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## The Turkish Angel in the House: A Travelling Concept in the *Housewife* Poems of Ziya Gökalp and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna

By Fatma Fulya Tepe<sup>1</sup> and Per Bauhn<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

In the present study, a close reading of the “Housewife” poems of Ziya Gökalp and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna reveals not only a travelling concept – that of the *angel in the house*, originally introduced by the British Victorian poet Coventry Patmore – but also illustrates how this concept mirrors the contradictions inherent in the early republican conception of Turkish women. On the one hand, women were recognized as holders of rights; on the other hand, they were idealised as submissive domestic helpers of their husbands. The concept of the angel in the house, as employed by Gökalp and Zorlutuna, celebrates the woman who makes it her mission in life to take care of the home. The “Housewife” poems provide support for a view of the Turkish woman of the early republic as only partially emancipated in relation to the state and as unliberated in relation to family and traditional gender roles.

*Keywords:* Turkish women, angel in the house, emancipation, liberation, Ziya Gökalp, Halide Nusret Zorlutuna

### Introduction

The issue of women’s rights has been considered a central aspect of the historical transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. As Deniz Kandiyoti has pointed out, “the woman question in Turkey became part of an ideological terrain upon which concerns about the changing nature of the Ottoman order and the question of Ottoman and later Turkish national identity were articulated and debated” (Kandiyoti 1989, p. 143).

However, the republican government of Mustafa Kemal, although emphasising the connection between the modernization of Turkey and the emancipation of Turkish women, took an ambiguous view of women’s organisations and movements. It prevented the creation of a women’s party in 1923 and dissolved the Union of Turkish Women (the TKB) in 1935. Hence, while women were given a more equal legal status compared to Ottoman times, their legal emancipation was not complete, nor were they encouraged to play a role in Turkish political life outside the official republican structures. After 1934 women were recognized as citizens with rights to vote and to be elected to political functions, but at home they were still legally obligated to defer to their husbands in important respects. For instance, the 1926 Family Law prescribed that a wife needed her husband’s permission in case she wanted to take up paid work outside the home (Arat 1994, p. 64). Accordingly, “[t]he ideal Republican woman was a ‘citizen woman,’ urban and urbane, socially progressive, but also uncomplaining and dutiful at home. Modernity, as defined by the Turkish state, included marriage and children as a national duty

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for women... Beyond that, state feminism did not concern itself with what happened behind the closed doors of the home” (White 2003, p. 146).

The republican ambivalence regarding the status of women manifests itself in an *idealisation of the domesticated woman*. On the one hand, the woman as a wife and mother is put on a pedestal, celebrated as a worthy object of adoration and admiration. On the other hand, she is being adored and admired precisely because of her domestic qualities as a perfect organiser of the household, a valuable helper of her husband who is left free to take an active part in the life of the wider society. The idealisation we have in mind here is expressed in the poetic characterization of the Turkish woman as an *angel in the house*, a character that originated with the British Victorian poet Coventry Patmore but was later reproduced in other parts of the world. Turkish literature appropriated (but also opposed) Western influences already during the Tanzimat period of the mid-nineteenth century (Sirman 2000, pp. 163–165), and the concept of angels, denoting purity and closeness to the divine, is recognized in Islam as well as in Christianity (Burge 2012); hence, it could easily be adapted to the needs of early Turkish republican literature.

Without making any claims as to any causal links between Patmore’s poetry and the imagery of early Turkish republican authors, we treat the concept of the angel in the house as a *travelling concept*, that is, a concept that is capable of moving “between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities” (Bal 2002, p. 24). Borrowing a leaf from the sociology of literature and Theodor Adorno, we believe that analysing the poetic representations of the character of the angel in the house in the years immediately before and after the foundation of the Turkish republic can help us “discover how the entirety of a society, conceived as an internally contradictory unity, is manifested in the work of art” (Adorno 1991, p. 39). Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to show how the poetic depiction of the angel in the house, being an idealisation of the domesticated woman, expresses norms and values that are traditionalist rather than progressivist, revealing the ambiguities inherent in the early Turkish republican position regarding women and their rights.

## Materials and Methods

The present study relies on a close reading of two poems written by Ziya Gökalp (1918) and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna (1930), respectively, both with the title “Housewife”. Close reading involves paying attention not only to the semantic aspects of a text (what individual words mean), but also to its syntactic (how words are combined) and thematic aspects (the emergence of underlying thematic structures) (Greenham 2019). Close reading was developed at the time of the New Criticism school in 1920s and 1930s and involves “a technically informed, fine-grained analysis of some piece of writing, usually in connection with some broader question of interest” (Smith 2016, p. 58). It has been defined as a methodology that “invites students to examine the deep structures of a piece of text”, including “the way the text is organised, the precision of its vocabulary to advanced concepts, and its key details, arguments, and inferential meanings” (Fisher and Frey 2012, p. 179). According to other scholars, “[c]lose reading consists in mindfully extracting and internalising the important meanings implicit in a text” (Paul and Elder 2019, p. 9).

We have selected two poems for our analysis, based on the time of their writing and on their specific contents. This is in line with the method called purposive or purposeful sampling (Chein 1981). According to Sharan Merriam, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learnt” (Merriam 2009, p. 77). Here we have been looking for voices that express and illustrate the early republican view of the Turkish woman as partially

emancipated but unliberated, that is, a woman that is recognized as having civic rights while at the same time being evaluated primarily as her husband's helper and domestic support.

Both Ziya Gökalp and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna are well known names in a Turkish context. According to Kemal Karpat, "Ziya Gökalp, the formulator of Turkish nationalism and of the ideas of modernization subsequently accepted in the Republic, expressed his views first in the form of poems and advocated the use of literature to spread the ideas of nationalism and bring about society's modernization" (Karpat 1960, p. 29). Likewise, Bernard Caporal notes that "Ziya Gökalp studied the woman's issue as a literary theme before he studied it from a sociological perspective. Most of his poems demand freedom and equality of sexes in the family" (Caporal 1999, p. 96). Halide Nusret Zorlutuna was a well-known Turkish poet and novelist in the national romantic tradition. In contemporary Turkey, she has been celebrated as "the embodiment of modern femininity as a teacher and female writer" (Arslanbenzer 2015). Her involvement in movements for Turkish women's rights makes her an obvious subject for study in this context (Korkmaz and Özcan 2007).

The original language of the poems examined here is Turkish. The English translation has been made by Fatma Fulya Tepe, one of the authors of this article.

### **Background: The Original Angel in the House**

*The Angel in the House* is the title of a narrative poem in two parts, each part including more than 300 pages, written by Coventry Patmore and dedicated to his wife Emily; it was first published in 1854 and then reworked and expanded until 1862. Patmore portrays the ideal Victorian wife as a woman devoted and submissive to her husband. This ideal woman and wife is described as passive, powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and pure. According to Patmore's poem, the husband "must be pleased; but him to please is the woman's pleasure". Even when the husband is unfair and harsh to his wife, she is "too gentle even to force his penitence by kind replies" and just "waits by expecting his remorse", being grateful for any word of kindness that her husband may eventually offer her: "She leans and weeps against his breast and seems to think the sin was hers". This angel wife "loves with love that cannot tire" (Patmore 1863, pp. 109–110).

Characterising the married woman as an angel suggests an idealisation combining religious elements with secular self-sacrifice. On the one hand, the angel in the house "was the one near to God, the pious one"; on the other hand, she "provided the home environment that promoted her husband's and children's well-being in the world" by means of a certain "sweetness of temperament" that in turn implied her "domesticity, unworldliness, asexuality, innocence, even helplessness in matters outside the domestic sphere" (Peterson 1984, p. 677). It has been pointed out that Victorian middle-class women, if they cared for their moral status, were expected to conform to this domesticated role. Either they "became some sort of chaste, obedient domestic angel or they almost certainly fell within the category of a fallen woman" (Kühl 2016, p. 176).

Now, long before Patmore wrote his poem, Mary Wollstonecraft had criticised this angelic idealisation of women, according to which wives are supposed to be mild and soft in temperament, regardless of the harshness of their husbands, caring for these husbands and forgiving them their shortcomings, trying to relieve them of stress by foreseeing their wishes, and submitting to their opinions for the sake of domestic harmony. "Such a woman", wrote Wollstonecraft, "ought to be an angel – or she is an ass – for I discern not a trace of the human character, neither reason nor passion in this domestic drudge, whose being is absorbed in that of a tyrant's" (Wollstonecraft 2004, p. 121).

In 1891 Charlotte Perkins Gilman satirically criticised the idea of the angel in the house in a short story, carrying the title "An Extinct Angel". In this short story, Perkins Gilman

emphasised that “the angel was required in addition to such celestial duties as smiling and soothing, to do kitchen service, cleaning, sewing, nursing, and other mundane tasks” (Perkins Gilman 2009, p. 48). However, as a result of “the unthought-of consequences of repeated intermarriage between the angel and the human being, the angel longed for, found and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge. And in that day, she surely died. The species is now extinct” (Perkins Gilman 2009, p. 50). Here Perkins Gilman alludes to the Biblical narrative of how the first woman, Eve, ate a fruit from the tree of knowledge, and how this caused her to lose her innocence. The message here is that the character of the angel in the house is based on an illusion that cannot stand up to rational scrutiny.

In a similar manner Virginia Woolf, in a 1931 lecture titled “Professions For Women”, made the angel in the house the target of an ironic observation:

[Y]ou may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. 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. 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 (Woolf 1942, p. 237).

Virginia Woolf added that “[k]illing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (Woolf 1942, p. 238). However, it has been suggested that the Victorian angel in the house image of the married woman has managed not only to survive but also to thrive in contemporary media. Christine Crouse-Dick has for instance argued that even in the pages of a progressive women’s lifestyle magazine like *Real Simple* a “revamped version of the domestic angel” works to reinforce “the ideological notion of separate spheres – that the home is a woman’s domain” (Crouse-Dick 2012, p. 442).

### **The Turkish Angel in the House**

In this section, Ziya Gökalp’s and Halide Nusret Zorlutuna’s “Housewife” poems are presented. The following section will contain a close reading of the poems. Gökalp’s “Housewife” was published in 1918; Zorlutuna in 1930. The title of the poems is a combination of the Turkish words for “house” and “wife”, with the word “house” coming before the word “wife” and determining the understanding of the latter word. The woman is a wife, but a wife not only of her husband but also of the house – in this sense, she is literally a “housewife”, belonging to the house.

“Housewife” by Ziya Gökalp (Gökalp 1977, p. 108):

*My home is a heaven  
I am its angel.  
I am the fairy of my hearth  
Who brings happiness.*

*In my home every night  
I prepare a feast:  
My husband comes from work  
My children from school...*

*Its columns are made of porphyry  
From the hundreds of candles  
Of the emerald dome  
Green lights are poured out*

*In a flowery room  
Our dinner table brings us together  
It is a temple, this room  
Our love is our prayer*

“Housewife” by Halide Nusret Zorlutuna (Zorlutuna 2008, p. 39):

*When you step over the doorstone, your heart is refreshed  
Neither a stain on the stony ground, nor a trace on the wood  
This very charming little home smells of soap, winter and summer  
Its tablecloths are snow white, its curtains are snow white.*

*From every corner an elegant feminine taste is shining  
In everything there is the eye-straining work and labour of a woman  
A delicate young woman is the mistress of this home  
Like a shy river, her voice is purling in the heart*

*Her eyes are dreamy, soft, deep  
“Home” is a temple to her, “love of family” is her religion!  
She never lacks babies around her  
While one of them jumps, the other crawls*

*Her entire life belongs to the children, to the home  
Her thin face resembles a three-night moon  
Whatever your position or age is  
Wouldn't you bow your head in front of this woman?*

### **A close reading of Gökalp's poem**

From the first lines of Gökalp's poem, we understand that the voice of the poem is meant to belong to a housewife, defining herself and her home in the first half of the first stanza of the poem. Hence, what we have here is a male poet's representation of what he believes should be a woman's idea of a house and a housewife:

*My home is a heaven, I am its angel*

In these lines the female character of the poem voices a heavily idealised perspective of the role of a housewife, defining herself and her home in words like “angel” and “heaven”. She elevates this worldly home to the status of an otherworldly heaven and her mortal self to that of an angel. Comparing the home to heaven and the housewife to an angel function to increase their status and to make this mundane everyday place and its worker acquire a holy aura or sacredness. From the holy scriptures, heaven is known to be a problem-free place, full of abundance and happiness. And angels are the messengers of God or at least work closely with God. They are also known to be supernaturally beautiful creatures, superior in appearance to ordinary human beings. In this poem, these positive and superior characteristics and implications of the concepts of heaven and angel are transferred to the home and the housewife, vastly increasing the

meaning and status of the latter. We should also note the possibility that the use of religious concepts to characterise the house and the housewife might have been intended to discipline men as well. Ascribing religious attributes to women can function as an instrument to make God-fearing men in an Islamic society more respectful of their wives. Hence, Ziya Gökalp might have intended the use of a religious terminology to balance power relations between husband and housewife.

In the second half of the first stanza, the speaker says:

*I am the fairy of my hearth,  
Who brings happiness*

Here, she continues to describe herself in quasi-magic terms, as a “fairy” of her home. A fairy is once again a beautiful female being, belonging to an unreal, supernatural world. The fairy is at one and the same time a delicate and powerful being, and the kind of magic she exercises is of a positive, helpful kind. The hearth, on the other hand, is the cooking place of the home, the place where food is being prepared, but also a place of warmth and comfort. Hence, when we are told that the housewife is the fairy of her hearth, this suggests that she is the benign and powerful guardian of her home, and especially that part of the home that relates to cooking and heating. Here it is also important to note that she talks of it as *my* hearth – she assigns to herself a special role of *ownership* in relation to the hearth, but this can also be understood as an idea of *belonging* to the hearth. In both interpretations it places the housewife firmly in the kitchen, with a special responsibility for preparing food and keeping the house warm.

Next, she continues by saying that she is the one who “brings happiness”. The housewife fairy obviously performs the miracle of bringing happiness by cooking and keeping the house warm. Hard work is here obscured by a language that suggests magic. This is indeed how a man would describe a woman’s work at home – a work that he does not see for himself and does not take part in. To him the result when he comes home from work may well look like magic, the work of a fairy. But is it likely that the woman who actually carries out the work would experience it like this?

Then the housewife fairy describes the outcome of her cooking activities:

*In my home every night  
I prepare a feast:  
My husband comes from work  
My children from school...*

The angel brings happiness to her home by preparing food for her husband and children. And it is not just food, or a meal, that we are talking about here, but a *feast*. Once again, words conveying a sense of the extraordinary or luxurious are being applied to what otherwise might have been considered an everyday activity. It is not suggested that the supper is expensive in monetary terms; rather, the idea is that it is prepared with care and love for those who are going to enjoy it – that is, the husband and the children.

In the third stanza, the angel’s house is being described:

*Its columns are made of porphyry  
From the hundreds of candles*

*Of the emerald dome  
Green lights are poured out*

Once again, the language of the poem indicates something extraordinary, using words that suggest a celestial palace rather than an ordinary home. Here, as in earlier lines, the poem employs images with a religious content. The “dome” of the angel’s house makes us associate it with a mosque, and green (“emerald”) is the colour of Islam. Thus, the angel’s home resembles a mosque, a place of holiness and divine presence. We are now invited to think of the angel’s house as a sacred building, a shrine of everyday life, consistent with her own supernatural powers and the peace and joy she brings to its inhabitants. Hence, the everyday activities of the housewife are elevated into something sacred, deserving the kind of respectful adoration that is usually associated with the practice of religion.

The last stanza gives further details of the home:

*In a flowery room  
Our dinner table brings us together  
It is a temple, this room  
Our love is our prayer*

The room in which the family shares their meal is decorated with flowers, bringing in the beauty of spring and the idea of nature being reborn. The dinner table brings the family together. Sharing a meal provides nourishment to the members of the family and so gives them a new life – another rebirth, like the one symbolised by the flowers of spring. And just as God’s love brings life to nature, so the love of the angel in the house brings life to her family. Accordingly, the room where the family has its dinner is likened to a temple, while the love that is manifested in the meal prepared by the angel and shared by her family is likened to a prayer. Once again, concepts borrowed from religion – temple, prayer – are used to underline the angelic qualities of the housewife and her work. It is as if ordinary language is insufficient to capture the housewife’s view of her life and work.

Throughout Gökalp’s poem, we encounter a description of the housewife and her activities that is built on hierarchical dichotomies between this world, the world of humans and of everyday life, and the other world, the angelic world of magic and miracles, holiness and divinity. This dichotomy serves the purpose of empowering the role of the housewife by replacing the ordinary and everyday characteristics of her life with supernatural qualities. Although in real life the house and the housewife are not perceived as having a high social status, the poem elevates them into something divine. The housewife is turned into an angel and her house into a temple. In this respect, the poem could be regarded as a redefinition, revaluing, and empowerment of the private sphere, and of its women and relations.

On the other hand, the use of religious concepts also suggests how vulnerable the position of the housewife is. It is not enough to ask for human justice and human rights to improve her status, but one needs to bring in religious conceptions and make them apply to her. It is as if the housewife needs God’s protection to be represented in positive terms.

The poetic idealisation of the housewife, epitomised in the very word “angel”, might be supposed to bring with it increased respect and empowerment for actual housewives. But what if it instead appears so unrealistic that it becomes impossible for actual housewives to identify with it? And how are real housewives to benefit from being likened to angels in the absence of real empowerment and rights equal to those of men? Moreover, if the role of the housewife is elevated to that of the angel in the house, how will this affect the perception of emancipated women who are *not* content with being housewives? Are they to be considered as *fallen* angels?

Might the idea of the angel in the house actually confine women to the role of housewives rather than encourage them to choose a life for themselves according to their own preferences?

Here we should remember that the discussion of a domestic division of labour started to spread first in the 1970s (Pilcher and Whelehan 2017). Hence, the possibility that the angel in the house could be the *husband* might not have been readily available at the time when the poem was written. Another reason why Gökalp's poem celebrates and sublimizes the traditional division of labour at home could be his realisation that women had less economic power than men, since they were normally not involved in business activities, nor were they wage earners. To compensate for this, he might have wanted to upgrade the status of women's domestic work. Still, the idealisation of the housewife suggested by the concept of the angel in the house is conciliatory rather than emancipatory, celebrating woman as a housewife rather than as an agent, entitled to choose her own way of life.

### **A close reading of Zorlutuna's poem**

In this poem the speaker of the poem addresses a guest who has come to pay a visit to the home of the housewife. The guest is reminded of the pleasing qualities of the home:

*When you step over the doorstone, your heart is refreshed  
Neither a stain on the stony ground, nor a trace on the wood  
This very charming little home smells of soap, winter and summer  
Its tablecloths are snow white, its curtains are snow white.*

The focus here is on cleanliness, tidiness, whiteness, and, by implication, on the absence of dirt and decay. This is a home that is controlled and ordered by the housewife, maintained and kept clean in a way that would make any visitor feel delighted and willing to enter. All year round ("winter and summer"), regardless of the weather, the housewife makes sure that her home smells of soap and that the textiles of the house are snow-white. It is a "little" home, suggesting that we are not entering a palace or any other kind of upper-class home, but the kind of home that a family with moderate or small incomes can afford. This underlines the ordinariness of the situation – we are entering a home that most Turkish people at the time could identify with.

In the second stanza, we are given further impressions of the housewife and her work to make a beautiful home:

*From every corner an elegant feminine taste is shining  
In everything there is the eye-straining work and labour of a woman  
A delicate young woman is the mistress of this home  
Like a shy river, her voice is purling in the heart*

Here we are meeting with contrasting images of the housewife. On the one hand, she is not a rich urban lady who can hire cleaners – she cleans her home herself. Yet her work manifests "an elegant feminine taste". So, although she is not wealthy or belong to the upper classes of society, she still has the appearance of a lady when it comes to taste and refined manners. And in an important sense, she is superior to wealthy urban ladies, since the beauty of her home is her own work and not just something that she has paid someone else to arrange for her. Another contrast is to be found between the hard work involved in keeping her home clean and the delicate and shy nature of the housewife herself. Once again, we are meeting with an angel in the house – capable both of hard physical labour and of welcoming a visitor with an appearance of beauty and tenderness. Perhaps this also reflects a combination of two different roles typically assigned to women. On the one hand, they are charged with

responsibility for household chores and for keeping the home neat and tidy; on the other hand, they are expected to look beautiful and pleasing. Here shyness is also presented as a virtue of the housewife, suggesting a traditional female ideal of modesty.

The third stanza continues to describe the housewife, her home and her family:

*Her eyes are dreamy, soft, deep  
 "Home" is a temple to her, "love of family" is her religion!  
 She never lacks babies around her  
 While one of them jumps, the other crawls*

The dreamy quality of the housewife's eyes suggests that she has turned herself away from the world, looking inward, searching her heart and soul in an act of contemplation. This otherworldly focus is further reinforced using religious terms in the next line. Here, just as in Gökalp's poem, religion and the religious concept of the temple are being invoked. Home and family are given a sacred status and the housewife attaches a spiritual significance to them. Her religiously inspired devotion to home and family makes her an angel in the house. However, at the same time as the housewife is being elevated to an angelic position, she is also represented as a dreamer. But not only is she depicted as a woman dreaming; she herself is depicted as a rather unreal character. From what we have already seen, she is at one and the same time a hardworking and efficient organizer of her home and an inward-looking, dreamy person, finding religious significance in her work.

As for the application of religion and religious concepts to the housewife's devotion to home and family, it is as if it is not enough to point to the mutual love existing between husband and wife or between mother and children as a sufficient reason. The speaker of the poem obviously finds it necessary to invoke the idea of religious duty as well. How are we to understand this? Is this perhaps a message for male readers of the poem? Given the traditional authority of religion and religious prescriptions, the speaker of the poem might want to use religion to impress upon Turkish men that they should respect their wives as the true saints of the home.

Then the speaker makes the following observation:

*She never lacks babies around her  
 While one of them jumps, the other crawls*

This refers to the physical or biological reproductive capacity of the housewife. Thus, she is not only a housewife but also a mother. The mother has more than one child and there is not a lot of age difference between the children – "while one of them jumps, the other crawls". This is an implied celebration of the fertile and childbearing woman. By implication, it also expresses a requirement of the angel in the house that she should not deny her husband offspring. Whatever aspirations she might have had for a career of her own, or for work outside the home, it is as a diligent housewife and fertile mother that she is being praised.

This understanding of the angel in the house carries over into the final stanza, in which the speaker declares of the housewife that *[h]er entire life belongs to the children, to the home*. This suggests that the housewife does not have a private or personal life of her own; she is not even a person in her own right. She *belongs* to her children and home. Here there is nothing of the self-ownership associated with individualism and agency. For all her angelic qualities, this woman is valued as an instrument of family happiness rather than as an agent in her own right. Here one can see the ambiguity inherent in the angel in the house character. She may be described in supernatural and divine terms, but in the end, she is a holy domestic servant. Still, because of her religious attributes she is owed respect, as the last line of the poem suggests:

*Wouldn't you bow your head in front of this woman?* But she is owed respect not because of her qualities as an individual human being, but as the embodied manifestation of religious duty. Hence, we are left with an ambiguous notion of the angel in the house. Perhaps the poem (given the time when it was written) was intended to increase the social status of the housewife by pointing out to a religiously conservative and male dominated society that the housewife fulfilled a vital obligation to both society and religion by providing love and nurture for her family. At the same time, this conception of the Turkish housewife as an angel in the house also had a confining implication, as it did not encourage any other role for the Turkish woman than that of a housewife. And even as an angel in the house, the Turkish woman is expected to combine a capacity for hard physical labour with a tender beauty and elegance in appearance, making her attractive according to traditional male standards. In this way, the character of the angel in the house seems to mix aspects of Joan of Arc with aspects of Greta Garbo, that is, on the one hand, a self-sacrificing and religiously motivated endurance, and, on the other, a quiet and shy form of female beauty.

### **Discussion: The Turkish Angel in the House and the Family Law of 1926**

The poems by Gökalp and Zorlutuna can be viewed as representing the ambiguities of the early Turkish republic regarding the role and status of its women citizens. In its legislation, the Kemalist republic tried to accommodate the conflicting ideals of emancipation and tradition, both affirming women as citizens with rights and upholding patriarchal values that put limits on these rights. In their poems, Gökalp and Zorlutuna idealise a woman who freely undertakes the task of creating and preserving domestic bliss, a woman who does not feel oppressed by patriarchal expectations, but rather takes a pride in making a home out of a house, and a paradise out of a home. In this way, partial emancipation can be harmonised with tradition, as the angelic woman volunteers to put her agency in the service of traditional values. She fulfils herself by identifying with the role of a housewife and the duties she perceives as emanating from this role. The role of a housewife hence becomes her *normative identity*, connecting who she is with what she ought to do (Bauhn 2017). The poetic integration of traditional values in the identity of the Turkish woman has the effect (intended or accidental) of hiding the opposition between tradition and emancipation. While conservatives could be appeased by the expectation that emancipated women would not leave their homes and household chores, progressivists could embrace the conclusion that women not only fulfilled themselves by voluntarily identifying with their domestic duties, but that they also deserved the respect and adoration of the whole nation in doing so.

It has been argued in Turkish feminist literature that the republic emancipated women without liberating them (Toprak 1982, pp. 361–362). (For other statements of this position, see Toprak 1990; Abadan-Unat 1991; Arat 1998.) We would like to take that argument one step further and claim that Turkish women were not even fully emancipated by the republic and that the poems analysed here indicate the reason why this is so. Under the impact of traditional values, women were denied an equal standing with men and were instead idealised as angels of the home. According to the republican conception of the family, “women are defined as the helper and adviser of the husband as head of the family” (Sirman 2000, p. 174), but they are not perceived as independent agents in their own right.

### **Conclusions**

The poetry of Gökalp and Zorlutuna can be seen as expressive of the views of the early republican elites. While these elites were willing to recognize women as citizens, they were reluctant to confront traditional family values about women's domestic responsibilities. The outcome was a compromise, according to which women were partially emancipated while at the same time being implicitly encouraged to embrace the role of the housewife. It is the latter

role that is idealised by Gökalp and Zorlutuna in their poetic accounts of the angel in the house. Hence, in spite of an official republican rhetoric of modernism and progressivism, women were hence in important respects expected to be satisfied with the role of mothers and domestic caretakers, and it is this expectation that comes out in the two poems we have analysed here.

Another conclusion, at the level of theory and methodology, is that a sociological and analytical study of literature of the kind that we have undertaken here can be a fruitful way of revealing gendered expectations that may not be so easily uncovered by the usual methods of history or political science. The poetic idealizations of the angel in the house help us understand the reality of the early Turkish republic's policies regarding women. In this way, the study of poetic fiction, rather than being opposed to factual description, may actually promote a fuller and more vivid understanding of women's ongoing struggle for rights to freedom and agency, not only in Turkey, but everywhere.

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