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## **FREEDOM FROM WITHIN: FEMININE BATTLE WITH THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE – ON THE EXAMPLE OF *AUGUST IS A WICKED MONTH* BY EDNA O'BRIEN**

In this paper we propose to analyze to what extent the Victorian notion of *the Angel in the House* translates to the image of “ordinary” women. Our scope is to reflect on the self-limiting notion of the angel in the light of Virginia Woolf’s essay “Professions for Women”. Questions if the angel can be killed in the same way as Woolf kills it for artistic purposes and what are the consequences of its extinction will be posed with the reference to Edna O’Brien’s novel *August is a Wicked Month* and its main protagonist, Ellen. Taking our cue from Virginia Woolf our aim is to show the tension between the character’s confined and true self.

*Key words:* *Angel in the House*, limit, kill, consequence, duality.

### **1. Introduction**

We have all been, for centuries now, witnesses of the fact that the male viewpoint is what determines and/or regulates women’s behavior, appearance and mental state. Therefore, it came as almost no surprise when the Victorian age gave birth to Coventry Patmore’s narrative poem *The Angel in the House* – which afterwards became the general term for a certain type of women, i.e., the perfect woman: complacent, obedient, selfless – as we can see from the following few lines:

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“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.”

As can be understood from just this snippet, women have always been regarded as material possession, a subjected object whose sole “purpose” is to please. And those who have wished to break away from this patriarchal grip have always been the ones shunned, judged, exiled, or worse. And contrary to “popular” belief (bluntly put – male belief), those women were “made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and action” (Hooks, 2000: 7).

This choice and action have been carefully directed and micro-managed by men, while information was thoughtfully cherry-picked – “when women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege” (Hooks, 2000: 7). Thus, for a long time, women did not have a “real” picture of what was going on and what our place in the world or value were, because, unfortunately, we were still discerning life from the male point of view, up until the moment we realized that in order to “change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness” (Hooks, 2000: 7).

During that same Victorian age, matters began to stir, slowly, but certainly. It was at that same time that Virginia Woolf wrote her books and essays, and spoke her mind – which was (still) a rare occasion, we must remember that – not all women were (as) educated (or educated at all) or given the same opportunities as men. Moreover, it was Woolf who wondered “why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?” (Woolf, 2012: 575).

Due to the perpetual grasp patriarchy had on women,<sup>2</sup> proper and prosperous development came to a halt, making us face almost the same issues many decades after: “Females spoke less, took less initiative, and often when they spoke you could hardly hear what they were saying. Their voices lacked strength and confidence. And to make matters worse we were told time and time again by male professors that we were not as intelligent as the males, that we could not be “great” thinkers, writers, and so on” (Hooks, 2000: 13). We cannot argue that Hook’s words sound more than familiar, mostly because women anywhere in the world have been brought up according the same model

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<sup>2</sup> Or better to say “still has”, because we do not believe that the patriarchy has stopped holding women in their grasp to this day, let alone in any of the previous years.

– to be the *Angels in the House*, shy (because loud women are considered rude and uncultivated), complacent (because they must listen to authority), kind and caring (because it is their maternal nature to care for everyone), selfless – without a sense for self and without an active grasp of self and its intricacies.

Although we will be using the idea of the *Angel in the House* somewhat differently than Woolf (and from a distance to its Victorian surrounding), her words will be an adequate introduction into our paper as her idea of “killing” the *Angel in the House* was what brought us to this subject. Therefore, here are a few parts about the angel in the house which will describe in more detail what we refer to when we talk about this ideal: “I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, *The Angel in the House*. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her [...] I will describe her as shortly as I can. 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. [...] The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: “My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure”” (Woolf, 2018: 2).

Pure – perhaps in every sense, not only in their character, but also as a physical being – an idea that has gone hand in hand with this clear-cut image the male standpoint has constructed for women. We cannot avoid thinking of the famous aphorism “the human body is the best picture of the human soul”, which, as Moi writes in *Revolution of the Ordinary*, “is an attempt to make us stop thinking of the body as something that hides the soul, and to make us realize that the body is expressive of soul, which means that it is expressive also of our attempts to hide, disguise, or mask our feelings and reactions” (Moi, 2017: 186).

With all this in mind, some of the questions emerging are, in fact – to what extent does our *Angel of the House* limit us, be it from the artistic viewpoint or just as a plain existential question of life? In what way can we kill it (if we even can kill it)? And do we truly gain freedom from within by doing so? Can it be for all as Woolf so skillfully describes it: “Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. 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 of 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” (Woolf, 2018: 2). Or does that act of “killing”, as a complete contradiction to the idea of artistic and personal freedom, carry with it a special kind of “curse”?

These are just some of the essential questions we will aim to answer throughout our paper, through a brief analysis of Edna O’Brien’s *August is a Wicked Month*.

## **2. Analysis of Edna O’Brien’s *August is a Wicked Month***

### **2.1. About Edna O’Brien’s writing in general**

Edna O’Brien’s writing has been controversial since the very beginning. The characters she portrayed were always blunt and the story-lines were a complex, metaphoric (at certain moments), real-life representation of general life ails. As such she has been exiled from her home country and Irish society, never apologetic for being unscrupulous to underline that same ‘societies’ issues during the very peak of Irish turmoil. By doing so, she “earned” the label of a ‘Jezabel’ (O’Brien, 2013: 12) and moreover gave the “people” leeway to read into her novels much more of her life than she could have anticipated.

Her trilogy (*The Country Girls: Three Novels and an Epilogue*) set the bar rather high, as far as the critics (outside of Ireland) were concerned, and once this novel, *August is a Wicked Month*, came out (respectively in 1965), it caused more than just a fuss.

While the trilogy dealt with “coming to maturity, marriages, and subsequent disillusionment and marital strife of the heroines, Cait (anglicized as ‘Kate’ in the second and third novels) and Baba, who are followed from rural Ireland to Dublin and on to London” (Burke, 2006: 220), *August is a Wicked month* dealt with an emotionally scarred woman who seeks the solution to her problems holidaying in France, marking “the beginning” of a sexual revolution era (Burke, 2006: 221) in O’Brien’s writing. As we will see in our analysis in the following chapter, the text and the sub-text the author uses shows us that constraints are no longer there and that now the only matter which should concern us, the readers, is the freedom from within that came forward thanks to this “revolution”.

It is O’Brien’s trailblazing attitude that made her write about heavy (somewhere still almost certainly taboo) subjects such as sexual disease, sexual desire, abortion and family violence. With this in mind, we will pass onto the next chapter so as to see in more detail (and through actual examples) what the main gist of this novel was, how it links to our “killing” of *the Angel in the House* and why it is important for us today.

## 2.2. Analysis of the novel

Thinking about women's bodies, women's sexuality and desire, let alone writing about them, not that long ago, was as good as prohibited by all social conventions. Hooks writes about it as follows: "Before feminist movement, before sexual liberation, most women found it difficult, if not downright impossible, to assert healthy sexual agency. Sexist thinking taught to females from birth on had made it clear that the domain of sexual desire and sexual pleasure was always and only male, that only a female of little or no virtue would lay claim to sexual need or sexual hunger. Divided by sexist thinking into the roles of madonnas or whores females had no basis on which to construct a healthy sexual self" (Hooks, 2000: 85).

We should have all this in mind when thinking about how Ellen is portrayed in *August is a Wicked Month*. Her ties to her husband have been cut by the divorce. So, now that they are separated, she no longer "belongs" to anyone. She, nonetheless, adores her son, and in the attempt to pass her time without him, as the father took him to a camping trip to the countryside (which the boy loves), Ellen goes to the French Riviera to have a "holiday". Holiday, but at what cost? That is the question that emerges at this point. The sentiment throughout the novel is all the same – we feel how a mother who misses her son feels, with sporadic moments of guilt when she does not. Yet, this sentiment grows after the pivotal moment in which Ellen finds out her son had died. So, we can decipher the ominous beginning of the novel, somewhat dark, with fleeting ironic comments, and the even "darker" second part of the novel.

Theme-wise, what made this novel stand out at the moment when it was published, was the pure and clear imagery of sexual desire, with the woman's body in the center of it. Moreover, contrary to what we would have thought at first, the theme of child-loss is not central. It's, however, pivotal for the mental state of the main character, but certainly not central. That event, in combination with this "forbidden" theme, might have been what caused the commotion at that time.

As we are currently on the subject of sexual desire represented in this novel, let us take a look at the following example: "She wished he had a thousand hands and could bring all of her body to life at the same moment. He was doing what he could. Her arms were singing and her lips wild with the little threads of joy running through her like little madnesses. After a year's solitary confinement" (O'Brien, 2016: 10). It is thanks to this very example that we realize that throughout this text "the pleasure is only a memory of a brief moment once upon a time, as it is a joy for which another person is necessary" (Dojcinovic-Nesic, 2004: 159). Thus, although such explicit descriptions of the "shared" pleasure might be common in this text, they are rather a sign of a certain co-dependence, an influence the main character cannot liberate herself of. She, as an individual, could not experience the "same" pleasure, the same

feelings, on her own. As though she is running away from something: "In bed she opened wide. And christened him foxglove because it too grew high and purple in a dark secretive glade. He put the bedside light on. She felt him harden and lengthen inside her like a stalk. Soft and hard together. He loved her as no man had ever done, not even the husband who first sundered her and started off the whole cycle of longing and loving and pain and regret. Because that kind of love is finally emptying" (O'Brien, 2016: 15).

In connection to that, we see that she is still regarded as an object, just one not "belonging" to anyone after the divorce: "He despised petty honour, but no longer thought it his duty to correct this or any other flaw in her" (O'Brien, 2016: 3). With the divorce, her ex-husband was, thus, liberated from the obligation to be her "moral compass" – which alludes to the idea that she, on her own, as many women, is incapable of making proper decisions and being shy, obedient, humble, etc. Just as if that "perfect" side of her (that *Angel in the House* every woman holds within – a duality innate to all) had "left" her the moment she was no longer married. We say left in this instance and not "was killed" as we will explain what we meant by this (killing) a bit later in the analysis, as the notion of a "killed" *Angel in the House* manifests itself differently in this text, i.e., its "consequences" are seen and felt differently throughout this novel.

All this does not negate the fact that Ellen was, in fact, still the "perfect" mother to her son, one ready and capable of putting the needs of her son above her own, one who felt rather empty without his presence: "Without her son, or without a guest, she found that cooking saddened her. Alone, she ate standing up, so as not to make a ceremony of it" (O'Brien, 2016: 14). Moreover, this inserted phrase "or without a guest" actually adds more context and makes us aware that she not only needs her son to see her own purpose, but also "anyone". This, undoubtedly, is an issue many women face, even today. Furthermore, this is expressed all the way through the novel. The narrative style which is blurred somewhere between the 1<sup>st</sup> person, 3<sup>rd</sup> person and at certain points resembles the stream of consciousness, makes it somewhat difficult to conclude if some scenes were her own, hidden, inner thoughts. Regardless, we feel what she lacks, the wishes she dare not say out loud: "The stone kept the soil from being washed down the steep hills in heavy rain. She wanted to be like that, supported, by a solid man" (O'Brien, 2016: 82).

This co-dependence we notice in the main character is somewhat juxtaposed to how she is perceived, i.e., described, which also gives us an important insight into her mind and is a great explanation for her behavior – her physical description directly adds to this notion of a woman being an object. However, what might seem peculiar is the fact that we cannot decipher clearly if this is how "the world" sees her, or how she sees herself. As if by looking a certain way, or having certain experience automatically qualifies her to be perceived in a certain way – be it promiscuous or angel-like, be it by others



or be it by herself: “‘I’m out of practice,’ she said. // ‘A girl like you.’ He didn’t believe it. Who would? She was twenty-eight and had skin like a peach and was a free woman with long rangy legs and thick, wild hair, the colour of autumn” (O’Brien, 2016: 11).

Yet, she remained consistent to this co-dependence we notice, consistent in searching for the unattainable in a man, which easily transposes to searching the unattainable and impossible in life: “All her outings and hopes were veered towards being with a certain kind of man that controlled and bewitched her” (O’Brien, 2016: 90–91). So, although this trip to the French Riviera was supposed to be freeing in a way that she lets her body “live” and gain experience, feel that temporary freedom as “she longed to be free and young and naked with all the men in the world making love to her, all at once” (O’Brien, 2016: 25), she was never free of this self-imposed search for “a man”. Furthermore, “this trip was her jaunt into iniquity” (O’Brien, 2016: 29), which she was in general, as the complacent and kind woman in her everyday wifely duties, bereft of, and which she equated with “living”.

However, ultimately, Ellen seems a rather weak character whenever confronted with her male counterparts, no matter how much she pretended to fight it. This is clearly seen in the scene where she is alone with Sidney (one of the men she met in France) in his bedroom. Although she is not attracted to him and has no motives to be with him – he convinces her to get in bed with him, and at that moment, we feel her pure disgust: “She shivered. There was something in his proposal that made her think of lying next to the dead. // ‘Do I have to?’ // ‘You don’t have to,’ he said humbly. So humbly that she knew she must, and waving good night pointlessly to the empty room she went with him up two flights of marble stairs and entered a room with a door whose back and sides were covered in green baize so that it opened softly and closed again with the same hushed and sinister softness. She thought of a morgue. [...] Far from being on the threshold of sin she saw herself as about to make a sacrifice” (O’Brien, 2016: 98–99).

Sacrifice every woman “must” make? It seems that is the general sub-text of this story, as can be seen in the never-ending collective female trauma embodied in Gwyn, one of the side-characters, like Sidney, whose main purpose is to shake Ellen’s spirit when in doubt about certain situations. The best example of this collective female trauma is this scene: “‘Listen sweetie pie,’ Sidney said, ‘you’ve got to get some sleep so you can look pretty tomorrow for Jason.’ // ‘Got to look pretty tomorrow,’ she said, sinking into his arms as he led her away to one of the bedrooms” (O’Brien, 2016: 97).

It is with this notion of “pretty” that women have been brain-washed and micro-managed, and until that is eradicated, nothing will, in fact, change. Even though, “feminist thinking helped us unlearn female self-hatred. It enabled us to break free of the hold patriarchal thinking had on our consciousness” (Hooks,

2000: 14). Gwyn, however, is the perfect example of the opposite, the example of what is still an issue today, because the situation remains almost the same: “Young girls and adolescents will not know that feminist thinkers acknowledge both the value of beauty and adornment if we continue to allow patriarchal sensibilities to inform the beauty industry in all spheres. Rigid feminist dismissal of female longings for beauty had undermined feminist politics. While this sensibility is more uncommon, it is often presented by mass media as the way feminists think. Until feminists go back to the beauty industry, go back to fashion, and create an ongoing, sustained revolution, we will not be free. We will not know how to love our bodies as ourselves” (Hooks, 2000: 36).

These constraints have been understood as critical parts of the term *Angel of the House*. Separate from, yet to an extent still linked to, the artistic notion and understanding Woolf explained in her essay “Professions for Women”, we understood the *Angel of the House*, in the context of this book, as a part of the character, a constituent part of her psyche. It is this *Angel* who guided Ellen morally, who gave her the sense of sin and sacrifice – because sin is in what we do for our own pleasure, and sacrifice is what we do for anyone else: “‘You are a good person,’ he said, ‘kind.’ // That sickly word. // ‘I’m a nurse at heart,’ she said. ‘Didn’t you know that?’” (O’Brien, 2016: 99).

As can be seen in the above-mentioned example, women have been indoctrinated to be obedient since the beginning of time. And this was always hidden behind the terms “kind”, “nice”, “pleasant” – yet all detrimental: “Doing the routine moves and saying the routine words, she remembered how she’d met her husband at a bus stop the very day she ran out of the operating theatre in terror and he asked why she cried. He offered to help her. Kindness. The most unkindest thing of all” (O’Brien, 2016: 100).

Men’s kindness had been deeply covered and masked so as to seem as it had never had any strings attached to it, although it always implied sex as a return investment – and this seems to be the case for all male characters in this novel. It’s as Moi said: “The discovery sets us free, enables us to move on” (Moi, 2017: 51). Unfortunately, Ellen did not live by that and she seems to have been deeply rooted in this corrupt “system”, thus never actually being set free and being able to move on. Unlike Woolf when she wrote: “I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me” (Woolf, 2012: 583), Ellen seemed too interlocked with the authoritative figures (men in her case, always men as the authoritative figures), she seemed to think that they were in fact more than capable of giving her something – like Bobby, after the death of her son: “She thought again of the young priest that had once saved her from drowning and now, looking at Bobby, she thought of his greater gift to her. He’d given her forgetfulness, a day’s distraction, a day’s healing” (O’Brien, 2016: 158).



Controversial as it might sound, in our case, well, Ellen's case, the moment when her *Angel in the House* was killed, was the moment her son had died. That was the drop that overflowed, and made her release the brake, and as a woman without any brakes, she was finally free within. In the beginning, how she perceived the concepts of sin and sacrifice made it clear to us that the dichotomy of the *angel* and the true self was present within her. She was constantly battling her demons: "Fear and hatred were what motivated her passions" (O'Brien, 2016: 21). Yet still torn apart and guided by what she was indoctrinated to think as the "good" woman, wife and mother: "'People get what they deserve,' she said as she came off the phone. A great believer in punishment" (O'Brien, 2016: 22).

What could shock us the most, so to say, had we not understood her character as described before, would be the following words, the following "confession": "It is always thought that in times of crisis people go wild, but she was not wild. She was calm and able to say to herself that she had killed her son. The logic was simple: if she'd never left her husband they would have holidayed together and she and the child would have gone for the milk and they would have stood, hands held, waiting for the car to go by and it would be something that flashed by leaving a cloud behind and they would have then crossed the road" (O'Brien, 2016: 139).

In a sense, we understand her denial, her anger, her utmost powerlessness to change this outcome, yet what we also understand, but what escapes the main character herself, is the fact that this sequence of events is not valid. The explanation and the idea that she is ultimately guilty for this is still that eternal female burden that all the woes of life are somehow women's fault, and that must be eradicated. Moreover, it must be stated, first she was devoid of the wifely role, then of the motherly one, thus, left to be "just" a woman, however we might understand it – ultimately, she gained her freedom by this, as harsh and as cruel it may sound.

In a sense, although Woolf speaks about this act in a different sense, an artistic one, we see that it translates to our story and our main character: "But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (Woolf, 2018: 2). Yes, occupation of a woman writer, but a need for women in general, it seems almost mandatory in order to gain freedom from within, one which allows certain feelings to exist and to be let out: "And for that little minute she did not feel guilty for being happy so soon after her son died. Even when he was alive she was only a mother some of the time. She doted and hovered over him for months and then of a night she would have a wild longing to go through the town and do delirious things and not bear the responsibility of being a mother, for hours, or days, or weeks" (O'Brien, 2016: 157).

So, although she was "freed" from that motherly role and now that she was technically able to be whoever she wishes, to do whatever she wishes and

to go wherever she wishes, Ellen remains stuck in the same old co-dependent patriarchal pattern discussed earlier. This pivotal moment of loss (and gain in a different sense) seems lost on her at first, as she was still battling the *Angel*.

Her moment of pure freedom from within was overshadowed by the “punitive” outcome of her reckless insistence to sleep with Bobby, even though everything was platonic up to that point. So, as her trip comes to an end, we see a rather devastated, highly judgmental and self-loathing Ellen: “There was no doubt. Something had infected her. The dark mesh of hair had a blight. She looked at it, smelt it, a nest of sobs now with ugly yellow tears, and she damped the cake of soap and washed herself roughly as if by hurting herself she would take away her sin and her shame” (O’Brien, 2016: 171).

Sin and shame, both constant motives of this novel, constant worries on Ellen’s mind (Ellen’s indoctrinated mind): “She thought if they produced another child he might be the same. Reproduce their son exactly. But then she thought of her other trouble and felt daunted. She dimly knew that diseases like that were hereditary and the sins of the parent were truly visited upon the child. Her husband would have her publicly stoned if he knew” (O’Brien, 2016: 186).

“It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality” said Woolf (2018), and it is true, but it does not make it impossible. The freedom that came with this act, for Ellen, was felt in the last part of the book, when she actually considered her needs, although with ironic undertones: “Yes, she was callous, she was hurrying away to find a doctor to cure herself. Already Bobby meant nothing, he had merely been the bearer of infection. The three-wise-men fable in reverse. Not that she blamed him. Blame, like nostalgia, was a sensation she had dispensed with. Trivial, all of these tags, when set against the huge accident of being alive or not” (O’Brien, 2016: 189).

It was at this very moment that we saw the purest, most honest representation of a freed woman, without any brakes, without any embedded moral guidelines that dictate what she should and should not be or do. At that very moment she owned this act of killing of the *Angel in the House*, her worst enemy (herself), and she became truly free, truly capable of moving on in the future.

### 3. Conclusion

“She had not thought of him once. Not once. That was her crime. Under the soft skin and behind the big, melting eyes, her heart was like a nutmeg. Some of it had been grated by life but the very centre never really surrendered to anyone, not to the mother who stole for her, nor to the drunken father, nor to her far-seeing but poisoned husband, and not to the child in the way it should have” (O’Brien, 2016: 193).

We can agree, based on this snip, that Ellen was misplaced and misunderstood – that she never could comply with all the norms and rules set out by the patriarchal system. She was “groomed” so as to fit in, but in fact always felt empty and alone because of it. She sought male companionship because she was deeply disturbed. Her morality was always linked to the outside connection, be it her husband or her son. As long as the son was alive, we saw that there were deep hesitations within her whether or not to proceed in a certain way.

Her “iniquity” as she mentions it, was understood as more of a means to an end than a clear-cut lifestyle she wanted at first. In her corporal experiences we see her from a rather different viewpoint than what could have been interpreted at the time when the book was first published. She oozes this certain emptiness, void, insecurity, which all seems deliberately hidden behind explicit sex scenes. This does not negate the fact that the body is “the place of sexual, social, political, cultural identity, power and subordination” (Dojcinovic-Nesic, 2004: 155).

Subordination – a constant pattern in Ellen’s behavior – a constant throughout the novel. With this in mind, it came as no surprise that her first reaction to her son’s death was to find another anchor towards which she would go. Everything we said throughout the paper about the *Angel in the House*, is deeply rooted in her. The moment of killing, of gaining freedom comes with a certain latency. It comes with a certain disease, as well, which makes it even more difficult for her to truly accept that she is finally free of all the constraints she was under as a wife and as a mother.

Be that as it may, this novel confirmed that this duality *Angel* vs true self exists within each and every one of us – one is groomed and micro-managed, while the other is hidden (up to a certain point). Mostly because, it can be agreed, even though it is something that we might be born with, it is not “unleashed” until we allow it (i.e., until we kill the complacent side of ourselves), until we are “made”, until we understand what it means and how it truly magnificently it benefits us. By raising our consciousness, we had to change ourselves, (Hooks, 2000: 7) and by doing so we made a step towards liberation, towards killing what held us back the most – a part of ourselves.

Why? Well to try to be successful in a much greater search: “To cease to be me” (O’Brien, 2016: 194). The me who is complacent to what the male opinion prescribed, we read from Ellen’s words. The me who is the victim of collective trauma and believes it will never be good enough, we see the sub-text. The me who failed all social norms by not being a good wife and good mother, the feelings emerge. The me who could never truly accept the ideal of the *Angel in the House* and pretend that its values were my own, we interpret finally.

So, in conclusion, we see that most of our questions, if not all, have been answered – be it how we anticipated it or differently. Starting with the limitations we were wondering about, and their extent – we saw, through our analysis that its influence is immense and that the limitations it imposes have

a strong grasp on our main character. Furthermore, it does not have to be an actual murder for us to be set free, although one death, in particular here, was pivotal in the whole process of realization that the freedom can be obtained. However, contrary to what was anticipated, the freedom gained was not in its sense complete and utter freedom, it still had certain limitations, as Ellen could never truly free herself of this subordinate position, never could leave behind the moment of seeking male validation. And last but not least, the question of “punitive” consequences brought upon by “certain” behavior. In our interpretation, this “curse” which the main character saw as a punishment for her actions, really is not a valid viewpoint. As mentioned before in our paper – this stems from the deeply rooted indoctrination where women are (since forever) actively taught that everything bad that happens to them or the people they love is their fault. We argue that this is not the case and that this particular chain of events serves a different purpose than to show to the readers that bad things happen to you when you do the forbidden. We saw this as one more way to give the main character a chance to really connect and explore her body, its limits and its powers. However, this is as always left to individual interpretation, so this is where we will be finishing up our discussion.

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