

Helping Virginia Woolf to Kill the Angel in the House:
What we can learn from theological feminist's insights to deconstruct
'the Angel in the House'.

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Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how insights from theological feminists can be helpful in deconstructing the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ as portrayed by Virginia Woolf. Two methods, the imaginative interpretation method and the executive method, are discussed in detail to establish in what way they can contribute to the deconstruction of the myth. The focus of the analysis of the methods was to examine how they provide insights in dichotomies and the power relationships that are included within them. The thesis first examines how myths operate in general in order to gain an understanding of how the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ is constructed. The focus hereby lies in the question of what makes a myth problematic. This concluded in the importance of the role of dichotomies and patriarchal structures. Eventually the insights gained by the analyses of the two methods were applied to the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’. This involved drawing upon the knowledge of the question of how a myth is problematic. It was concluded that the imaginative interpretation method was not able to deconstruct the whole myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ and only had an effect on changing the dichotomy. The executive method was partly helpful in deconstructing the myth, but only if it was based on certain insights that the method provided.

Introduction

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. 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. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her blushes, her great grace (Virginia Woolf her description of 'the Angel in the House' 1942, 2).

On January the 21st in 1931, Virginia Woolf (1882 -1941) gave a speech in London for the National Society for Women's Service. She talked about 'the Angel in the House' and described this metaphorical figure as a passive woman who did not have a voice of her own and existed only as a mother, a daughter or a wife. This angel would whisper "be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; (...)", into the ear of Woolf while she was writing, making sure that she would not deviate from the mold of the 'perfect woman' that the patriarchal society had created for her (Woolf 1942, 2). The figure of 'the Angel in the House' can be seen as the image laid upon women of what a 'good' 19th century woman would look like. Woolf imagined this woman bothering her while writing, making sure she would not deviate from the image of 'the Angel in the House' that society had created for her. A woman living in the 19th century in England was not allowed to have a mind of her own or exist in the public space (Showalter 1972, 340).¹ Woolf despised this woman, for she was the reason she could not write freely. In her speech she explains how a woman has to 'kill the Angel in the House' if she wants to be anything other than the myth of a 'perfect woman' that men have created for her: being passive, pure and without an opinion. Only if she kills 'the Angel' will she be a free woman and that is the task Woolf has laid out for herself in her writings. In her lifespan she has published many books that all look for ways to deconstruct the myth of the 'perfect woman' and focusses especially on the materially and socially aspects of the problem.

Other feminists have also fought the battle that Woolf addresses in her speech in the

¹ For a more detailed analyses of the 'Victorian woman', I refer to Amanda Vickery her work on the topic. Vickery, Amanda. 1993. "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History." *The Historical Journal* 36, no.2 (Summer): 383:414.

second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Adrienne Rich (1929 – 2008), one of the most influential feminists of her time, wrote for example that “women can no longer be primarily mothers and muses for men” and that “we have our own work cut out for us” (1972, 25). She agrees with Woolf that the myth of the Victorian woman should be deconstructed, because ‘the Angel in the House’ has real consequences for the life of women: it restrains what a woman can/should or cannot/should not do. Nina Auerbach (1943 -), elaborates on these consequences in her book *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. In her book she discusses how the image represented to Victorian women, the image of ‘the Angel in the House’, can be seen as a myth.² She elaborates on the dichotomy that this myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ creates: that of a ‘Woman’ and the ‘Demon’. On one side is the ‘Woman’, or ‘the Angel in the House’, praised by society, but that also means there is a ‘Demon’ that is being despised. Auerbach argues that the dichotomy of the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ is therefore harmful, because “the very rigidity of these categories (...) concentrates itself into a myth of transfiguration that glorifies the women it seemed to suppress” (1982, 9). She means that not only the image of ‘the Angel in the House’ is problematic, but also the other end of the dichotomy: that of a ‘Demon’. The myth appears to be highlighting the ‘good’ side of women, but acutely suppresses them. Sandra Gilbert (1939 -) has written a book with Susan Gubar (1944 -) called *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* where they explain how difficult it was for women writers to deal with the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’. Gilbert acknowledges this dichotomy too and writes that “a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of ‘angel’ and demon which male authors have generated for her”, if she is to deconstruct the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ (1980, 17).

The Story of Lilith and Eve

While reading the literature on ‘the Angel in the House’ and about the dichotomy that is part of this myth, I discovered that my mind began racing back to a story I once heard, the story of Lilith. This ancient myth is traced back to Sumerian mythology and it is argued that it later appears in 1QIsa^a, 4Q510⁵⁸, and 4Q184⁵⁹.³ Some scholars argue that it is also mentioned in *The*

² When I refer to the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’, I use the definition provided by Nina Auerbach on this subject. She uses the word ‘myth’ to refer to the image laid upon woman in the 19th century in England that provided them with a prototype of what a ‘perfect woman’ should look like. Virginia Woolf refers to this ‘perfect woman’ as ‘the Angel in the House’. I will use these terms to refer to the myth Nina Auerbach addresses.

³ 1QIsa^a, 4Q510⁵⁸, and 4Q184⁵⁹ are part of The Great Isaiah Scroll.

Testament of Solomon, but there is a lot of debate around where Lilith is mentioned and where not, the main reason for this being the different interpretations that the Hebrew language provides, but I will not elaborate on these interpretations here. Luckily, there is one thing they do all agree on. That is the fact that the myth of Lilith appears in post-talmudic literature, more specifically the Alphabet of Ben Sira (Blair 2008, 30). This document is dated around the 8th century and describes the story of Lilith as followed:

After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, 'It is not good for man to be alone'. He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.' At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angels to bring her back (Stern and Mirsky 1990, 183-184).

The three angels found Lilith, but she refused to return to the Garden of Eden. God then decided to curse Lilith, making one hundred of her babies die each day. Lilith told the angels that she then in return would kill pregnant women and their baby's, except when they wore an amulet from the angels (Carvalho 2009, 25). From the men she would steal their seeds, in order to make more demon babies. At the end of the story Lilith has become a demon, a witch, someone who collaborated with the devil and someone that should be feared for her desperate need for sexuality and independence (Cantor 1983, 41).

Throughout the centuries the myth of Lilith has taken on many forms and a variety of scholars have been interested in her story, especially theological feminists who want to reclaim the myth and praise Lilith "as a symbol of female sexuality", instead of punishing her for her choice to leave Adam and seeing her as a negative image (Carvalho 2009, ii). Aviva Cantor, a Jewish theological feminist, highlighted in her book *The Lilith Question* that Lilith cannot be seen without her relationship to Eve, the 'alleged' first wife of Adam (1983, 42). Eve was according to Genesis 1 and 2 created from Adam his rib. Cantor states that there is a dichotomy between the two woman that shapes their identity and that contributes to the interpretation of the story. Cantor calls Lilith the "flip side of Eve", meaning that "Eve is the enabler," and "Lilith the disabler". She believes men, the patriarchal society, had created this dichotomy so men can tell women that "if she is independent, assertive, free, as Lilith was, she'll end up a

frigid nymphomaniac childless witch” (1983, 43).

I then began to understand why my thoughts went to Lilith while reading about ‘the Angel in the House’. Both the myth of Lilith and the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ show a particular struggle or battle to refrain from the idea of a ‘perfect woman’. Sandra Gilbert worked on this connection with Susan Gunbar in their book. They state that the problem of Lilith represents the “problems of female authorship and female authority”, because “Lilith represents the price women have been told they must pay for attempting to define themselves” (1980, 35). Meaning that if a woman writer dares to kill ‘the Angel in the House’ she risks becoming the despised ‘Demon, the other end of the dichotomy that Nina Auerbach talked about (1983, 9). Therefore, Gilbert and Gunbar argue that Lilith shows “just how difficult it is for women even to attempt the pen” (1980, 35).

Research Question

I will investigate in my thesis how insights from theological feminists, that focusses on the creation story of Eve and Lilith and their dichotomy, can help to deconstruct the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ that Virginia Woolf described. I think it is important to investigate this topic, because theological feminists have their own methods to deconstruct dichotomy’s and myths that are related to religious texts and/or practices and these insights are barely applied outside of their own discipline. I want to find out if applying their insights and methods can be helpful to other problems outside of the religious spectrum they are normally used for. I will argue that Gender Studies as an academic field can benefit from an internal multidisciplinary approach between the different departments that share themselves under Gender Studies. Hopefully this will pave the wave for feminists to work together on different topics outside of their normal department and benefit from each other’s insights in the broadest way possible.

First, I will elaborate on my method and why I have made certain choices within my research. Then I will look at the notion of a myth in general to understand the working of power relationships within them and how a myth can create a dichotomy. This will help me to understand how the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ is constructed. It is important to establish this first, because in order to deconstruct a myth you have to know what it consists of and how it works. Knowing how the dichotomy is created will help me to find tools to deconstruct it. In chapter two I will analyse the methods theological feminists are using to deconstruct the myth of the creation story and thereby the existing dichotomy between Eve and Lilith. My focus will be on the ‘Imaginative Identification Model’ (IIM) and the ‘Exegetical Method’. I will

investigate how these methods are applied and find out how they can deconstruct myths and give insights into dichotomy's. Finally, I will use my understanding of how 'the Angel in the House' is constructed to investigate if the methods from theological feminists can provide new insights that can help to deconstruct it.

Method

For this research I have made use of postmodernist ideas. This approach is aware that there are multiple realities (Hesse-Biber 2013, 42). Doing my research from this angle has helped me to recognize the constructions of the myths that I discuss and how certain power relationships are at play. Postmodernists do not believe that there is a universal truth out there to be found and I think this is very important to keep in mind while working with stories. Myths are always a social construction and are therefore filled with structures of, for example, patriarchy. Because I did not approach the myths as static I was able to recognize their subjectivity. This attributed to my ability to try to deconstruct the myth of 'the Angel in the House' while using theological feminist methods.

For my analyses of the myth of Lilith I have used a translation by David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky, because the original text is written in Hebrew. Stern and Mirsky have translated the Alphabet of Ben Sira, which contains part of the story of Lilith. They have tried to stay as close to the original meaning as possible and their translation is widely used by scholars researching this topic. For analysing the creation story of Eve, I have used the New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV). This Bible is written in a formal style and tries to maintain the original meaning of the Hebrew words.

I have chosen two methods from feminist theology to analyse to see if they can deliver insights that can help to deconstruct the myth of 'the Angel in the House'. Both methods, the IIM and the executive method, are imbedded in postmodernist ideas. For that reason I selected them, because the chance that they could provide insights to deconstruct the myth of 'the Angel in the House' was more likely than if I had chosen methods imbedded in modernist ideas. Chosen the methods overall was a difficult process. Phyllis Trible (1931-), a feminist biblical scholar, explains that "Biblical theologians (...) have never agreed on the definition, method, organization, subject matter, point of view, or purpose of their enterprise" (1989, 282). I found out that her quote has a great resemblance to reality. The method that most of them found useful and that I encountered the most in their research was the executive method. Particularly interesting about the executive method is that it is one of the first methods theological feminists started using and still do. For the second method I choose something not so very different from

the first, because I wanted to compare them to each other to see what they might have in common or can learn from each other. The IIM was most fitting to this enterprise. In the second chapter I will elaborate more on the content of these methods.

Chapter One: A Myth

Many scholars have investigated and written about what a ‘myth’ actually is and how it operates. I will discuss a few of these descriptions to form an idea on what they agree and disagree on and highlight connections between the different ideas presented. In this chapter I will investigate how a dichotomy can be created from a myth and argue that it is an inevitable consequence that is accompanied by problematic power relationships. Note that I refer to ‘the Angel in the House’ as a myth, thereby using the definition of Nina Auerbach. She, as stated earlier, recognizes the image of the 19th century Victorian woman as a myth. Because Virginia Woolf her description of ‘the Angel in the House’ represents this woman, I too refer to it as a myth.

Myth as the status quo

Elisabeth Fiorenza Schüssler (1938,), who considers herself a Christian theological feminist, argues in her article *Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation* that a myth provides a world view but does not so by upholding abstract ideals and doctrines. Instead, a myth creates a “vision of the basic structure of reality and presents a model or prototype to be imitated” (1975, 620). This prototype promotes behaviour, ideas and images that uphold the interpretation of the myth. In other words, the myth tells what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and what one should strive for. A myth is then part of the status quo and is being used to justify this ‘world view’ (Bowie 2006, 278). Michelle Osherow thinks it is problematic if a myth is seen as the status quo, because it then becomes part of our history. She elaborates on this idea further in her essay *The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women’s Science Fiction*, where she investigates the myth of Lilith in relationship to women who write science fiction. She states that because a myth becomes part of our history, it does not mean that the myth is considered ‘true’ in society by the majority of the people, but that the power structures that are attached to it are. Osherow explains this idea when she talks about the myth of Lilith and describes that people do not really believe in a “insatiable witch flying through the air”, but that “men’s fears of powerful women are all too real” (2000, 78/79). She adds that those male fears influence women’s behaviour, regardless if they are true or not. This means that a myth does not have to be valid to have an effect in society.

Another aspect of a myth is that it goes unrecognized and the prototype it creates is not acknowledged. Because a myth is seen as the status quo, the prototype is seen as something natural. George Aichele (1944 -) calls a myth therefore “the community’s taken-for granted common sense” (2009, 388). In his book *An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible* he elaborates on this idea and calls it problematic. If a myth is seen as natural, then so are the dichotomy’s and power relationships that are attached to it. I agree with Aichele that this is problematic, power relationships are not natural and should be acknowledged and deconstructed were possible. If the myth is seen as natural, then it can confirm patriarchal structures and then they become part of the status quo too.

Aichele mentions a second problem. If a myth creates a prototype than people who do not fit into the myth are seen as “the other” and he argues that “this other is always necessarily silent and even mysterious, (...)” (2009, 389). I would argue that this explains how a myth creates a dichotomy and why this is always in relation to structures of power. For example, if the prototype is that women should never wear a hat than every woman that does wear one is considered different. Although being different does not have to be a bad thing, the woman is considered “the other” in relation to the prototype. The prototype represents what ‘good’ is and what one should strive for. Not measuring up to this ideal is than considered ‘bad’. The problem of the prototype is therefore twofold, it does not only enhance the power of the ‘good’ side of the dichotomy but it also establishes the inferiority of the ‘other’. Nina Auerbach creates a light at the end of the tunnel. She states that a myth and a dichotomy can change if only laid bare, because the reason a myth can thrive is because it goes unnoticed. Bringing the myth to the surface then, could possibly be a solution for the problem.

The myth and ‘the Angel in the House’

Adrienne Rich argues that besides the fact that the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ is difficult for woman to deal with in society, it is especially hard for woman who want to write. Because of the myth, a woman writer does not recognize herself in already existing literature. This is because the woman writer does not fulfil the prototype that the myth has laid out for her. She does however, keep encountering this prototype and is being confronted with it. Rich visualises this as follows: “she is looking eagerly for guides, maps possibilities; (...) she comes up against something that negates every- thing she is about: she meets the image of Woman in books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream, she finds a beautiful pale face, (...) but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together (1972, 21). In Rich her

description the woman runs into a dichotomy, “she finds a terror and a dream”, but she cannot find herself in either of these ends of the spectrum. She is looking for a more complicated prototype that she can identify herself with, but the existing myth does not provide it for her.

The reason that the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ is problematic for women is because it creates a prototype of what a perfect woman should look and be like. As Schüssler argued, the prototype lays out the map of what is considered ‘good’ and ‘bad’. In the case of the myth of the Angel in the House, a good woman is “intensely sympathetic, immensely charming, utterly unselfish,” and excellent “in the difficult arts of family life” (Woolf 1942, 2). She is not allowed to have a mind of her own, following that if she does have an opinion she is considered ‘bad’. Being sometimes rude if necessary, dressing how she wants and taking time for herself, would also fall into that category. Everything she is that does not fit into the prototype the myth has created is considered wrong. This is why the woman in Adrienne Rich her example had such a hard time recognizing herself in the stories she read, the man had only created an image of a woman for her that embodied the myth of the Angel in the House: because “the ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel” (Gilbert 1980, p.20).

The myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ also enhances patriarchal structures, I would even argue that its whole existence is created by them. As the quote (stated above) by Sandra Gilbert makes clear, ‘the Angel in the House’ is an image for *men* and is not meant for woman to recognize themselves in. It is *their* dream and the woman must simply measure up to the standard. If she does not or cannot do this, she is placed at the other end of the dichotomy. This is where the power structures of the myth reveal themselves. A woman is superior if she is ‘the Angel in the House’ and inferior if she is anything else. I would also argue that there is a great paradox in the way that the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ works. It looks like the dichotomy creates a certain hierarchy between women but if one looks closely enough, one recognizes another hierarchy present. The whole myth exists for the satisfaction of men, even the greatest ‘Angel in the House’ can never make herself an equal to him, for she was created only for *his* purpose. Therefore, one could argue that the more she complies to the prototype of the myth, the more inferior to men she becomes, instead of superior to the women at the other end of the dichotomy.

Chapter two: Theological feminist methods

Imaginative Identification Model

Elisabeth Schüssler presents feminist theology as a critical theology and investigates myths and images of woman from the Bible. Her goal is to find ways of replacing these images that are, according to Schüssler, created from an androcentric tradition. She argues that “feminists have to find new myths and stories in order to embody their goals and value judgments” (1975, 620). She calls this the ‘imaginative identification model’ (IIM), a method to interpret the story differently so woman can identify with the woman being presented. That way, the new myth can embody the goals of feminists and the “androcentric barriers” that poisoned the myth can be deconstructed. A way Schüssler applies this method is when she explains that ‘feminine’ qualities can be coded differently (1975, 623). For example, ‘mothering’ can be seen as an important aspect of woman in the Bible, bearing children is then part of their life goal. Personal qualities that are being connected to ‘mothering’ are then also seen as a woman’s thing, for example: nurturing, being there for someone else and having a lot of emotions. When using the IIM, the Biblical text is not being changed, but the ideas about the texts are. The IIM reads between the lines of the scripture. Meaning that a woman can still be seen in relationship to mothering if the Bible says so, but that the other connotations added to this aspect can be changed if wanted. Feminists can then interpret mothering with other qualities, making the myth more fitting to the vision of a woman they want to see and identify with. Schüssler stresses the importance for feminists not to put one myth, story or image above another one, but rather “put forward a variety of images and stories” (1975, 623) I agree with her statement, because that way the dominant myth is not simply replaced with another dominant story, but it gives women a chance to choose freely and critically an image they want to identify with.

A lot of feminist scholars have praised Schüssler for her method. Diana Carvalho, who is specialised in Hebrew texts, is one of them. She thinks the method reveals an important representation of women in the Bible that otherwise would have stayed silent (2009, 14). She uses the method in her own research to focus on another side of the women represented, especially when it comes to their relationships with men and God and how they participate in certain rituals (2009, 16). Cantor has used IIM on the myth of Lilith and gave the story a new set of connotations. She describes for example Lilith as “a reflection of a dying and lost matriarchal society” and uses overall modern terms to describe Eve and Lilith (2009, 43). She also turns her attention to Adam and God and argues that they can be seen as sadistic men who are full of fear, because they are afraid to lose Lilith. Cantor reads between the lines of the myth

and comes to the conclusion that when God punished Lilith after Adam complained about her leaving, he did so because he did not know what to do without her. That is also the reason why Adam complained in the first place. I think this is a very interesting way of using the IIM, because the connotations given to the Alphabet of Ben Sira deviate enormously from past interpretations. God is normally not seen as in need of a female partner, but Cantor argues differently. The example of Cantor using the method therefore shows what is possible in this line of thinking and working on myths.

Another example I think is worth mentioning, to show how the imaginative identification model works, is from Osherow. She identifies a dichotomy between Eve and Lilith, where Eve is seen as maternal and Lilith as sexual (2000, 77). The reason for this dichotomy comes from the fact that Eve is called ‘the mother of all living’ (Genesis 3:20 NRSV). The curse laid upon her by God for eating from the forbidden fruit is also connected to her motherhood: I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children: (Genesis 3:16 NRSV). Lilith on the other hand is seen as sexual, because she steals the seed of men to create more babies and making the man infertile in the process. Osherow argues for a different view that changes the dichotomy, something that critics often do not recognize (2000, 76). She highlights the fact that Lilith is a mother too, according to the myth. She may not be ‘the mother of all living’, but she did give birth to her demon babies. Lilith her curse also affected her motherhood, as did the curse that was laid upon Eve. Lilith was cursed to watch one hundred of her babies die each day. Osherow suggests that “Mother Lilith, with all her imperfections, draws our attention to a different aspect of motherhood than that associated with Eve. Instead of birthing and nurturing children, Lilith causes us to consider the difficulties of loss or separation from them” (2000, 77/78). Osherow therefore pleads for a more extensive myth of Lilith that complicates her and makes her a woman whose losses and pain do not go unrecognized.

Biblical exegesis: The executive method

Where the imaginative interpretation model of Schüssler reads between the lines, the executive model does not. It is an interpretation method, meaning that it works from the text itself in order to obtain a different image instead of analysing what is not being said. The text is handled as a blank page or “a fresh work of art” (Carvalho 2009, 50). One of the most influential feminists who have worked with this method on the Alphabet of Ben Sira and Genesis 1-3 is Phyllis Trible. She writes in her article *Five loaves and two fishes* that feminist interpretations beings with exegis and that the focus of this method lies with “highlighting neglected texts and

reinterpreting familiar ones” (1989, 298). She has used the method to reinterpret the creation story of Eve and comes to a different conclusion than conventional understandings of the story. Tribble argues that the patriarchal order, that is often argued for, cannot be led back to how Eve was created. Instead, Eve her creation implies that God did not intent to create a sexual order. Her conclusion on the story of Eve is that instead of the myth legitimizing a patriarchal order it actually “places that culture under judgement” (Gellman 2006, 320).

Tribble started her analysis by looking closely at the text itself. First, she looked at the writings that described how Eve was created. After God had put Adam in a deep sleep he took one of his ribs and “he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was” (Genesis 2: 21-23 NRSV). This part of the Bible is often seen as an argument for Eve her inferiority, because she was not created equally with Adam but made out of his rib (Lilith was made out of the earth, equally to Adam). Tribble looked at this text and analysed something completely different. She states that Adam and Eve, in opposite to Lilith, were created from the same substance *because* she was taken from his rib: they share the same body. Therefore, the “only equal union was between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Lilith” (Carvalho 2009, 51). This interpretation also makes Eve an equal to Lilith, because she is no longer seen as inferior due to her creation. After Tribble reached this conclusion, she also looked at the biblical part where Eve is cursed. Not only was she doomed to give birth in pain, God also said right after: “Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16 NRSV). Tribble therefore argues that patriarchy is judged as a sin in the Bible, it was a curse for Eve that man should rule over her from now on (1989, 292). She ends her analysis with the statement that “severe androcentrism” is not an ideal according to the Bible, but it is presented as “an aberration from the ideal” (Gellmann 2006, 320).

I have discussed the imaginative identification method of Schüssler in detail and provided two examples to show how this method can be put into practice. Carvalho uses the method to argue for a very different view on Adam and God when using it on the myth of Lilith. She argues that the reason God cursed her, was because he was afraid of losing her. Osherow on the other hand argued for a more complicated view of Lilith. She wants Lilith her motherhood to be highlighted in order to deconstruct the dichotomy that exists between her and Eve. Both examples have showed that with the imaginative identification model interpretations of a text can be changed with reading between the lines. It can change the connotations that are related to an interpretation and creates different views that women can actually identify with.

The executive method takes on a different approach. It does not let already existing patriarchal interpretations play a role in analysing the myth, because the text is looked at with metaphorical fresh eyes. Tribble critiques feminists who do let patriarchal interpretations be authoritative in their analyses and I think there is a risk in the imaginative identification model for allowing this. Because the imaginative model does not look directly at the text, it builds the analyses on interpretations and these can be influenced by patriarchal ideas. When using the imaginative model, extra attention should be paid to the interpretation before conducting an analyses. With the executive model, this risk is minimalized. It looks directly at the text instead of reading between the lines. This way, old interpretations vanish and room is created for new and fresh ideas. When using this method, one should keep in mind that the true meaning of the text can never be retrieved. One can only analyse a possible interpretation but should never make it the dominant one. In that aspect, the executive method can learn from the imaginative interpretation model, because it highlights the importance of having multiple interpretations available. I would argue that it is always convenient to look critically at any method used, because even feminists can not-knowingly fall back in to old patriarchal habits.

Chapter three: Killing the Angel in the House

The imaginative identification method can be used to highlight a certain aspect of one side of the dichotomy to balance the contradiction overall. Osherow, for example, wanted to highlight the motherhood of Lilith to bring her closer to the image of Eve. This way the dichotomy is not entirely deconstructed, but it takes a step in the right direction to make the image more recognizable for women. We can highlight the role of ‘the Angel in the House’ and the oppositional role of the ‘Demon’. This can bring the two together and minimizes the dichotomy. ‘The Angel in the House’ is, for example, related to a woman who does not speak her mind. But not speaking your mind all the time is for some woman very hard to do. This characteristic than can be praised and seen as a quality that a strong woman possesses. The same can be done with the ‘Demon’, who is related to always saying what she thinks. We could connote this quality as positive, because standing up for your opinion and speaking your mind is a very brave thing to do. This way, both on first hand opposing characteristics can come together and overcome their opposing factors. This creates an image where strong women, who sometimes stay silent and sometimes do speak their mind, can identify with.

Adrienne Rich argued that female writers should have more complicated images they can identify themselves with. She especially looked for an image that showed a woman that is “absorbed”, “drudging”, and “puzzled” (1972, 21). By applying the insight from the IIM to the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’, this can be achieved. Changing the connotations of the images of the ‘angel’ and the ‘Demon’ create a more complicated prototype of the perfect woman. Not only speaking or not speaking your mind is than perceived as natural, but both characteristics can fit into the image. Making the myth overall more identifiable for women, which is one of the goals of the IIM.

Trible has shown that with the executive method one side of the dichotomy can be lifted to the level of the other end of the contradiction. She applied the method to look at the role of Eve in the creation story. She analysed the text of the scripture, instead of reading between the lines as the IIM does, and came to the conclusion that Eve is not inferior to Adam and Lilith. With her analyses she deconstructed the existing dichotomy, because the power relationships that came from the contradiction disappeared when making the women equal to one another. When we apply this idea to the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’, one could try to change the story so that the ‘angel’ is no longer perceived as superior to the ‘Demon. To achieve this, the image of the ‘Demon should be altered. This can be done by changing her story. One way of doing this is by giving as much credit to the occupations a ‘Demon’ performs as to the occupations of ‘the Angel in the House’. Adrienne Rich stated that women have always been “a luxury for man, and has served as the painter’s model and the poet’s muse, but also as comforter, nurse, cook, bearer of his seed, secretarial assistant and copyist of manuscripts” (1972, 18). No wonder than that when a woman wants to pick up a pen and write her thoughts down, she is no longer perceived as an angel. For the angel does not do such things in the mind of men. If we changed the connotations that go with the professions of a ‘Demon’, such as writing, she could gain as much credit for her work as ‘the Angel in the House’ gets. For example, one could argue that writing is on the same level as cooking. When a woman cooks she takes care of the household, she feeds the children and provides a good home for them. The same can be said about a woman who writes, she also provides for the family by making an income which in turn can create a good home for her children. When looking at the myth from this perspective, the dichotomy between the two opposing women can disappear, because both of their qualities are seen as equal.

Although the above insights used on the myth of ‘the Angel in the House’ can help to alter the connotations and change the interpretations, it does not fully deconstruct the myth. The reason for this is that both methods, when applied this way, keep working within the already

existing parameters. They do change the images available that can help us woman to identify better with the myth of 'the Angel in the House' and it does balance out the dichotomy, but the patriarchal power structures are still present. To solve this problem, we should escape the myth all together. As I argued earlier, the whole myth of 'the Angel in the House' is soaked with patriarchal ideas. The myth only exists for the benefit of men. One insight of the executive model however still gives hope. When working with the method from the view of Carvalho, we can deconstruct the myth in its totality. Carvalho stated that we should look at a myth with fresh eyes. In the case of Lilith and Eve this method could be easily applied, the myth has a text as a starting point. Because the myth of 'the Angel in the House' does not have a text to work from, because it is created through patriarchal structures, we cannot apply the method the same way, but I would argue that the insight provided by Carvalho still holds. I suggest that we look at woman who write with no pre-assumptions or connotations. The same goes for profession's in general that woman perform, being it a model, a politician or a mother. When looking at the occupations without connotations, we no longer create a dichotomy accompanied with power relationships. A model can then, for example, be very elegant, strong minded, egocentric and a mother. We can name certain characteristics, but we should not categorize them or value one higher than the other. This way of thinking can deconstruct the myth of 'the Angel in the House', instead of only changing the values of categories or the variety of connotations given. I argue that this is the most fitting way of working with the myth of 'the Angel in the House'.

Conclusion

I have used two theological feminist's methods and applied them to the myth of 'the Angel in the House'. Although not all the tools provided by the methods were able to help me deconstruct the myth, I found some insights very helpful. Especially the insights that the executive method has provided me. Looking at the myth in total with fresh eyes can help to deconstruct the dichotomy and the power relationships it contains. The IIM helped me to understand how difficult it can be to deconstruct a myth without getting rid of all the patriarchal structures it consists of. The executive method helped to solve this problem. It showed me that we should not help Virginia Woolf to kill her 'Angel in the House' or try to save her. Instead, I suggest that we metaphorically abduct her and make her disappear so that we can encounter the issue without any patriarchal structures present.

Over all I have showed that using methods from another department within the same discipline can help to solve feminist problems and provide interesting new insights. I would encourage other feminists to step over their own limitations too and use the work of other

scholars Even when not all the insights work out the way you want them to, as I have experienced during my research, I still think that working on deconstructing myths and their patriarchal structures is never a waste of time. Let's continue to learn from each other and discover what we can accomplish by sharing our methods, theories and thoughts.

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