel—or so patriarchy would have us believe. Women who are not chaste, who do not marry, who do not serve men, who resist the submissive roles they are pushed into, who seek to tell their stories, who want to impose their existence on the world.