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Coventry Patmore: Critic of Literature and Art

Julitta Gaul

Loyola University Chicago

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COVENTRY PATMORE: CRITIC OF LITERATURE AND ART

BY

SISTER JULITTA GAUL, S.C.C.

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PREFACE

The past two decades have witnessed a revival of interest in Coventry Patmore, whom the world has come to know as "the poet of nuptial love." In 1921 Frederick Page collected and published a large number of Patmore's latest essays under the title of Courage in Politics and Other Essays, while Osbert Burdett published a microscopic examination of the Patmorean theme under the title The Idea of Patmore. The numerous articles commemorating the centenary of Patmore's birth were followed in 1924 by a biography of his daughter Emily, a religious of the Holy Child Jesus, whose life is a kind of commentary on the odes of The Unknown Eros. Frederick Page's study of Patmore's poetry appeared in 1933. There followed in quick succession a biographical study of the Patmore family by Patmore's great-grandson, Derek Patmore, and two pieces of scholarly research by Father Terence Connolly, S.J. -- the first a translation of St. Bernard's homilies on the Canticle of Canticles, which Father Connolly intended as an aid to the understanding of Patmore's poems, and the second a heavily annotated selection of Patmore's poems, called Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love. A third volume of the letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., which contains his complete correspondence with Patmore, was the last important piece of scholarship of interest to the student of Patmore.

During all this period, however, no one has attempted an exhaustive study of Patmore's literary criticism and his theories of art. Osbert Burdett devotes a chapter to the application of Patmore's central idea to art. Paul Franklin Baum has made a tentative study of the problem
in a brief essay entitled "Coventry Patmore's Literary Criticism." A suggestion made by Father Calvert Alexander, S.J., concerning Patmore's potentiality as a critic\(^1\) gave rise to the present investigation, which purposes to make a more complete, though not exhaustive, study of Patmore's work as a literary critic and theorist.

To Dr. Morton Zabel of Loyola University, under whose direction the study was made, and to Father Arnold Garvy, S.J., who made valuable comments and suggestions, the writer makes grateful acknowledgment.

1 The Catholic Literary Revival, 68.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PLACE OF AESTHETIC THEORY IN PATMORE'S THOUGHT AND WORK

To Coventry Patmore the supreme virtue of the artist was that conscious striving after adequate expression which follows from a realization of his high calling. He went so far as to call this consciousness the soul of art and to write of it: "Its seemingly absolute non-existence is only the perfection of the ars celare artes." When Patmore's life was approaching its term, Alice Meynell paid tribute to its fruits:

Never was poetry more conscious than Patmore's. Nor, perhaps, if we seek among the homages of the poets to their art shall we find graver or profounder admiration than Patmore's, hardly even excepting Wordsworth's, explicit and implicit.

In Patmore's poetry, particularly in the polished achievement of The Unknown Eros, this conscious devotion to art receives implicit expression; its explicit manifestation must be sought in his critical essays, which, although they will always be secondary to his poetry, bear a definite relationship to that poetry and constitute an apology for art as distinctive and far-reaching as the defense of nuptial love in Patmore's poetry.

The seeds of aesthetic theory were sown in the mind of Coventry Patmore by his father, Peter George Patmore, a dilettante critic of English

1 "Mrs. Walford's Novels," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 137-8.
literature. The Father's influence on his son's critical opinions was no slight one. Even before Coventry's birth, his father had written a sonnet on Wordsworth, and this at a time when appreciation of Wordsworth was limited to the few. Indeed, he anticipated the best appreciation of Wordsworth of a later day. His judgment on Byron, Shelley, and Coleridge, though less fully developed, was scarcely less sound. The boy Coventry learned to know the English poets from his father's books, in which favorite passages were marked. Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton he studied thoroughly; in other authors, as his later writings seem to evidence, he often read only marked passages. What the extent and nature of Patmore's early reading was, he himself stated in the autobiographical sketch written at the suggestion of his biographer, Basil Champneys:

At this age [fifteen] I had read almost all the standard poetry and much of the best secular prose in our language, and was in the habit of studying it critically; in proof of which assertions I may mention an "Essay on Macbeth," which was written by me when I was between fifteen and sixteen, and which was published, without a word of alteration, in the "Germ" -- a periodical issued by the "Pre-Raphaelites" -- some years afterwards.

An entry in the Pre-Raphaelite diaries under date of December 20, 1849, notes that this paper "is devoted to showing that the idea of obtaining the crown was not suggested to Macbeth by the witches, but had been previously contemplated by him. It is very acute and well written and will fill some twenty pages."  

3 Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, I, 9.
4 Ibid., I, 44.
5 Ibid., I, 30-1.
6 Ibid., II, 43.
7 Quoted in ibid., I, 92.
Peter George Patmore had dedicated his son to the service of the Muses; he had guided the boy's literary tastes; he had encouraged him in his writing of poetry and had virtually forced the publication of his first volume of poems in 1844. It was he, too, who was responsible for Coventry's first published critical essays. In 1845, pressed by financial difficulties, Peter George Patmore secretly fled to the continent, leaving Coventry and his younger brother to shift for themselves. "Somehow or other," writes Champneys, "they managed to subsist on contributions to periodical literature, and possibly on translations from French and German." 8

Even after Patmore had received an appointment in the British Museum through the influence of Monokton Milnes, he still found it necessary to increase his income by writing for periodicals. He continued to write for the North British Review, the British Quarterly Review, the Edinburgh Review, the Literary Gazette, and other magazines until 1862, the year in which The Victories of Love, a sequel to The Angel in the House, appeared. Then came a long pause.

In his study of Patmore, Frederick Page points out the relationship between this early critical work and Patmore's poetry. He believes that Patmore is the author of an unsigned article on the novels of Countess Hahn-Hahn, which appeared in Lowe's Edinburgh Magazine for June, 1846, and which contains "the first hint of 'the novel in The Angel in the House,' four years before its inception, and almost a year before Patmore's engagement to Emily Andrews." 9 Patmore, he avers, took over the story from

8 Ibid., I, 61.
9 Patmore: A Study in Poetry, 63-4.
Countess Hahn-Hahn, broke it up into bits, and remolded it to his philosophy.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, Page holds that this essay contains Patmore's defense for the everyday incidents and the domestic commonplaces of \textit{The Angel}. "There ... is Patmore's apologia," he says, "and his anticipation and rebuttal of the derision he was to meet with."\textsuperscript{11} Likewise Page sees in Patmore's study of Sir Kenelm Digby the genesis of \textit{Tamerton Church-Tower} and the evolution of \textit{The Angel}; in a review of Tennyson he finds evidence of the consciousness of Patmore's method in the preludes and idyls of the latter poem; in Patmore's early criticism of Keats he notes a relationship with the theory of married life that forms the basis of this poem; and in the essay on Madame de Hautefort he discovers Patmore's justification of its social setting.\textsuperscript{12} In the mind of Page, Coventry Patmore's periodical contributions from 1845 to 1862 prepared the way for his first major poems.

Between these early critical writings and Patmore's later work in prose a period of almost twenty-five years elapsed, during which Patmore devoted himself exclusively to the great work of his life, the odes dealing with the subject of divine love and the mystic espousals of the soul with God. Then, in 1885, he appeared once more as a critic of literature and art as well as of manners and politics.

Before discussing the nature and scope of these writings, it may not be out of place to present the views of various writers on this emergence of Patmore from the solitude in which the odes of \textit{The Unknown Eros} had been composed. Virginia Crawford writes:

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, 64-6.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, 69.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, 66-8, 85-6, 88, 94.
Like Matthew Arnold, for whom he entertained a sincere admiration, if he loved poetry, he also loved intellectual controversy, and his need to impose his thoughts on others drove him in later years into prose.13

Edmund Gosse and Calvert Alexander, S.J., attribute Patmore's abandonment of poetry for prose to the gradual waning of poetic inspiration. Gosse says:

When Patmore discovered, between 1878 and 1884, that the faculty for expressing himself freely in verse was leaving him, he began to embody his ideas in clear, nervous and aphoristic prose.14

And Father Alexander:

In 1884, feeling that he had written all that he could give to poetry, he devoted himself exclusively to prose.15

Patmore himself sheds no more light on the matter when he writes, in a letter to Gerard Manley Hopkins, on October 10, 1886:

I have written all that I can or at least that I ought to say, in the way of poetry; and I begin to think that I may do a little good, on a lower level, before I die.16

But the religious who wrote the biography of Patmore's daughter Emily speculates on the reason for the failure of his poetic inspiration. She believes that his daughter's choice of the religious life had exerted a strong influence on the odes, and hence she writes: "After she died he wrote no more poetry. His song began with the first Emily and ended with

13 "Coventry Patmore," Fortnightly Review, LXXV (n.s. LXIX) (February, 1901), 307.

14 Coventry Patmore, 205.

15 The Catholic Literary Revival, 68.

From March, 1885, to August, 1888, Patmore contributed more or less regularly to the St. James's Gazette. During these years and until his death he also wrote occasionally for the Fortnightly Review, the Anti-Jacobin, Merry England, and the Saturday Review. In the summer of 1889 he published about thirty selected essays under the title Principle in Art. A large number of these essays deal with principles of criticism; most of the others are evaluations of the work of individual authors. In Religio Poetae, a second volume of essays, which appeared in 1893, Patmore correlates religion, love, and art, especially poetry. In 1895 he published his final volume of prose, a collection of aphorisms and concise essays -- "hard sayings," he himself calls them -- on life, religion, art, and love under the title The Rod, the Root, and the Flower. Gosse remarks that these three volumes "contain in succinct form a summary of what Patmore's loves and hatreds, prejudices and inclinations and illusions, were in the last years of his life."

Despite the lapse of more than two decades between Patmore's earlier and later prose work, there is a singular continuity in it. Basil Champneys declares that the opinions are generally the same, "the

17 A Religious of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, A Daughter of Coventry Patmore: Sister Mary Christina, S.H.C.J., 7. The author of this biography is an American, Mother St. Ignatius, who, under her maiden name of Louisa Wheaton, has made various contributions to Catholic periodical literature.

18 The greater number of these essays were collected by Frederick Page and reprinted in 1921 as Courage in Politics and Other Essays. This book contains a bibliography of Patmore's prose contributions to periodical literature.

superiority of the later criticism being manifest mainly in increased pregnancy of thought and felicity of expression.\textsuperscript{20} Of the early essays he writes:

They appear to me \ldots to attain a high standard of excellence on their own lines. The style indeed lacks the nervous energy and distinction shown by his later prose work, but the articles are almost always marked by originality and maturity of thought and by careful and fair critical treatment.\textsuperscript{21}

Practically all of Patmore's critical essays deal in some measure with art in general. Besides they fall into two distinct groups dealing with architecture and literature, respectively. Because a complete understanding and proper evaluation of the essays on architecture would require a specialized knowledge entirely beyond the literary sphere, it seems wise to limit the present study to those dealing with literature. But even here a further limitation is necessary. Most of Patmore's earlier essays, it will be remembered, were written under stress of financial difficulties; hence it is not surprising that he did not care to have his name connected with all of them. In a letter written to Buxton Forman on July 18, 1886, he limits the early critical essays with which he would have his name associated to "English Metrical Critics," "The Ethics of Art," and "Shakespere." The present study, therefore, is concerned only with these three early critical attempts of Patmore and with the essays of his maturity, supplemented by the critical remarks that appear in his correspondence. Slight as the material may seem in bulk, it yet contains a substantial body of aesthetic theory and a considerable number of practical judgments.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21} Basil Champneys, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 109.
\bibitem{22} \textit{Ibid.}, I, 109.
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CHAPTER TWO

PATMORE'S THEORIES OF ART

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Coventry Patmore never professed to preach a definite gospel of aesthetic doctrine. He believed that the materials necessary for the formation of a body of Institutes of Art already existed in the works of Aristotle, Hegel, Lessing, Goethe, and others, but that no living man could organize those materials.\(^1\) He made no attempt to embody his own views in anything like a system. For system itself he manifested a supreme contempt, preferring rather to suggest than to enumerate final principles; yet paradoxically, "when he reached a conclusion it was as positive (to him) as a Euclidean Q.E.D."\(^2\) Of the aphorisms and concise essays that make up The Rod, the Root, and the Flower, he wrote in his preface:

"A systematic Philosopher, should he condescend to read the following notes, will probably say, with a little girl of mine to whom I showed the stars for the first time, "How untidy the sky is!" But who does not know that all philosophies have had to pay, for the blessing of system, by the curse of barrenness?"\(^3\)

Yet one might remind Patmore of a truth which he himself had enunciated.

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2 Paul Franklin Baum, "Coventry Patmore's Literary Criticism," University of California Chronicle, XXV (1923), 245.

in various forms in his poetry: that obedience to law is the ultimate condition of true freedom; and hence that a fixed and immutable order or system rules even the untidiness of the sky. So, too, out of the apparently random ideas on art that appear in the prose writings of Patmore, the student may construct a sequence of thought that hazards even the name of system without fear of incurring the curse of barrenness.

Although Patmore nowhere explicitly defines art, his is a classical conception of art for he holds that

To set before and excite man to the love and pursuit of their ideal life is the common object both of religion and of art, especially of literary art.4

Reality of any kind is the subject of art, and the artist reveals it "whenever he exhibits or suggests the true relation of any object to the rest of the universe."5 His representation will be direct or indirect. In an indirect representation of reality, he will employ symbols to express the otherwise unutterable, as Patmore employs symbols in the ode of The Unknown Eros to exhibit the mystery of the love of God for the soul. In a direct representation of reality, he will generalize and idealize, so that the image he presents becomes for the imagination an ideal type, as the Apollo Belvedere is the ideal of a beautiful young man.6 If reality is the subject of art, its scope must be as wide as reality:

Whatever is, is the legitimate subject of art. So far, indeed, is it from being confined to that which is in itself attractive, that art may safely employ facts and

4 "Unnatural Literature," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 128.
5 "The Ethics of Art," British Quarterly Review, X (1849), 447.
6 Ibid., 444.
images which are rightly banished from ordinary conversation. 7

Nevertheless, art does not seek for distinction in "antics, oddities, crudities, and incessant violations of the universal law"; on the contrary, its function consists in "upholding those laws and illustrating them and making them unprecedentedly attractive by its own peculiar emphases and modulations." 8

Of nuptial love Patmore had written:

... the bond of law
Does oftener marriage-love evoke,
Than love, which does not wear the yoke
Of legal vows, submits to be
Self-rein'd from ruinous liberty.
Lovely is love; but age well knows
'Twas law which kept the lover's vows
Inviolate through the year or years
Of worship pieced with panic fears,
When she who lay within his breast
Seem'd of all women perhaps the best. 9

Of that higher consecration and renunciation which is the essence of the religious life, he declared:

For none knows rightly what 'tis to be free
But only he
Who, vow'd against all choice, and fill'd with awe
Of the ofttimes dumb or clouded Oracle,
Does wiser than to spell,
In his own suit, the least word of the Law. 10

7 Ibid., 459.
10 "Legem Tuam Dilexi," lines 71-6.
And for art, which in his mind was closely related to love, he could claim no higher praise than that of obedience to law:

The glory of art is in showing life as rejoicing in and completed by law; and the prayer of the great poet is that of the great prophet: 'Order all things in me strongly and sweetly from end to end.'

To Patmore, interested though he was in all forms of art and in all types of artists, the literary artist, the poet, is the artist par excellence. By poets he does not mean only or chiefly those who have written in verse.

It is true that the outward form of poetry is an inestimable aid to the convincing and persuasive power of poetical realities; but there is a poetic region -- the most poetical of all -- which is incapable of taking the form of poetry. Its realities take away the breath which would, if it could, go forth in song; and there is such a boundless wilderness of equally inspiring subjects to choose [sic] from that choice becomes impossible, and the tongue of love and joy is paralysed.  

11 "The Morality of 'Epipsychidion'," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, III. Long before he wrote this essay on Shelley, and indeed before he had joined the Roman Catholic Church, Patmore had voiced the same idea in the essay entitled "English Metrical Critics," North British Review, XXVII (1857), 160:

At a time like this, when it is as much the fashion to exaggerate the so-called "inspiration" and "unconsciousness" of artistical productions, as it used to be to over-estimate the critical and scientific elements, the utility of laws ... is likely to have seemed questionable to some of our readers. The true poet's song is never tammeled by a present consciousness of all the laws which it obeys; but it is science and not ignorance which supplies the condition of such unconsciousness. The lives and the works of all great artists, poets or otherwise, show that the free spirit of art has been obtained, not by neglect, but by perfection of discipline.

12 "Religio Poetae," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 224.
The poet is, above all, the seer, the man who can perceive and touch reality with his spiritual senses and, by means of his alert and far-reaching vision, detect in external nature symbols by which alone spiritual realities can be rendered credible to persons of inferior perceptive powers.  

He gives the world to eat only of the Tree of Life, reality; and will not so much as touch the Tree of Knowledge, as the writer of Genesis ironically calls the Tree of Learning that leads to a denial of knowledge. He is the very reverse of a "scientist." He is all vision and no thought, whereas the other is all thought and no vision.

He, more than all other men, feels the truth, and bridges the gulf between truth and emotion by language which is at once true, sensuous and passionate. He leads men by their affections to things above their affections, and so he becomes, like Paul of old, truly the apostle to the Gentiles. He alone may and can speak the otherwise unutterable in such a way "that the disc with its withering heat and blinding brilliance remains wholly invisible, while enough warmth and light are allowed to pass through the clouds of his speech to diffuse daylight and genial warmth."

Unlike the function of the statesman, the social reformer, or the political economist, that of the poet is essentially affirmative. Since poetry deals only with the permanent facts of nature and humanity, the true poet either allows the present to drift unheeded by, or so handles its

13 Ibid., 219-20.
14 Ibid., 222.
16 "Aurea Dicta, CVII," in The Rod, the Root, and the Flower, 33.
phenomena as to make them wholly subsidiary to or illustrative of well-ascertained stability.17 His function "is simply affirmative of things which it greatly concerns men to know, but which they have either not discovered or have allowed to lapse into the death of commonplace."18 For this reason,

Great has been the failure of every poet who has renounced his affirmative function as seer in order to denounce and reform abuses. The real poet is, indeed, the greatest of all reformers; but it is not upon the platform, in the pulpit, or on the stump that he carries out his work. His business is to embody truth, justice, and goodness in the living and alone convincing form of beauty, and to make them beloved by showing that they are lovely; and, if he presents folly, vice, or any kind of uncomeliness, it is not in order to contemplate and to judge such evils in themselves, but in order to supply foils which shall set forth more strongly the irrefragable splendour of truth embodied in sensible loveliness.19

From the function of the poet it follows that his first duty is "not to run before he is sent," that is, not to write except when he feels inspired. "If this duty is religiously kept, a very little running may make the successful race, when the moment for starting comes."20 To wait for inspiration is to maintain a literary conscience. Every poet has a certain amount of original poetry in him, and if he does not get it out of himself in his spring or summer, he may hope to do so in his winter of life.21

Poetical integrity is the supreme virtue of the poet. This

18 Ibid., 53.
19 "The Morality of 'Epipsychidion',' op. cit., 114.
20 Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, I, 254.
21 Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore, 183.
quality does not reside in his active life, but consists in the uprightness of
his mind and heart, and is to be inferred from the cumulative testimony
of his words.

A man's actions -- although we are bound socially to judge him thereby -- may belie him: his words never. Out of his mouth shall the interior man be judged; for the interior man is what he heartily desires to be, however miserably he may fail to bring his external life into correspondence with his desire; and the words of the man will infallibly declare what he thus inwardly is, especially when, as in the case of the poet, the powers of language are so developed as to become the very glass of the soul, reflecting its purity and integrity, or its stains and insincerities, with a fidelity of which the writer himself is but imperfectly conscious.22

Lest the poet, however, seek excuse for his actions in human frailty, let him remember that absolute sanctity is the standard of human law, and that, natural faculties being presupposed, the poet "will be great in proportion to the strictness with which, in his moral ideal, he follows the counsels of perfection."23

As sincerity is the predominant virtue of the poet, so insincerity is his worst fault. This defect, which is really shallowness, betrays itself by a predominance of form over formative energy, or of splendor of language over human significance, by a constant preoccupation with the superficies of nature which produces so-called "descriptive" writing, and by an endeavor to say fine things in order to gain admiration. In the work of the insincere poet manner comes first, matter second.24

22 "Poetical Integrity," in Principle in Art, Etc., 45.
23 "Bad Morality Is Bad Art," ibid., 23.
Two faculties, the intellect and the imagination, characterize the true poet and set him apart from his fellow mortals. To Patmore intellect and genius are more or less synonymous:

The intellect is the faculty of the "seer". It discerns truth as a living thing; and, according as it is in less or greater power, it discerns with a more or less far-seeing glance the relationships of principles to each other, and of facts, circumstances, and the realities of nature to principles, without anything that can be properly called ratiocination.

This, Patmore believes, is genius, and it is, in a sense, infallible. Indeed, in proportion as a man is fallible in what he professes to see, he is not a seer and therefore not a man of genius. It goes without saying, however, that all mortal genius is only partial, and even in that partial character, imperfect; "but the most imperfect genius has an infinite value -- not only because it is actual sight of truth, but also and still more because it is a peculiar mode of seeing, a reflection of truth coloured but not obscured by the individual character, which in each man of genius is entirely unique."

Genius is double-sexed: it is masculine ratiocination wedded to

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25 There is is confusion in Patmore's use of these terms. Genius is an extraordinary aptness, with an intellectual element, it is true, but with other spiritual and even physical qualities; in no case can it be identified with the intellect. In the essay entitled "Principle in Art," Patmore uses the term intellect to mean the faculty of ratiocination. In "Seers, Thinkers, and Talkers," however, he makes a distinction between reason and intellect, calling the latter "the faculty of the seer" and so making it something intuitive. This looseness in the use of terms is one of the weaknesses of Patmore's criticism.


feminine sensitivity; hence it has not only much to say but also the ability to say it. The genius of no other artist can compare with that of the poet:

The immensely wider and more various range of vision which the great poet exercises when compared with other artists, together with the necessity for the combined working of many lesser faculties and laboriously acquired accomplishments, has always made of the poet the ideal "genius in the world's esteem. The separate insights into the significance of form, colour, and sound, upon which the arts of the sculptor, painter, and musician are founded, must be included in the vision of the poet of the first rank.

Closely allied to this intuitive power is that highest and rarest faculty of the artist, the synthetic eye or the poetic imagination. Although imagination and genius are widely regarded as one and the same thing, they are in reality distinct but inseparable qualities:

The most peculiar and characteristic mark of genius is insight into subjects which are dark to ordinary vision and for which ordinary language has no adequate expression. Imagination is rather the language of genius: the power which traverses at a single glance the whole external universe, and seizes on the likenesses and images, and their combinations, which are best able to embody ideas and feelings otherwise inexpressible; so that the "things which are unseen are known by the things which are seen." ... The idea is the product of genius proper; the expression is the work of the imagination.

Imagination is the source of all artistic beauty. It is this synthetic


30 "Imagination," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 304.
which discerns the living relationship between the heather and the rock, and makes them instinct with an inexhaustible beauty.

The greater the number of objects that are taken in at once by the poet's or artist's eye, the greater the power; but true poets and artists know that this power of visual synthesis can only be exercised, in the present state of our faculties, in a very limited way; hence there is generally, in the landscapes and descriptions of real genius, a great simplicity in and apparent jealousy of their subjects, strikingly in contrast with the works of those who fancy they are describing when they are only cataloguing.31

He who would esteem the poetic imagination at its true value must guard against two common fallacies: the one looks upon imagination as "a faculty for seeing things as they are not," whereas the images and parables that imagination employs "are the only means of adequately conveying, or rather hinting, supersensual knowledge";32 the other confounds imagination with fancy, "which is only a playful mockery of imagination, bringing together things in which there is nothing but an accidental similarity in externals."33

From the marriage of genius and imagination arises that singular quality of the poet's work which Patmore has variously called distinction, originality, or style. It is this quality which makes the poet closely related to the saint.

That which is unique in the soul is its true self, which is only expressed in life and art when the false

self has been surrendered wholly. In saints this surrender is continual; in poets, etc., it is only in inspired moments.34

However momentary this surrender on the part of the poet may be, it is "the mark by which we discover, not what, but how, he thinks and feels";35 it is "the manifestation of the inward man himself."36 It consists not merely in a man's advancing toward his unique apprehension of good, but rather in his doing so in harmony with the laws that guarantee the same privilege to all men, without hindrance from his or any other individuality. Once it leaves the path of law, originality loses its nature. In art it ends in travesty and becomes oddity or mannerism,37 whereas in reality it should be "the old order witnessed to and expanded by new and beautiful individuality."38

38 "Goldsmith," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 60. Patmore uses the terms manner and style somewhat ambiguously. Witness the following excerpts:

It has been said that he alone who has no style has true style. It would be better to say that he who has no manner has the first condition of style. -- "An English Classic: William Barnes," op. cit., 137.

He [Arthur Symons] does not seem to me to be quite qualified, as yet, for this kind of criticism [a study of Browning]. He does not seem to have attained to the point of view from which all great critics have judged poetry and art in general. He does not see that, in art, the style in which a thing is said or done is of more importance than the thing said or done. Indeed, he does not appear to know what style means. -- From a letter to Dykes Campbell quoted by Arthur Symons in his
Sooner or later every artist is confronted with the problem of the relationship between art and the emotions and between art and morality. Both of these topics Patmore treats at some length. All art, and particularly poetry, he believes, is essentially masculine, that is, rational, and employs the emotions merely as its accidental or complementary means of expression. Ordinarily, art works through emotional appeal, "but so far is such appeal from being its essence, that art, universally acknowledged to be of the very highest kind, sometimes almost entirely dispenses with 'emotion,' and trusts for its effect to an almost purely intellectual expression of form or order -- in other words, of truth; for truth and order are one, and the music of Handel, the poetry of Aeschylus, and the architecture of the Parthenon are appeals to a sublime good sense which takes

article "Coventry Patmore: Supplementary Notes: With Some Unpublished Letters," Living Age, CCVLIX (June 2, 1906), 540.

I did not complain of want of "form," but of "style," which is a totally different thing. Style appears to me to be the very innermost soul and substance of poetry -- a thing beyond words, the all and alone precious individuality of the singer -- inexpressible by words, but yet breathed through them, when the poet is a true one.... When I said that manner was more important than matter in poetry, I really meant that the true matter of poetry could only be expressed by the manner. A poet may be choke full of the deepest thoughts and the deepest feelings, may express them brilliantly and stirringly, and yet he may not be a poet of the first order, if the expression want that ineffable aroma of individuality which I mean by style. I find the brilliant thinking and the deep feeling in Browning, but no true individuality -- though of course his manner is marked enough. -- From a letter to Dykes Campbell quoted in Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 264.
scarcely any account of "the emotions." 39 Art that appeals to the emotions only can have but a faint hope of success. 40 Nevertheless, the question arises: which emotions have a legitimate place in art? Cheerfulness, says Patmore, is a necessity of art, because a joyful life, of which art is the representation, is the only true life. Hence melancholy art "is false art, and represents a false life, or rather that which is not life at all; for life is not only joyful, it is joy itself. Life, unhindered by the internal obstruction of vice or the outward obscurations of pain, sorrow, and anxiety is pure and simple joy; as we have most of us experienced during the few hours of our life in which, the conscience being free, all bodily and external evils have been removed or are at least quiescent.... None are without opportunities of joy and abundant reasons for gratitude; and the hindrances of joy are, if justly considered, only opportunities of acquiring new capacities for delight. In proportion as life becomes high and pure it becomes gay." 41 This cheerfulness is not produced by the presentation of corporeal pleasures. Indeed, neither the pleasures nor the pains of the body have a legitimate place in art except occasionally as discords in the great harmony of the drama. 42 Similarly, violent, unusual, and disordered feelings must be presented sparingly if they are to become the subject of truly poetic passion. 43

40 Ibid., 26.
43 "Goldsmith," op. cit., 60.
Pathos is the "pain" of art, and its effect is intensified in proportion to its brevity. Pathos is "the feeling of pity"; it is not so inclusive a term as pity, for whereas the latter "is helpful and is not deadened or repelled by circumstances which disgust the simply sensitive nature," pathos "is simply emotional, and reaches no higher than the sensitive nature." Suffering, wherever it is encountered, in itself arouses pity. But pathos requires certain conditions of contrast. The suffering of obvious goodness, beauty, innocence, or heroism; a little good coming upon or in the midst of extremity of evil; grief dignified by an attempt to curb it; great and present evil coupled with distant and uncertain hope; the bewilderment of weakness -- these are the great sources of pathos.

In proportion to the extent and variety of points of interest or of emotions represented in a work of art, the necessity for classical calm, or for what Patmore calls "a point of rest," increases. This point of rest is "the punctum indifferentie to which all that is interesting is more or less unconsciously referred." It is usually an unimpressive element or character, whose significance can be realized only by the experiment of doing away with it. Remove Kent from King Lear or Horatio from Hamlet, and you take away that vital point of comparison by which, on account of its absolute conformity to reason and moral order, the relationship of all the

44 "Pathos," in Principle in Art, Etc., 41.
46 Ibid., 38-42.
other characters is measured and felt. 48

The point of rest in a piece of art, whether it be expressed in a subordinate personality of a drama, or in the refrain of an old ballad, or in the sawn-off branch of a tree in an elaborate landscape, affords a clue to that harmony and peace which is characteristic of great art.

Pleasure is an itch of the cold and corrupt flesh, and must end with corruption; joy is the life of the natural and innocent breast, prophesying peace, but too full of desire to obtain it yet; peace is the indwelling of God and the habitual possession of all our desires, and it is too grave and quiet even for a smile. 49

The outstanding difference between ancient and modern art consists in the presence of peace in the former and in its absence in the latter.

Peace, as it was held to be the last effect and reward of a faithful life, was regarded as the ideal expression of life in painting, sculpture, poetry, and architecture; and accordingly the tranquil sphere of all the greatest of great art is scarcely troubled by a tear or a smile. 50

Far from being a merely negative quality, this peace, which St. Thomas defines as the "tranquillity of order," "involves, in its fullest perfection, at once the complete subdual and the glorification of the senses, and the 'ordering of all things strongly and sweetly from end to end.'" 51 Peace, then, becomes that complete submission to law from which, Patmore holds, all true freedom and real beauty flow. Whatever use art makes of the emotions, peace must be the ultimate effect.

48 Ibid., 14-5.
51 Ibid., 33.
Intimately connected with the relationship between art and the emotions is the problem of morality and art. This problem Patmore treats under two aspects: art as a teacher of morals, and purity in art.

"All, save some small party of sensualists," he writes, "agree that art is something which ought to have an elevating power; and it is now generally believed that many works, which centuries have stamped with fame, were intended to exert such power." It follows, then, that art is an ideal imitation of reality, since what is literally imitative usually has not this tendency to elevate. Art neither ignores nor denies morality. It teaches by suggestion rather than by assertion. Art supports men in moments when faith is slack, but if it is made the main prop of spiritual life, it tends to increase the very weakness it is suited to correct. Therefore in the use of art, moderation must be the rule.

It will be found, that quite as much of art as can be made available for the good of any man's soul is easily to be obtained by him; whatever has set a limit to his means in this way, will generally be discovered to have also limited his wants.

Better one picture or one poem thoroughly known, than a hundred galleries or innumerable volumes superficially examined and transiently felt.

Every true poem or novel has "a moral," since the greatest art is all beauty, that is, all order. "A 'moral' is only inartistic when the

52 "The Ethics of Art," loc. cit., 442.
53 "Emotional Art," op. cit., 27.
55 Ibid., 462.
artist has not sufficient strength of character and language to make it a real force, either as the kernel of disaster or felicity. What, then, should be the attitude of the artist toward religion? He should avoid it altogether as a direct subject. His only subject should be law, the rectitude of humanity.

As all the music of verse arises, not from infraction, but inflection of the law of the set metre; so the greatest poets have been those the modulus of whose verse has been most variously and delicately inflected, in correspondence with feelings and passions which are the inflections of moral law in their theme. Masculine law is always, however obscurely, the theme of the true poet; the feeling, with the corresponding rhythm, is its feminine inflection, without which the law has no sensitive or poetic life. Art is thus constituted because it is the constitution of life, all the grace and sweetness of which arise from inflection of law, not from infraction of it, as bad men and bad poets fancy.

When the great poets, and especially the dramatists, represent the infraction of law and its consequent disasters, they do not merit the charge of bad morality; for though they exhibit the infraction of the inner law, that is, sin, they illustrate the inflection of that outer and vaster law of God's universal justice, by which the sinner realizes the ultimate futility of the sin, and the man who has not sinned grasps the significance of his having resisted temptation.

In proportion to the virility of a piece of art will be its purity. To no other subject does Patmore devote as much thought and careful analysis. And it is fitting that the poet whose great theme is the symbolism between nuptial love and divine love should speak authoritatively

on this difficult topic. As one reads his comments, one is aware of a righteous indignation in the mind and heart of the writer. No offender escapes the lash of his censure: neither the sensualist, who presents corruption for its own sake; nor the "respectable" hypocrite, who accepts indecency provided it be couched in delicate phrases; nor the devout puritan, who sees evil where there is none.

Patmore's entire conception of purity rests on the Pauline doctrine that man's body is the temple of God.\(^59\) He begins with the thesis that "essential purity is order, and there can be no perfection of order without knowledge of what is the right order of things within us."\(^60\) Hence the frequent tragedy of the innocence of ignorance. "The prolongation of the innocence of ignorance into advanced youth would probably be unmixed gain were it not that knowledge, being left to come by accident, is almost sure to become poisoned in the moment of acquisition."\(^61\) From such poisoning proceeds that impurity of ignorance which is as likely to call good evil as bad men are to call evil good. In ancient Christian writings ignorance is nowhere confused with innocence, nor is it regarded as even a part of innocence: "witness the words of Her, who is the model

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59 This idea of the indwelling of God is one of the fundamental notions of Patmore's entire philosophy. It appears again and again in his writings. Nowhere, perhaps, does he enunciate it more clearly than in the poem "To the Body" (Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love, 84-5), and in the essay "Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity" (Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 275-8).

60 "Knowledge and Science, XVI," in The Rod, the Root, and the Flower, 70.

61 "Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity, in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 277."
of innocence to all ages, in her answer, at thirteen years of age, to the message of Gabriel."62

Purity, therefore, does not imply that a ban be placed on plain speaking. On the contrary, the writings of the Fathers of the Church are models of outspokenness, and "the greatest art, in which all things are 'ordered sweetly' by essential peace, and in which pleasure is only the inevitable accident, is exceedingly bold. Its thoughts are naked and not ashamed, ..."63 It will have nothing to do with indecency and impurity. It will not cater to that respectable type of reader who tolerates any amount of indecency provided the terms in which it is expressed are not coarse. Indecency is essentially untrue: it is "an endeavour to irritate sensations and appetites in the absence of natural passion;"64 because it is a lying thing, it can have no place in art. Insidious as this poison of "respectability" may be, however, it is yet not so fatal as the self-complacent seriousness of those "who do not believe that God made all things pure, and that impurity is nothing but the abuse of that which is pure, and that such abuse is impure in proportion to the purity perverted."65

Regarded from the viewpoint of morality, literary art may be divided into three classes: the ideal, the natural, and the unnatural or bestial. To the first class belong those works of art which either

62 Ibid., 276.
63 "Peace in Life and Art," op. cit., 34-5.
64 "Bad Morality Is Bad Art," op. cit., 18.
represent freely that order which is the true reality of humanity, or tragically expose the hideousness of departure from that order. In the second class appear works which, while depicting ordinary society with its average mixture of good and evil, yet present the good and the true as naturally more alluring than the evil and the false. The third class consists of pieces of writing which present vice for its own sake and appeal not to the intellect or the affections, but to the senses only. Patmore's sentence on both writers and readers of such pieces of literature is positively damning:

Wherever writers are not ashamed to write, and readers to read, narratives (fictions or otherwise) which depend for their interest mainly upon the representation of cruelty, horror, or sensuality, or all three mixed, there the human beast has got loose; and from enjoyment of such representations to actual participation in the realities there is but one step, and that not a long one. The essential guilt is already involved in the foul and unnatural enjoyment by the imagination of such evil, which may be fully committed 'in the heart', though the external act may be hindered by habit, or fear, or prudence.

All of the theories so far enumerated have to do with the soul of art. Yet art must have a body as well as a soul. As color is the body of painting, and tone that of music, so language is the body of poetry. Patmore repudiates Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction:

The best poet is not he whose verses are the most easily scannible, and whose phraseology is the commonest in its materials, and the most direct in its

67 Ibid., 128.
68 Ibid., 130.
arrangement; but rather he whose language combines the greatest imaginative accuracy with the most elaborate and sensible metrical arrangement, and who, in his verses, preserves everywhere the living sense of metre, not so much by unvarying obedience to, as by innumerable small departures from, its modulus. 69

Occasionally a great poet may use an old word in a new sense, rarely may he stretch his prerogative to the length of inventing a word. 70 Above all, the poet must avoid artificiality or any sense of strain in the use of language. Many artists make the mistake of thinking "that they are intense when they are only tense. Great intensity is always calm, often gay and playful in its exterior." 71 On the other hand, let the poet not fear the charge of obscurity, provided the obscurity be that of inexplicable realities. 72 The use of symbolism and imagery is "the very method of Nature, whose book, from beginning to end, is nothing but a series of symbols, enigmas, parables, and rites, only to be interpreted by the 'discerning intellect of man' actively and laboriously employed." 73 It would be folly, therefore, to demand that every passage of a poet be understood by the multitude.

Patmore was a close student of poetic art in all its branches; hence it is not surprising that he devoted a long and technical essay to the subject of meter in his middle years. After he had republished this

71 Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 98.
72 "Aurea Diicta, CXLIII," in The Rod, the Root, and the Flower, 43.
73 "The Language of Religion," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 239.
essay in *Amelia*, he made a rather humorous comment on it: "The essay on Metre reads dreadfully learned. Do you understand it? I am by no means sure I do." One may be permitted, therefore, to pass over the subject rather lightly and to point out only such ideas as were carried out in Patmore's own poetry. He never seems to have inclined toward intricate metrical schemes. Meter, he believes, "ought not only to exist as the becoming garment of poetic passion, but, furthermore, it should continually make its existence recognised." Rhythm and time are important elements in his technique, and an essential part of these elements is the pause -- or what he calls *catalexis* -- either within the line or at the end. In the odes of *The Unknown Eros* this pause is employed with great freedom and varies in length from the time of two to fourteen syllables, a practice justified by the analogy of the pauses in a similar style of music. Such free use of pause must be governed strictly by poetic passion. Patmore is particularly fond of the iambic meter; he declares that the six-syllable iambic is the most solemn of English measures, while the eight-syllable iambic is the gayest. On the question of meter Patmore reverts to the necessity of law:

Art, indeed, must have a body as well as a soul; and the higher and purer the spiritual, the more powerful and unmistakeable should be the corporeal element; -- in other words, the more vigorous and various the life,

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74 Basil Champneys, *op. cit.*, I, 254.
the more stringent and elaborate must be the law, by obedience to which life expresses itself.... The quality of all emotion which is not ignoble, is to boast of its allegiance to law.72

Possibly Patmore's ultimate opinion on the subject of meter is embodied in the following passage from his essay on Goldsmith:

It is really only a 'matter of taste', rather than one of sound principle, whether a man prefers to travel on the dull tramway of the versification of Goldsmith or Dr. Johnson, or to stumble over the hillocks of potsherds and broken brickbats to which the 'rhythm' of some much-praised modern poetry may be likened. Yet even as a mere matter of taste, it seems that a dull adherence to the modulus of metre ... is less objectionable than the incessant and not slight nor significant violations of that modulus which are often the source of the boasted liveliness and variety of much verse of the present century. The laws of metre are like the laws of life in this, that the affections and passions evoke music by a tender strain upon them which never breaks them. The bad poet, like the bad man, trifles with such laws for the sake of mere excitement and escape from monotony, stretching these formal limits without the excuse of true emotion, and breaking them rather than suffer the ennui of his own dullness.78

Viewed as a whole, Patmore's aesthetic theories seem to converge toward the one center of submission to law. All his comments on art in general, on the poet, on style and imagination, on the emotions and morality, on poetic diction, and on meter, may be summarized in the passage

77 Ibid., 130.
quoted early in this chapter:

The glory of art is in showing life as rejoicing in and completed by law; and the prayer of the great poet is that of the great prophet: 'Order all things in me strongly and sweetly from end to end.'

The full import of these theories becomes clearer when one considers Patmore's relation to the critical thought of his time.

79 Vide supra, page 11, note 11.
CHAPTER THREE

PATMORE'S RELATION TO THE CRITICAL THOUGHT OF HIS TIME

Three mutually explanatory qualities characterize Patmore's attitude toward his age: pessimism, dogmatism, and self-sufficiency. "No poet," writes Herbert Read, "indeed no personality of the whole period -- stands in such direct opposition to all its beliefs and ideals -- perhaps we should say, finally stood in such opposition, for Patmore's settled attitude did not develop until the middle age."¹ His pessimism is manifested in his general comments on contemporary literature, his dogmatism in his interpretation of the critic and criticism, his self-sufficiency in his attitude toward prominent writers of the age with whom he came into rather close contact. Hence a study of Patmore's relation to the critical thought of his day becomes a study of these three attributes.

Superficiality, according to Patmore, is the predominant fault of the art of his day. Men are no longer truly interested in art; "interest in poetry is becoming less and less of a passion and more and more an affectation or fashion."² Everyone is talking about "high art" and the "higher life"; yet never were these less known and less understood. "The proof is in the way these names are constantly associated with that of 'progress'; whereas progress, as respects the realities, is, if it exists

¹ "Coventry Patmore," in In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays, 90.
² "Memorials of Coleorton," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 92.
at all, most certainly a progress backwards."³ Many an artist has failed and done injury to modern art by attempting to display his "breadth"; this is especially true in the case of the lyric or idyllic poet who might have given the world an immortal lyric or idyll, but who "has chosen to forsake his line for the production of exceedingly mortal epics or tragedies."⁴ Men no longer devote their time to meditation, that attention to one's own business which used to be the practice of every good man.

Hence, among many other unprecedented phenomena of our day, there is an almost complete lack of men of letters. We have only newspaper, magazine, and booksellers' hacks; clever enough, indeed, but without insight, character, or any care for, or desire to propagate a knowledge of the true realities and delight of life.⁵

To superficiality must be added two other signs of the decadent life and therefore of the art of the day: melancholy and levity.

Wilful melancholy, and, the twin sign of corruption, a levity which acutely fears and sympathises with pains which are literally only skin-deep, have been increasing upon us of late in a most portentous way.⁶ From this levity arises that tenseness which is characteristic of much of the literature of the day and which is merely "an extravagant and unreal mockery of the intense, as hysterics are of true passion."⁷

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3 "Possibilities and Performances," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 301.
5 "Attention," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 246-7.
7 "Robert Bridges," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 150.
If popular literature and art may be most exactly described as "the abomination of desolation in the holy places," the burden of responsibility rests mainly with those who because of their education and training ought to be the custodians of a high and pure standard -- the critics of the day. In former times their approval was a spur to the man of genius and an almost certain precursor of fame. But now they, too, have been lured into seeking lawlessness, self-assertion, or oddity instead of individuality. Worst of all, this decadence seems to be not a transitory reaction, but a decay, from which there is little hope of recovery.

They "have come to be satisfied with mere pathological studies, and to scout as inartistic that which is of the very essence of all that is worthy to be called art." Much of their criticism, Patmore concludes, "appears to be little better than very tender but imperfect feminine appreciation -- all love and little or no light, and therefore liable to change with the critic's mood and fancy."

In view of this pessimistic attitude toward the bulk of the literature of his day, Patmore's dogmatism when he interprets the nature and function of criticism becomes self-evident. He embodies his tenets on criticism in the title essay of the volume Principle in Art, Etc. There can be no art and no true criticism of art without principle, Patmore declares.

8 "Aurea Dicta, LXXXV," in The Rod, the Root, and the Flower, 27.
Sensitiveness or natural "taste", apart from principle, is, in art, what love is apart from truth in morals. The stronger it is, the further it is likely to go wrong.\footnote{12}

It is the function of criticism to examine art in the light of definite principles. Criticism cannot produce good art -- that is, it cannot teach an artist what to do or how to do it; but it can, by causing bad art to collapse, teach him what to avoid. Moreover, it trains the public, and thus "tends to provide art with its chief motive-power, a public prepared to acknowledge it."\footnote{13} It appeals primarily to the intellect and not to feeling, and censures the reader no less than the writer for his ignorance and mistakes. Criticism is "a science in which truth stands first and feeling second, and of which the conclusions are demonstrable and irreversible."\footnote{14} A natural sensitiveness to beauty is not, therefore, the essential qualification of the critic. He is \textit{par excellence} the man of reason, the judge of art, although his judgments will be the richer and the more powerful if in him feminine responsiveness to beauty is combined with and guided by masculine search for truth. If the critic would really be what he professes to be, let him "remember that criticism is not the expression, however picturesque and glowing, of the faith that is in him, but the rendering of sound and intelligible reasons for that faith."\footnote{15}

Patmore's theories on the nature and function of criticism were

\footnote{13} Ibid., 2; cf. "Hegel," op. cit., 107-8.
\footnote{14} "Principle in Art," op. cit., 4.
\footnote{15} Ibid., 5.
directed principally against English literary aestheticism. A brief survey of the tenets of this school of art as exemplified in the writings of its chief exponent, Walter Pater, will serve to clarify still more Patmore's attitude. But since Pater's theories of art may in a certain measure be traced back to Ruskin, it becomes necessary to examine the system of aesthetics which the latter had drawn up and promulgated at about the middle of the century. To Ruskin the cult of art was a kind of religion; "he set up and worshipped all the arts of the Catholic Church as a rival to the Church itself." In his mind, however, aesthetic activity was not an end in itself. He believed that beauty "is the flower-like expression of a Divine Soul which lives in nature, and which gives to every being its form, the index to its function. The full development of this form corresponds to the full exercise of the function; and thus beauty is the sign of an harmonious accord with the will of Providence." In the moral purity of social groups Ruskin saw the foundation of great artistic epochs. Hence he left the field of pure art criticism to devote himself to social and economic criticism, wherein he tried to prove that the great need of his age was "a justice, a charity, a simple dignity in the relationship of man with man, which the whole movement of modern times had tended to destroy and from which it was daily receding farther." With the fulfillment of

16 Ibid., 4.
18 G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, 63.
19 Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, 1191-2
20 Ibid., 1193.
this condition, beauty in life and art would, he believed, blossom of itself. In Ruskin, therefore, one encounters a gradual evolution from the criticism of art to that of society and economics and thence to the task of social reform.

Many of Ruskin's disciples, however, refused to follow him in his progress from art to social reform. He had unveiled to them the wealth and splendor of European art; they accepted the vision but made room for sensuousness in their interpretation of it. This sensuousness, which can be found already in the first Pre-Raphaelites, on whom Ruskin had exerted some influence, reached its climax in Swinburne with his reckless glorification of beauty. Principally through Swinburne the French doctrine of art for art's sake was entering England, and from this doctrine English literary aestheticism developed.

Pater's debt to Ruskin, therefore, is one which Ruskin himself would have denied, for what he had intended as an avenue to social reform became, in the hands of the aesthetes, the road to a self-sufficing sensuality. Like Ruskin, Pater revelled in the glories of Renaissance art; but unlike Ruskin, he looked upon art as an end in itself. In the conclusion of his Studies in the History of the Renaissance he has embodied the essence of aestheticism. Cazamian summarizes this doctrine:

The adept's duty is no longer to pursue through the efflorescence of natural forms the Divine influx, the source of strength and of harmony with the will of the universe; beauty no longer is the blissful perception of creatures true to the law of their essence; it no longer rests like a glory, in the societies of men, upon the summits of simple austerity and of heroism. Every social or moral consideration vanishes; one thing remains: the voluptuous asceticism of the sage who is to die. Life offers, to the knowing,
occasions of psychical intensity; to gather as many of them as possible, and to taste them all at their highest pitch, so that the flame of consciousness should burn with its full ardour, such is the secret principle of an existence that actually possesses and rules itself. Far from giving itself away, it shall suck in the whole world, and absorb it for its own good; this devouring strain will wear it out in its turn; but death is the inevitable night, whose coming is delayed, but not prevented, by the mean thrift of thankless virtues; and nothing matters but the violence of the fire in which an ephemeral energy is irradiated by its very destruction. 21

It is a far cry from Ruskin's religion of art to this hedonistic worship of beauty. A. C. Benson, in his study on Pater, points out the peril of such a creed: "it is in the first place purely self-regarding, and in the second place ..., stated in the form of abstract principles, it affords no bulwark against the temptation to sink from a pure and passionate beauty of perception into a grosser indulgence in sensuous delights." 22

That Pater became aware of this danger is evidenced by his withdrawal of the conclusion from the second edition of his book. Benson comments:

... Pater felt, no doubt, that having struck a sensuous note in his essays, this statement of principles of artistic axioms lent itself to misrepresentations; and nothing could more clearly prove the affectionate considerateness of his nature, his desire for sympathy and relationship, his tender care for those whom he loved in spirit, than his fear of giving a wrong bias to their outlook. 23

To the fundamental doctrine of art for art's sake, Pater adds,

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21 Ibid., 1311.
22 Walter Pater, 47.
23 Ibid., 48.
in his essay on style, the theory of the precise word, le mot juste, which he learned from Flaubert. In the concluding paragraphs of this essay, and particularly in the last sentence, he enunciates his idea of the ends of art:

Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art; -- then, if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I summed up as mind and soul -- that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.24

Benson remarks the poignant emphasis which the phrase "the glory of God" lends to this passage. He believes that "this single phrase bears eloquent testimony to the fact that, below the aesthetic doctrine which he [Pater] enunciated, lay an ethical base of temperament, a moral foundation of duty and obedience to the Creator and Father of men."25

In the realm of criticism proper Pater followed the impressionistic school of Lamb and Hazlitt. He was concerned not with the technical or archaeological aspects of a work of art, but with its poetic suggestiveness. He held that criticism is a kind of creation, since it penetrates through the piece of art into the mind and soul of its maker. His "appreciations," therefore, are re-creations of some small portion of a piece of

24 Appreciations, with an Essay on Style, 38.
art; their substance is drawn from himself rather than from the work of art under consideration. Endowed with a highly sensitive mind, Pater produced studies which in themselves are stimulating, but which hardly merit the name of criticism in the Patmorean sense.

Against the subjective attitude of Pater and his circle Patmore raised his voice first in the essay called "Principle in Art" and then in the whole series of essays in which he embodied what he considered some of the fundamental principles of art. To the theory of the precise word he apparently subscribed to a certain extent when he wrote that since the happy hours of inspired production are rare, "a conscientious worker will sometimes conceal their rarity by spending so much time and labour upon the comparatively uninspired context of passages inspired that his whole work will be upon the same level of verbal beauty." The doctrine of art for art's sake he repudiated utterly; for art, he held, is ultimately subordinate to man's final destiny.

That Patmore's strictures on criticism were not intended as a personal attack upon Walter Pater but rather as a censure of the extreme aestheticism to which Pater's writings ultimately led, seems evident from the fact that, upon the publication of Patmore's Religio Poetae, Pater wrote him a note of commendation, in which he said: "Your essays are one more proof that true poets make excellent critics, and sometimes genuine connoisseurs of art." Except for this letter of Pater's, there is no

27 Quoted in Derek Patmore, Portrait of My Family, 232.
record of any personal contact between Patmore and the aesthetes. His intimacy with the Meynells, however, may have brought him, at least indirectly, in touch with the aesthetic group. The Meynell home at 47 Palace Court was a gathering place for the literary folk of the period. Viola Meynell recalls some of these visitors in her memoir of her mother: "Aubrey Beardsley, then a clerk in an insurance office, came with a portfolio of drawings; Lionel Johnson, too pale and delicate even for speech; Oscar Wilde, and Willie Wilde whose wit was found no less than his brother's. William Watson and Stephen Philips and Herbert Trench were visitors; and W. B. Yeats, whose poetry-writing young friend, Katharine Tynan, was also my parents' much-loved friend." 28 Of this group, Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, and Lionel Johnson are of particular interest in connection with Patmore's views on aestheticism.

Wilde and Beardsley were the concrete embodiment of the extremes to which the new ideas of the nineteenth century -- and especially the theory of art for art's sake -- might be carried. They simply lived out the principles of Morris, Pater, Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, and rushed to what might have been their ultimate doom. In the words of Calvert Alexander,

These men had proved all the new theories to the hilt with a simple and terrifying logic. They had found they would not work, and they were brought face to face with the modern dilemma, the choice, namely, between Christ and barbarism. What it would take others who toyed with the new evangel twenty years and the lesson of a World War to learn, they had discovered before the nineties were over. 29

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28 Alice Meynell, 144.
29 The Catholic Literary Revival, 93.
In them was epitomized the decadence of the nineties, which consisted in applying to actual life the principles laid down by science and philosophy in the fields of morality, society, and art. In them, too, was embodied the rebirth which is implicit in repentance and which, at least in the case of Beardsley, brought a new vision, never to be realized, of art in the Catholic Church.

This vision had already come to Lionel Johnson, whom Richard Le Gallienne calls "perhaps the most definite personality" of the nineties. Brought under the influence of liberal theology, agnosticism, aestheticism, and what remained of the Oxford Movement, he had been won over by the last and strongest of these influences and had entered the Catholic Church, yet without sacrificing his friends or his intellectual heroes. In him, it would seem, were combined the passionate search for the beautiful which characterized the aesthetes, and the intellectual asceticism which Patmore demanded of both poet and critic. In the present study his interest lies chiefly in his remarks on Pater and Patmore, to whose ideals of art he brought a sensitive and sympathetic understanding. In defense of Pater he writes:

To see, hear, touch, feel, with a cultivated curiosity, a trained susceptibility; that, so runs this false interpretation [of Pater's philosophy], is the choicest life: to eliminate all vulgarity of dead commonplace, and live for a succession of exquisite emotions, the gifts of beauty in nature and in art. Assuredly, Mr. Pater held the power of recognizing and of loving beauty in the world to be a possession past praise, and a passionate constancy of concern for it to be no mean state of mind; but assuredly in no ignoble way. ... Mr. Pater was never more characteristically inspired than in
writing of the discipline of art, its immense demands, its imperative morality.... Dissolute and lawless art, flung upon the world in a tumultuous profusion and disorder, was not art in his eyes.31

And of Patmore:

His poetry was a devotion, his sense of art was worship, his way through life was upward. A terribly sensitive and strong man, he centred and concentrated his energies upon the apprehension and expression of the divine secrets which explain the human mysteries: secrets few, but sufficing.... Beauty was not beauty to him, unless, according to the famous definition, it was indeed splendor veritatis, truth in the glory of its shining. Authority is stamped upon his work, which made no compromises with the desires of weaklings or the ignorances of fools.32

Patmore's insistence on principle as the foundation of criticism and his general attitude toward contemporary literature are instances of the authority of which Lionel Johnson speaks. These two qualities are further explained by, and themselves help to explain, his self-sufficiency in his relations with other writers of the day. "None of the other Victorians, not even Carlyle, was so frankly a cosmos unto himself."33

His contacts with important literary figures never ripened into friendships.

He had either to dominate or to be dominated by another. Thus his friendships usually began with discipleship and ended with apostasy; and the company of men for its own sake had not the usual pleasure for him which most men unaffectedly find in it. In marriage domination and discipleship are complementary, but the former is fatal to friendship, wherein an equality of affection is the

32 "Coventry Patmore's Genius," ibid., 239.
33 George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature, 108.
rule. It is an interesting comment, alike on Patmore's character and on his art, that friendship had no honoured place in his philosophy.34

To a visitor at the home of the Patmores in the forties and fifties, this self-sufficient attitude would not have been immediately apparent, for their home was a gathering place for some of the most artistic and intellectual society in England. Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning, Allingham and Emerson, the Rossetti brothers and the other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and later Aubrey de Vere were frequent visitors. With Tennyson, Ruskin, and the Pre-Raphaelites Patmore had more intimate relations than with the other members of this group. An account of his associations with these men may be regarded as typically Patmorean.

Patmore's early poetry brought him to the attention of Tennyson and sowed the seeds of what promised to be a lifelong friendship. As Basil Champneys says, "... Patmore, considerably younger as a man, and not so far established as a poet, was altogether at Tennyson's feet."35 With the years, however, Patmore's ideas grew more fixed and his attitude toward Tennyson became first one of equality and then one of independence. In 1862, when Tennyson, with what seemed to Patmore deliberate coldness, maintained a severe silence at the death of Emily Patmore, the break came. Yet the severance, precipitated by an accident, was almost inevitable, for Patmore had ceased to be a disciple of Tennyson and had declared, in an unsigned article, that Tennyson's "substantial contribution to poetry had been completed with the publication of the earlier poems, and that the later ones

34 Osbert Burdett, The Idea of Patmore, 207; but cf. Frederick Page, Patmore: A Study in Poetry, 24-5, for a different view.
35 Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, I, 181.
were little more than an eking out of the original inspiration." 36 Late in life Patmore made an unsuccessful attempt to end the misunderstanding with Tennyson. Even if he had been successful, however, his relation to Tennyson could never again have been the same, for Patmore the critic could no longer worship at the Tennysonian shrine. His final estimate of Tennyson is preserved in a memorandum:

Among Tennyson's works, the second of the two little volumes published in 1842, contains, to my thinking, the greater part of all that is essential in his writings. It bears to them the same relation that Keats's little volumes issued in 1820 does to all else he wrote. 'In Memoriam' and 'Maud' are poor poems, though they contain much exquisite poetry. Probably no modern work has done so much to undermine popular religion as 'In Memoriam.' Tennyson's best work, though in its way a miracle of grace and finish, is never of quite the highest kind. It is not finished from within. Compare the finish of 'Kubla Khan' with that of the 'Palace of Art.' 37

Patmore's relation with Ruskin never reached the intimacy of his contact with Tennyson, nor did it end in bitterness. It was rather a kind of alliance between two minds interested in a common object -- in this instance architecture. Patmore's early architectural criticisms brought him Ruskin's friendship, which continued until the latter's mental decline in the early eighties. At intervals during more than three decades the two men either met and discussed art or exchanged letters on the subject. The relationship between them is of particular interest in the present study for two reasons: Patmore's repudiation of Ruskin's remarks on the pathetic fallacy, and his part in bringing Ruskin to the

36 Ibid., I, 183.
37 Ibid., I, 198.
defense of the Pre-Raphaelites. Patmore challenges Ruskin in the following passage:

... there has never been a greater critical fallacy than that contained in Mr. Ruskin's strictures on the "pathetic fallacy." Nature has no beauty or pathos (using the term in its widest sense) but that with which the mind invests it. Without the imaginative eye it is like a flower in the dark, which is only beautiful as having in it a power of reflecting the colours of the light. The true light of nature is the human eye; and if the light of the human eye is darkness, as it is in those who see nothing but surfaces, how great is the darkness!

Patmore's intermediary role in bringing Ruskin to the championship of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood can best be treated in connection with his relation to the Pre-Raphaelites.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose ideas began to take form about 1844, was proclaimed in 1848. The following year Thomas Woolner, sculptor of the group, sought out Patmore, introduced the latter's poems of 1844 to the Brotherhood, and in the autumn of that year introduced the poet himself to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt. From that time on Patmore, though himself a young man, became a kind of patron to the Pre-Raphaelite circle. To their short-lived publication, The Germ, he contributed several poems and a critical essay on Macbeth, and to its first

38 "Poetical Integrity," in Principle in Art, Etc., 47.

39 Basil Champneys, op. cit., I, 81. Champneys briefly notes the aims of the P.R.B. on pages 81-2: "to throw over the stale conventions by which art was becoming strangled; to return to a direct study of nature, considering no representation of even its least important accessories unworthy of attention and labour; and to enlarge their range of subject by the inclusion of everything which could make any legitimate appeal to the aesthetic sense."
number he gave a motto of perfection: "It is the last rub which polishes the mirror."\(^{40}\) In 1851, when the Brotherhood was furiously attacked in The Times, Patmore induced Ruskin to write his famous defense of Millais and of the Brotherhood in general. The following year he introduced Dante Rossetti to Tennyson. He examined Rossetti's translations from "Early Italian Poets" and criticized and revised Woolner's later poems. In 1857 he visited Oxford to examine the decorative work done by Rossetti, William Morris, and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. The fruit of this visit was an article in the Saturday Review of Literature,\(^ {41}\) in which he praises especially the brilliance and purity of the colors.\(^ {42}\)

Patmore described the Pre-Raphaelites as "all very simple, pure-minded, ignorant and confident."\(^ {43}\) In later years he wrote rather adversely on the poetry of Rossetti. Nevertheless, his association with the Pre-Raphaelites was not without fruit for himself. He writes:

I don't think that either by theory or practice I had any particular claim to be regarded as a P.R.B. However, their mistake was very lucky for me, since they were all most interesting persons to know, and one or two of them became close and life-long friends.\(^ {44}\)

\(^{40}\) Patmore seems to have been fond of this saying, for it appears several times in his own writings. Cf. "Madame de Hautefort," in Principle in Art, Etc., 162-3, and the poem "De Natura Deorum," line 47, in Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love, 102.


\(^{42}\) Patmore's relations with the P.R.B. are discussed by Basil Champneys, op. cit., I, 31-7; Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore, 40-6; Derek Patmore, Portrait of My Family, 77-85.

\(^{43}\) Edmund Gosse, op. cit., 41.

\(^{44}\) Basil Champneys, op. cit., I, 82-3.
Of all the Pre-Raphaelites, the man who was closest to Patmore was Thomas Woolner, to whose "Tiresias" he has devoted an appreciative critical essay.

After Patmore's conversion to Catholicism his associations with contemporary writers became somewhat strained, and he was an object of literary neglect until a younger generation began to give him the recognition he had long craved but had refused to solicit. As recognition came to him, his arrogant self-sufficiency gradually lessened. From 1883 until his death in 1896, three literary friendships -- with Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., Alice Meynell, and Francis Thompson -- filled him with a calm delight, albeit with some portion of bitterness also.

From the point of view of the present study, Patmore's friendships with Alice Meynell and Francis Thompson are not so important as that with Gerard Manley Hopkins. Patmore's friendship with Alice Meynell was established in 1892, after he had previously admired her volume of poems of 1875 and had written a critical essay on her work; personal contact with Alice Meynell came as the result of her article on his odes in the National Observer in 1891. Derek Patmore, after narrating in detail the progress of this friendship, thus records its failure:

By 1894, this great friendship reached its zenith, and suddenly this infatuation of two intellects threatened to become something more dangerous. Alice Meynell drew back afraid.... Coventry Patmore retired to Lymington, and as Frederick Page comments: "Patmore's and Alice Meynell's recognition of each other had been public, and they parted secretly in public; and in public, secretly, he endured the tender pain of her pardon."

During the two years that remained to Patmore, his attitude toward Alice Meynell remained unaltered. At the end of 1895 he wrote an open letter to the editor of the *Saturday Review*, recommending her for the laureateship, which had been left vacant by the death of Tennyson. To her he devoted his last piece of critical writing, and in his farewell note he reminded her once more of her high office as a poet:

> I am dying. Remember my last request. Let not your thoughts deny nor your heart forget the things your eyes have seen. Do not destroy the immortality of your truest visions by calling them moods. You are not disloyal to any lesser good in transcending the higher. Our meeting in Heaven depends on your fidelity to the highest things you have known.  

When the friendship with Alice Meynell had taken its unfortunate turn, Patmore sought for sympathy from Francis Thompson, with whom he had become acquainted through the Meynells and who shared his veneration for Alice Meynell. The relationship between the two men was that between master and disciple, between one who had long trod the paths of mysticism and one whose feet had only recently been firmly set in the way of the "tremendous Lover." Patmore's *Religio Poetae* became the corner-stone of Thompson's later poetry, though at first it had been a stumbling-block to him.  

Thompson expressed his indebtedness to Patmore in a passage from one of his notebooks:

> What I put forth as a bud he blew out and it blossomed. The contact of our ideas was dynamic; he reverberated my idea with such and so many echoes that

46 Ibid., 259.

it returned to me greater than I gave it forth. He opened it as you would open an oyster, or placed it under a microscope, and showed me what it contained.48

But if Patmore was the master with a system, he nevertheless looked to Thompson to crush the false mysticism prevalent in contemporary literature, and he could remark to Thompson in words fully weighed: "I am not sure you may not be a greater poet than I am."49

However much his friendships with Alice Meynell and Francis Thompson meant to the man Patmore, the poet and craftsman in him met complete response only in his relationship with Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. Both men were supremely interested in the technique of their craft, and both were, besides, deeply read in the mystical writers of the Catholic Church. They met but twice during the six years of their friendship, but in the interim they exchanged long letters -- first on Canon Dixon's *Mano* and some of Robert Bridges' poems, then, as Patmore's interest and confidence in Hopkins grew, on the proposed final edition of Patmore's works as well as on his current critical essays, and on Hopkins' poetry.50 What is most striking in the correspondence between the two men is the absence of that self-sufficient attitude which is typical of Patmore in his relations with practically all other contemporary writers. Again and again Patmore recognizes the justness of Hopkins' criticisms. In reply to the latter's remarks on *Amelia*, he writes:

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48 Ibid., 192-3.
49 Ibid., 148.
50 To appreciate fully the intimacy between the two men, it is necessary to read the whole series of letters that passed between them, as they have been edited by Claude Colleer Abbott.
Your careful and subtle fault-finding is the greatest praise my poetry has ever received. It makes me almost inclined to begin to sing again, after I thought I had given over. I agree with all or very nearly all your objections. 51

And again:

I agree with almost all your criticisms on The Unknown Eros, but I fear that some of the most important cannot be acted on simply because they are so important. I dont [sic] feel up to any thing much beyond merely verbal corrections. In my present state of poetical incapacity -- which has lasted for two or three years, and may probably be permanent, I could only act on your very just objections by extinguishing the poems affected with the faults you point out, which I should be loth to do, though, of course, I would do so if the balance of good seemed to require it. 52

The intricacies of Hopkins’ verse Patmore cannot understand or appreciate.

Yet the fault, he believes, may lie in himself:

... after all, I might very likely be wrong, for I see that Bridges goes along with you where I cannot, & where I do not believe that I ever could; and I deliberately recognise in the author of 'Prometheus' a sounder and more delicate taste than my own....

I cannot understand his not seeing defects in your system wh. I seem to see so clearly; and when I do not understand a man's ignorance, I obey the Philosopher, and think myself ignorant of his understanding.

So please do not rely upon impressions which I distrust myself. 53

A note to Bridges reveals Patmore’s anxiety as to how Hopkins might receive these objections:

I wish I had not had to tell Hopkins of my objections.

But I either had to be silent or to say the truth; and


53 Letter LXXXVII D, ibid., 205-6.
silence would have implied more difference than I felt. I have seldom felt so much attracted towards any man as I have been towards him, and I shall be more sorry than I can say if my criticisms have hurt him.  

Perhaps the problem that most closely associates the names of Patmore and Hopkins is that of Patmore's lost manuscript, Sponsa Dei. When Hopkins paid a short visit at Hastings in 1886, Patmore showed him the manuscript. Hopkins did not approve of it, for he believed this interpretation of divine love to be too mystical for the general reading public. Precisely what his objections were is not known; but when, more than a year and a half later, Patmore suddenly informed him of the destruction of the little book, Hopkins placed the responsibility on Patmore himself:

Your news was that you had burnt the book called Sponsa Dei, and that on reflection upon remarks of mine. I wish I had been more guarded in making them. When we take a step like this we are forced to condemn ourselves: either our work shd. never have been done or never undone, and either way our time and toil are wasted -- a sad thought; though the intention may at both times have been good. My objections were not final, they were but considerations (I forget now, with one exception, what they were); even if they were valid, still if you had kept to yr. custom of consulting your director, as you said you should, the book might have appeared with no change or with slight ones. But now regret is useless.

Patmore accepted the rebuke, and his reply clears Hopkins entirely of a charge that might have injured his reputation profoundly:

54 Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 247.

55 Derek Patmore, op. cit., 218.

56 Letter XCVIII, in Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 237.
I did not burn 'Sponsa Dei' altogether without the further consultation you mentioned. After what you had said, I talked to Dr Rouse about it, and he seemed to have no strong opinion one way or another, but said he thought that all the substance of the work was already published in my poems & in one or two of my papers in the St. James's. So I felt free to do what your condemnation of the little book inclined me to do. 57

To the modern student the letters that passed between the two men reveal Hopkins at full length as a critic of Patmore's poetry, and Patmore as less autocratic than his associations with other writers would have presaged. In the light of Patmore's letter to Bridges after the death of Hopkins, they disclose the importance of Hopkins' place in the spiritual and poetic life of Patmore. He writes:

I spent three days with him in Stonyhurst, and he stayed here (at Hastings) and that, with the exception of a somewhat abundant correspondence by letter is all the communication I had with him, but this was enough to awaken in me a reverence and affection, the like of which I have never felt for any other man but one, that one being Frederick Greenwood, who for more than a quarter of a century has been the sole true and heroic politician and journalist in our degraded land. Gerard Hopkins was the only orthodox, and as far as I could see, saintly man in whom religion had absolutely no narrowing effect upon his general opinions and sympathies.

A Catholic of the most scrupulous strictness, he could nevertheless see the Holy Spirit in all goodness, truth and beauty; and there was something in all his words and manners which was at once a rebuke and an attraction to all who could aspire to be like him. 58

Tennyson, Ruskin, and the rest of the circle of Patmore's earlier contemporaries had never been able to penetrate into the secret stronghold

58 Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 249.
of Patmore's soul. Alice Meynell was to give him the sensitive apprecia-
tion for which he longed, but because she was true to herself and to him 
she was to become 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' of his last years. Francis 
Thompson was to pay him the homage of discipleship. But Gerard Manley 
Hopkins alone could offer him the concrete embodiment of his ideal poet, 
for in him the highest natural faculties were combined with a strict fol-
lowing of the counsels of perfection. Hence the significance of Patmore's 
tribute to Hopkins, which is unparalleled in the rest of his writings.
CHAPTER FOUR

PATMORE'S PRACTICAL CRITICISM

The majority of Patmore's judgments on individual writers were concomitant to book reviewing, for in his age a book review was not so much a presentation of facts concerning an individual work but rather a more or less exhaustive critical essay on the works of an author in general. Frequently, moreover, if the work under consideration was a new edition or a critical analysis of an older author's work, Patmore speedily dismissed the contemporary work and devoted his attention to the older author. This fact explains, in a measure, why certain epochs of English literature are never referred to in his writings and why his practical judgments deal only with limited aspects of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

As an incidental critic of Shakespeare, Patmore belongs to the romantic school of philosophical interpretation whose greatest exponents are Coleridge and such German critics as Schlegel, Gervinus, and Ulrici. The publication of Coleridge's lectures and of a study on Shakespeare's philosophy and religion furnished the occasion for the only critical essay on Shakespeare with which Patmore wished to have his name associated, although it would seem that he had once intended to publish an exhaustive

commentary on all of Shakespeare's plays but that his plans had been altered by the appearance of Ulrici's work.\(^2\)

Patmore believes that Shakespeare must be studied *sub specie aeternitatis*, for the fundamental idea of Shakespearean drama is a moral one. Since every direct statement of a moral idea contains some admixture of falsehood, the meaning and justification of Shakespearean drama lies in this: that "the moral idea, which must always remain a riddle to words, is soluble in action."\(^3\) So, for instance, *The Merchant of Venice* demonstrates the "relation of the letter to the spirit of law, and the various liabilities of man to dwell on the first and to neglect the last, ..."\(^4\)

From this general principle it follows that all the characters in Shakespeare are developed in relation to some moral truth; they are, as it were, "the signs and ciphers in the statement and elimination of a moral problem."\(^5\) Rhythmus and harmony are two outstanding elements in this development. Rhythmus is the "regular succession of parts, according to the law of continuity"; while harmony is the natural consequence of rhythmus, for it "originates in the discontinuous juxtaposition of parts between which we have previously been made aware of the existence of a continuity."\(^6\)

Shakespeare's system may be rationalized as follows:

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2 Ibid., 116, footnote.
3 Ibid., 116.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 131.
6 Ibid., 133.
The whole of the characters of any one tragedy are so chosen that they are susceptible of being arranged as a chain, each link of which is connected with its adjacent link by a continuity running through them all. In the beginning, the whole of the characters are exhibited in a general concord, which is commonly effected by representing them in circumstances under which all characters are alike. In the progress of the play individuality is gradually developed, until, at the end, the whole chain is extended, which is done by the introduction of circumstances under which all the characters are unlike. This development in its progress constitutes the rhythmus. But besides this, at every step in the course of the drama, the characters, whose individualizing attributes have been more or less developed, are placed in contact with each other, which however, never happens until the continuity between them has been exhibited, and this constitutes the harmony, the depth and fulness of which constantly increase in proportion to the advance obtained by the rhythmus; the opportunities for producing the former being, of course, most numerous when the development of which the progress constitutes the latter is developed.7

Although Patmore devotes only one essay exclusively to Shakespeare, he finds in him the concrete embodiment of many of his own theories of art. The genius of other artists is limited:

Shakespeare is the only artist that ever lived whose genius has even approached to universality.... Every play of Shakespeare is a new vision -- not only a new aspect of his vision, as is the case with the different works of nearly all other artists, even the greatest.8

A tone of joy rings through all his works. "We read his deepest tragedies without contracting even a momentary stain of melancholy, however many tears they may have drawn from us."9 In his most elaborate plays the value of the point of rest in art is most fully illustrated. Kent supplies

7 Ibid., 135.
8 "The Limitations of Genius," in Principle in Art, Religio Poetae, and Other Essays, 310.
the point of rest in Lear, Friar Laurence in Romeo and Juliet, Horatio in Hamlet, Cassio in Othello, and Bassanio in The Merchant of Venice.

Each of these five characters stands out of the stream of the main interest, and is additionally unimpressive in itself by reason of its absolute conformity to reason and moral order, from which every other character in the play departs more or less. Thus Horatio is the exact punctum indifferens between the opposite excesses of the characters of Hamlet and Laertes -- over-reasoning inaction and unreasoning action -- between which extremes the whole interest of the play vibrates.10 So with the central and unimpressive characters in many other plays -- characters unimpressive on account of their facing the exciting and trying circumstances of the drama with the regard of pure reason, justice, and virtue. Each of these characters is a peaceful focus radiating the calm of moral solution throughout all the difficulties and disasters of surrounding fate: a vital centre, which, like that of a great wheel, has little motion in itself, but which at once transmits and controls the fierce revolution of the circumference.10

The works of John Marston, the seventeenth-century dramatist, are of little value in themselves; their worth lies mainly in the light they cast on the works of greater writers, especially Shakespeare. Marston's style does not differ from that of many other Elizabethan dramatists, who

...pitched the tragic key at a height which no voice but Shakespeare's could sustain. In their effort to reach the heroic in good and evil, their bad men became criminal lunatics, not men of naturally but greatly evil passions greatly indulged; their good people often literally became fools for goodness' sake; and the grossness of the vulgar, in which Shakespeare finds sources of inexhaustible wit and humour, is almost uniformly revolting.11

Marston's two great limitations are a lack of even an elementary knowledge

of meter and a misapprehension of the nature of poetic diction. Nevertheless, one occasionally finds in the midst of his bad verse a passage that might have done credit to the greatest metrists. Viewed as a whole, "Marston's work reminds one of a big blustering boy, with the possibility in him of a shapely and sensible giant, but striving to use the giant's strength before he has got it."12

There is no trace of Sir Thomas Browne's having read Shakespeare, yet so exquisite is his style that "one cannot help fancying that it is such as Shakespeare would have used had he written in prose."13 His Religio Medici is outstanding even in that great school of poetic prose which boasts of such names as Jeremy Taylor and Isaac Walton. The seventeenth century up to the Revolution of 1688 is the period of England's greatest prose.

The prose of the pre-revolutionary period was a fine art. In proportion to the greatness of its writers, it was a continually varying flow of music, which aimed at convincing the feelings as the words themselves the understanding.14

Of all the writings of this golden age of prose, no other work, with the possible exception of Bacon's Essays, is so pregnant with wisdom, worldly and unworldly, as the Religio Medici. And if Bacon surpasses Browne in content, Browne claims the distinction of a much more sweet and easy style than that of Bacon.15

12 Ibid., 53-4.
14 Ibid., 55.
15 Ibid., 58.
Shakespeare, Marston, and Browne are practically the only earlier English writers with whom Patmore deals. He has an encomiastic essay on Goldsmith which convinces one of his perhaps unreasonable fondness for this eighteenth-century writer. If Goldsmith has flaws, Patmore holds, they must be overlooked. His Vicar of Wakefield is enough to justify Dr. Johnson's calling him a great man.

To praise this little novel rightly would be to transcribe it from beginning to end. There is nothing in English literature -- or, as far as we are aware, in any other literature -- to be compared with it. It is throughout 'heroic'; yet never for a moment incredible, or -- what is still more wonderful -- uninteresting. It is, on the whole, so lovely and noble a work that it ought, like Shakespeare's plays, to be held above criticism. None but a heartless literary prig would dwell upon certain apparently irrelevant discussions or improbable concatenations of events towards the end of the story as faults. 16

If his poetry is not great, it is because the taste and training of his age would admit of nothing better. Even so, "no poetry except that of Horace contains so many lines and passages which have passed into stock quotations and proverbial sayings." 17

By far the larger number of Patmore's individual judgments, however, are concerned with nineteenth-century writers. What impresses one most in these essays is that Patmore never follows a via media, impartially weighing both the merits and the defects of an author. Usually he leaves the impression of high excellence or extreme mediocrity in a writer.

17 Ibid., 63.
For Blake Patmore has no sympathy. His poetry is, for the most part, "mere drivel." He has a few lovely lyrics, and in his other pieces there is an occasional gleam of unquestionable genius, but by far the greater portion of his work is "delirious rubbish." Though he is more important as an artist than as a poet, yet even in the field of painting his reputation has been exaggerated. The effect of his collected drawings and paintings is similar to that of his poetry: the little that is good is practically obliterated by what is worthless. With characteristic arrogance Patmore writes to a friend:

I went to see the exhibition of Blake's drawings at the Burlington Club, and they quite confirmed me in my old view of Blake as artist and poet. It was nearly all utter rubbish, with here and there not so much a gleam as a trick of genius. He does not seem to me to have been mad, but only to have assumed a sort of voluntary madness of freedom from convention, in order to make himself original. He is therefore in a measure original, as any tolerably clever and perceptive mind would become if it chose to pay so ruinous a price for originality.

The praise that Patmore denies to Blake he lavishes upon Coleridge, who is "perhaps the only great, and at the same time perfectly candid critic upon Shakespeare," and to whom the nineteenth century is indebted for such "sweetness and light" as its culture possesses. He excels in the art of poetry, but he has left a lasting impression by his

18 "Blake," in Principle in Art, Etc., 92, 94.
19 Ibid., 97.
20 Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, II,100.
22 "Great Talkers: Coleridge," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays,70.
work in other fields also -- in politics, religion, and criticism. Patmore briefly summarizes his achievement:

Coleridge has written of politics with the greatest power of awakening men to a living apprehension of the immediate and infallible connexion of universal principles with consequences of universal import. In religion, what Newman has done for the Church of Rome, that Coleridge has done for the Church of England; he has supplied it with the all but overwhelming argument that a perfectly disinterested heart and a mind of the subtlest and strongest quality and the widest modern culture can accept its teaching with satisfaction. In art, he has written poems, not long, indeed, or many, but enough to set before the poets of all future time a model of (in its way) an almost unapproachable perfection. In criticism he has combined the breadth and subtlety of Hegel with the clearness and solidity of Goethe. 23

In Keats and Shelley Patmore recognizes the feminine class of poets, in whom "the 'beatitude,' the beauty and sweetness, is the essential, the truth and power of intellect and passion the accident." 24 Keats is a great poet, but he is not, as Sidney Colvin declares, "the most Shakespearian spirit that has lived since Shakespeare." 25

In Keats the man has not the mastery. For him a thing of beauty was not only a joy for ever, but was the supreme and only good he knew or cared to know; and the consequence is that his best poems are things of exquisite and most sensitively felt beauty, and nothing else. 26

Keats's finest pieces, as Colvin points out, are "Lamia," "Isabella," "The Eve of St. Agnes," the five "Odes," and "Hyperion," though they have serious defects. To these must be added the fragment called "The Eve of

25 Ibid., 76.
26 Ibid., 77.
St. Mark," and what "is probably the very finest lyric in the English language, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'." 27

References in Patmore's correspondence testify to the permanence of his interest in Keats, though his opinion undergoes little or no change in almost fifty years. Early in 1847 he writes to H. S. Sutton:

Keats's poems collectively are, I should say, a very splendid piece of paganism. I have a volume of Keats's manuscript letters by me. They do not increase my attachment to him. But his power of expression is truly wonderful. To him

"'Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stained the white radiance of Eternity.'

[Quotation marks sic]

May it not do so to you and me. 28

A little later he modifies this statement and admits that, after reading Keats for the first time in several years, he finds much more Christianity in him than he had expected. 29 Keats is also the subject of several letters between Patmore and Hopkins. The latter broaches the topic after having read Patmore's review of Sidney Colvin's book on Keats. Hopkins believes that much must be conceded to Keats's youth and education, and that his work resembles, rather than differs from, Shakespeare's early work. 30 In reply, Patmore declares that however much sensuality there may be in Shakespeare's early work, yet in him "sensuality seems the accident, in Keats the essence." 31 To Hopkins' further opinion that Keats was made "to

27 Ibid., 76-7.
28 Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 144.
29 Ibid., II, 147.
31 Letter XCVII A, ibid., 236.
be a thinker, a critic, as much as a singer or artist of words," Patmore still objects that Keats would never have done much better work than the volume of 1820. Two letters to Robert Bridges complete Patmore’s criticism of Keats, but they merely intensify his previous comments. "Nothing can surpass the artistic quality of Keats, at his best;" he writes, "but I am perpetually reminded in Endymion and Hyperion, that he is writing about things he does not understand." And later:

I read your book on Keats with great attention, pleasure and admiration, except in a few parts in which I thought you gave him too high a place among the great poets, and did not sufficiently dwell upon the predominance of the emotional character in his poetry. He is full to overflow with fine imagery, yet he seems to me to be greatly deficient in first-rate imaginative powers. Some of the greatest imaginative poems in the world have been almost totally free from imagery. This is the highest test of great imagination.

For Shelley Patmore has less sympathy than for Keats. Yet one cannot wonder at his judgment on Shelley, for the two men differ essentially in their interpretation of love. Reviewing a lecture by Gosse on "Epipsychidion," Patmore declares:

His writings are the most powerful moral solvent which the literature of our century has produced; and that is saying much. Their power in this way lies mainly in the circumstance of the manifest absence of all malefic intention, and in their professed enthusiasm for the very good into the heart of which they softly

32 Letter XCVIII, ibid., 238.
33 Letter XCVIII A, ibid., 243.
34 Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 252.
35 Ibid., II, 252.
and imperceptibly eat -- as a snail's mild juices will sink a hole in a stone wall faster than could be done by nitric acid. The doctrine of the practical supremacy of emotional love, and its independence of objective truth and customary moral standards, is immensely attractive to a large part of the youth of both sexes; but, if followed, it can only land them in a marsh of effeminate and selfish sensuality, and leave them there with weakened intellects and perceptions seared by pleasure to all the sources of generous and true delight. ... Love cannot live where it is habitually regarded as the foundation of an impermanent and divided relationship, and it must come to be so regarded unless the opposite view is adopted and upheld by moral and social law; and no amount of failure in individual cases ... can justify attacks upon an institution which enforces the observation, at least in form, of that ideal standard of love between the sexes which is as necessary to the highest felicity as it is to the highest uses of society. 36

Patmore sees in Shelley's social and moral deficiencies "the imperfections of his poetry, which is all splendour and sentiment and sensitiveness, and little or no true wisdom or true love." 37 Shelley himself is to him only "a beautiful effeminate, arrogant boy -- constitutionally indifferent to money, generous by impulse, self-indulgent by habit, ignorant to the end of all that it most behoves a responsible being to know, ... showing at every turn the most infallible sign of a feeble intellect, a belief in human perfectibility; ..." Nevertheless, even Patmore must acknowledge that there is greatness in Shelley. Much of his poetry may be "like the soap-bubbles he was so fond of blowing -- its superficies beauty, its substance wind;" 39 but it has "the immortal reality of music; and his

37 "What Shelley Was," in Principle in Art, Etc., 89.
38 Ibid., 87-8.
39 Ibid., 89.
songs are songs, though they may be often called 'songs without words,' the words meaning so little though they sound so sweet."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Thomas Woolner are the only Pre-Raphaelites to whom Patmore has devoted a critical essay. There is a marked distinction in his attitude toward the two men. The root of Rossetti's limitations, he holds, is his Italian blood and sympathy combined with a somewhat narrow acquaintance with Englishmen and the English language. His poetry is tense rather than intense. Its defects are "constant high-pressure of passion," and acute and independent clearness of individual images, "which is never found in the natural and truly poetical expression of feeling," and too much definiteness in detail, which interrupts the flow of passion. Although most of Rossetti's works suffer from these defects, many of his sonnets and several other pieces

... are full of natural feeling expressed with simple and subtle art; and in much of his work there is a rich and obscure glow of insight into depths too profound and too sacred for clear speech, even if they could be spoken; a sort of insight not at all uncommon in the great art of past times, but exceedingly rare in the art of our own.

Woolner, by virtue of his poems "Pygmalion," "Silenus," and "Tiresias," is a leading figure among the Pre-Raphaelites. His "Tiresias," which is readable throughout, is

... well composed in large masses of artistically contrasted light and shadow; there is often much intensity in the imagery, but seldom any sense of

40 "Crabbe and Shelley," in Principle in Art, Etc., 127.
41 "Rossetti," ibid., 103-4.
42 Ibid., 105.
strain; and in the lyric portions of the poem ... there is a great deal of easy grace and movement and a display of considerable skill in the invention of new forms of stanzas.43

Patmore has only praise for William Barnes, a minor poet, who writes in the Dorsetshire dialect.

His language has the continual slight novelty which Aristotle inculcates as proper to true poetic expression, ... The words of Barnes are not the carefully made clothes, but the body of his thoughts and feelings. Another still rarer praise of his work is that he never stops in it till he has said all that should be said, and never exceeds that measure by a syllable; and about this art there is not the slightest apparent consciousness either of its abundant fulness or its delicate reticence.44

Though it would be absurd to call him a poet of the first or even the second magnitude, his is the distinction of having"done a small thing well, while his contemporaries have been mostly engaged in doing big things ill."45

Sympathy and antipathy vie with one another in Patmore's estimate of Emerson, who was one of the group of intellectuals that gathered at the home of the Patmores in the forties. He is a lover of Emerson and has read all his essays at least three times. But that very love makes him impatient of Emerson's inconsistency -- his lack of reverence, the insincerity of his language, his failure to understand true Christian humility and repentance.46

43 "Thomas Woolner's 'Tiresias'," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 153.
45 Letter to Edmund Gosse, in Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 258.
46 Letter to H. S. Sutton, ibid., II, 142.
Emerson, though a good man -- that is, one who lived up to his lights -- had little or no conscience. He admired good, but did not love it; he denounced evil, but did not hate it and did not even maintain that it was hateful, but only held that it was greatly inexpedient.47

Three or four ideas form the basis of all his essays and lectures. When he is at his best, his "endless variations of one idea have the effect of music which delights us to the end with the reiteration of an exceedingly simple theme;... But ... there is no progress in his thought, which resembles the spinning of a cockchafer on a pin rather than the flight of a bird on its way from one continent to another."48 Even at his best, Emerson never approaches greatness; he is only "a brilliant metaphysical epigrammatist."49

On only four writers of the younger generation has Patmore passed critical judgment: Thomas Hardy, Robert Bridges, Francis Thompson, and Alice Meynell. Hardy's A Pair of Blue Eyes is such an exquisite piece that Patmore regrets its being written in prose rather than in verse.50 In his portrayal of the beauties of nature and in his interpretation of rustic manners and passions, Hardy is great; but he is most original in the treatment of his heroines:

Hardy is too good an observer not to know that women are like emeralds and rubies, only those of inferior colour and price being without flaw; and he is too rich in human tenderness not to know that love never

48 Ibid., 118-9.
50 Letter to Hardy, in Basil Champneys, op. cit., II, 262.
glows with its fullest ardour unless it has 'something dreadful to forgive'. The most heart-rending pathos is evoked by him, in nearly all his novels, from this source; for there is nothing so tragic as to see the pardonable frailties of amiable characters heavily punished.51

Some of his later novels, however, notably Ethelberta's Hand and The Woodlanders, fall below his true mark. Both the character portrayal and the language are not what one should expect from such a master.52

The chief merit of the poetry of Robert Bridges, Patmore thinks, is "a quiet unpretentious perfectness, which has the air of coming not from laboured finish, but from finished habits of thought, feeling, and life, combined with and aided by a scholar's attainments."53 This unpretentious perfection is one obstacle in the way of his acceptance by the public. Another probable obstacle is his independence of any other poet or school.

He aims at and attains a style so equable, and the eminently beautiful lines or passages are so proportioned to and arise so naturally out of eminent occasions, that nothing is 'striking' until it is made to stand alone, and then most of the beauty vanishes because it is relative. In what he writes Mr. Bridges is thoroughly 'masterly', because he knows exactly the powers he is master of, and never attempts to strain them.54

His treatment of Greek myths is especially noteworthy. Far from seeking in them parables or allegories,

51 "Hardy's Novels," in Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 136.
52 Ibid., 136-7.
54 Ibid., 144.
Mr. Bridges gives his story as he finds it, surrounding it indeed at times with suitable, but most carefully subordinated, accessories; so that the original myth stands clear, like a statue surrounded by a garden. But the statue is not cold. It glows with the poet's synthetic perception. Its multiple meanings unveil themselves in proportion to the deserts and capacity of the beholder.55

Francis Thompson's poems would gain in power if the feminine element of taste, emotion, and decorum in expression were present in greater abundance. Deficiency in this feminine element, the conspicuous predominance of the masculine intellect, the use of totally extinct words, and the abundant invention of new words are the outstanding faults of his poetry. The main region of his poetry "is the inexhaustible and hitherto almost unworked mine of Catholic philosophy."56 His spirituality is at times too high and too sustained for ordinary or even disciplined minds to follow. Yet his prose bears witness to the essential soundness of his highest spiritual and poetic flights.

Nearly all true poets have written prose admirably, and with eminent and manly insight into matters well within an ordinarly cultivated comprehension; but I have seldom read prose more simple in style and more weighted with great good sense than has appeared from time to time, with Mr. Thompson's name, in two or three little-known periodicals.57

Alice Meynell is the "lovely lady" of Patmore's critical essays. In her person Patmore's previous assertion that no female writer of the

55 Ibid., 145.
57 Ibid., 166.
day has attained to true distinction has been falsified.\textsuperscript{58} Her poems "breathe, in every line, the purest spirit of womanhood, yet they have not sufficient force of that ultimate womanhood, the expressional body, to give her the right to be counted among classical poets."\textsuperscript{59} Nevertheless, her poetical faculty is great if she is judged by her best poetry; and "Why Wilt Thou Chide," her "Belle Dame sans Merci," "will some day rank not far below that of Keats."\textsuperscript{60} As a writer of prose, however, Alice Meynell reaches her full stature. Her essays bear "the hall-mark of genius, namely, the marriage of masculine force of insight with feminine grace and tact of expression.... Mrs. Meynell's style is like the subtle and convincing commentary of a beautiful voice."\textsuperscript{61} Perhaps the highest praise that can be bestowed upon Mrs. Meynell is the effect of her work on critics:

It is a singular testimony to the incomparable grace, dignity, and truth of Mrs. Meynell's writing that the tone of all her critics seems to have been elevated by and made more or less like hers. Her literary manners are so supremely and manifestly lovely that they seem to have imposed the same sort of moral compulsion upon her literary inferiors to become as much like her as they could, as is imposed upon an ordinary company by the personal presence of the like extraordinary excellence of character and culture.\textsuperscript{62}

Patmore concludes his second essay on Mrs. Meynell, which was also his last piece of critical writing, with the following comment on two of

\begin{itemize}
  \item 59 \textit{Ibid.}, 149.
  \item 61 "Mrs. Meynell," op. cit., 151, 157.
  \item 62 "Mrs. Meynell's New Essays," op. cit., 166-7.
\end{itemize}
Concerning the Essay on Eleanora Duse, I need only endorse the opinion of a very great contemporary, who has said of it that 'it reaches the high-water mark of literary criticism in our time'; but I must simply stake whatever character I may have for critical discernment on my unsupported assertion that the other Essay, called 'Symmetry and Incident', rises far above that 'high-water mark', and that we must go back to Goethe, Lessing, and Hegel if we would discover any piece of criticism so novel, of such far-reaching importance, so moderate, so simple, so conclusive. -- in a word, so great.

The passage is pregnant with meaning not only with regard to Alice Meynell but also with regard to Patmore himself, for it reverts to his insistence on the necessity of principle in art and it raises the question of his rank and achievement as a critic.

63 Ibid., 173.
CHAPTER FIVE

PATMORE'S ACHIEVEMENT AS A CRITIC

Patmore was never under any delusion as to his own standing as a critic. He had turned to the writing of critical essays when poetic inspiration failed, and he never aspired to a place among the great critics. In several passages in his correspondence with Gerard Manley Hopkins he makes clear his position. Speaking of his intended reading of Hopkins' poems, he says:

... I am conscious of my extreme slowness in taking fully in what is new. I suppose it comes of my all along having followed a single line of my own, that I am really the worst off-hand critic of really new work that I know. But, as one of the Greek poets, I believe, says, 'Slow is the wrath of Gods, but in the end not weak,' so my judgment, though hard to make up, may rank perhaps with the judgment of the best of the 'gallery-God' when it is made up; for it is founded on the severe and instinctive principles which I believe I owe mainly to my Father's having taught me from my early boyhood a contempt for what is meretricious and a love for all the best models within my reach.1

"Gallery-Gods" he explains in his next letter as "the common run of 'Nineteenth Century', 'Fortnightly', & such critics."2 In a third letter on the same subject, he confesses:

The partiality and limitation of my appreciation of art often surprises myself. I have the most acute delight in some of the best music, but it seems a mere accident. Most

1 Letter LXXXVII C, in Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 204.
2 Letter LXXXVII D, ibid., 206.
of Beethoven, for example, seems to me to be simply noise; but when I do understand him I understand him indeed. It was twenty years before I could learn to see anything in Wordsworth's sonnets to the River Duddon.3

There is Patmore's verdict on himself; there, too, at least by implication, is a complete evaluation of his achievement as a critic.

All his life Patmore was a man of a single idea: the symbolic relation between married love and the love of God for the soul. His theories of art are a corollary of this idea, for since he looked upon nuptial love as the clue to all human relations, he believed that not only life but also art could be understood only by reference to it. As Katherine Brégy expresses it:

... in the mysteries of manhood and womanhood Patmore found the heavens above and the earth beneath explained. God he apprehends as the great positive, masculine magnet of the universe -- the soul as the feminine or receptive force; and in this conjunction of first and last lay the source of all life and joy. These sexual characteristics he detected in literature and art, as intellectual strength or sensible beauty was found to predominate; while in the workings of conscience there was a similar duality, the rational and the sensitive soul.4

Ultimately, therefore, Patmore's aesthetic is a single aspect of the unifying idea that is present in all his works. It forms a part of the original philosophy which this central idea with all its ramifications constitutes. Hence its general value lies in the reflected light which it casts back upon its source.

The oneness and continuity of Patmore's thought, however, tended

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3 Letter LXXXVII E, ibid., 207.
4 "Coventry Patmore," in The Poet's Chantry, 118.
to strengthen the self-sufficiency that formed an essential part of his character. Long years of intercourse with him, says Edmund Gosse, produced the impression that here was an intellectual and moral aristocrat, to whom "the give and take of modern toleration, the concentrated action of masses of men, whose units fit into one another, meant absolutely nothing."\(^5\)

This fundamental weakness of Patmore's character manifests itself particularly in his pronouncements on individual writers.

Limited artistic sympathy combined with extreme partiality is the great fault of these critical pieces. Patmore never came to his reading with that open-minded impartiality that is essential to the critic. Knowledge of art was his, and acute sensitivity to a certain type of beauty; but these qualities, because they rested on the foundation of prejudice, made of the majority of his judgments pieces of either extravagant praise or immoderate blame. As woman was to him always the "weaker vessel," so the poet in whom the emotional element predominated could never, in his mind, be a really great poet. Hence, though his censure is sometimes tempered by a little praise, or his praise by some blame, yet he rarely succeeds in maintaining a proper balance between the two. The reader is interested in these essays because they are the work of a critic who was also a craftsman, and because they contain occasional illuminating passages in which the soul of the poet rather than the mind of the philosopher speaks. Such, for instance, is the one in which Patmore pays tribute to the music of Shelley's verse and to the exquisite beauty of his songs.\(^6\)

\(^5\) Coventry Patmore, 150.

\(^6\) "Crabbe and Shelley," in Principle in Art, Etc., 127.
general, however, the reader leaves the essays on individual writers with the impression that Patmore is either highly appreciative or extremely contemptuous of the respective writer.

Frederick Greenwood extenuates this fault on the basis of Patmore's temperament. He writes:

There is truth in the saying that he could not moderate praise or blame, though as to his immoderation in blame it is better understood through understanding him. It is thought monstrous that he should have described Herrick as "a brilliant insect." But remembering Herrick's love-songs, what else should Patmore think him? It has also been said that he disparaged Tennyson. More than once or twice I have heard him begin on Tennyson disparagingly, on grounds that might almost be expected from a man with Patmore's ideas of poetry; but ten minutes of contention and his objections were thrown to the winds: there never was a greater lyric poet than A.T. He himself was not a lyric poet. Neither does anything in 'The Angel in the House' itself show that he was capable of homely verse, in which the sweetest and truest poetry finds voice. But he could make a long journey to look at William Barnes, drawn by "the lovely innocence which breathes from that poet's songs of nature and natural affection."

Whatever may be said in defense of this limitation, it is nevertheless there, and if Patmore had done no more than pass judgment on individual writers, his name as a critic might well be forgotten. Indeed, to rely on his opinion would be to run the risk of becoming fatally one-sided in the interpretation of literature.

But the very independence of mind that is the weakness of Patmore's practical judgments is the strength of the essays devoted to

principle in art. In a world in which criticism had surrendered its birthright to impressionism, Patmore, though himself an unconscious impressionist in the matter of individual pieces of literature, could yet enunciate principles of art whose full import can be realized only after serious study. Throughout his writings Patmore treads the path of Christian mysticism as expressed in the works of St. Bernard, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila. In the preface to The Rod, the Root, and the Flower he makes his indebtedness to these writers his only claim to be heard. Despite the essentially mystical element in Patmorean thought, however, his whole theory of art can be readily associated with the scholasticism of St. Thomas, with whose Summa he had a layman's acquaintance. Any demonstration of the bond between scholasticism and Patmore's aesthetic, however, must take into account several facts: that Patmore never had the benefit of a regular Catholic philosophical course with its exact terminology; that he was giving his ideas a literary dress and presenting them in literary media where, at the time, Catholic thought had but little welcome; and, above all, that he revels in aphoristic modes of expression.

The scope of the present study does not permit a complete analysis of the philosophical background of Patmore's theory of art, but its soundness may be demonstrated in a few major points: the nature and function of the poet, the poetic imagination, poetical integrity, and the need of law in art. Patmore's definition of the poet as seer finds this parallel in Jacques Maritain's exposition of scholastic maxims on art:

8 Vide supra, 12.
The human artist or poet whose mind is not, like the Divine Mind, the cause of things, cannot draw this form [the essential element of beauty] complete out of his creative spirit; he goes and gathers it first and foremost in the vast treasure of created things, of sensitive nature as of the world of souls, and of the interior world of his own soul. From this point of view he is first and foremost a man who sees more deeply than other men and discovers in reality spiritual radiations which others are unable to discern. But to make these radiations shine out in his work and so to be truly docile to the invisible Spirit at play in things, he can, and indeed he must to some extent, deform, reconstrukt, and transfigure the material appearance of nature.9

The highest and rarest faculty of the poet, Patmore holds, is the synthetic eye or the poetic imagination.10 It is a natural gift, which, however, of itself is not sufficient to produce a work of art. It must be trained and cultivated, for "consciousness is the soul of art."11 Maritain discusses both the gift and its cultivation. He speaks of the imagination as "the chief purveyor of art," which the poets gladly consider their principal faculty because "it is so intimately bound up with the activity of the creative intellect as not easily to be distinguished from it in the concrete."12 But he has previously pointed out that a natural gift, however indispensable it may be, is at best merely a prerequisite condition of art, and that without long and patient discipline it will never turn into art so-called.13 Poetical integrity Patmore considers the

9 Art and Scholasticism, 62-3
10 Vide supra, 16.
11 Vide supra, 1.
13 Ibid., 42.
supreme virtue of the poet, and because this quality consists in the uprightness of the poet's mind and heart, Patmore insists that, natural gifts being presupposed, the greatness of the poet will be in proportion to his personal following of the counsels of perfection, for absolute sanctity is the ultimate standard by which he must be judged. With metaphysical precision Maritain reaches a similar conclusion by arguing from the general end of art to the specific end of an individual work, and thence to the conditions requisite for the realization of this end. He says:

Now, suitably to judge such an individual end, that is to say, to conceive the work to be done, reason alone is not sufficient. A good disposition of the appetite is necessary, for everyone judges his particular ends by what he himself actually is: "as a man is, so does the end appear to him." The conclusion is that in the case of the painter, the poet and the musician, the virtue of art, which resides in the intellect, must not only overflow into the sensitive faculties and the imagination, but also require the artist's whole appetitive faculty, his passions and his will. If every faculty of desire and emotion in the artist is not fundamentally rectified and exalted in the line of beauty, whose transcendence and immateriality are superhuman, human life, the humdrum activity of the senses, and the routine of art itself, will degrade his conception. The artist must be in love, must be in love with what he is doing, so that his virtue becomes in truth, in St. Augustine's phrase, ordo amoris: so that beauty becomes connatural to him, bedded in his being through affection, and his work proceeds from his heart and his bowels as from his lucid mind. Such undeviating love is the supreme rule.

It has been previously pointed out that all Patmore's theories of art seem to converge toward the one center of submission to law.

14 Vide supra, 14.
16 Vide supra, 30.
He never wearies of exalting reason and order above the most acute aesthetic sensibility, and he makes the prayer of the great poet that of the prophet: "Order all things in me strongly and sweetly from end to end." In this requirement too he follows the thought of the Schoolmen, who, according to Maritain, perpetually insist that the mind takes first place in the work of art. "The never weary," he writes, "of reminding us that the first principle of all human work is reason. Let it be added that in making Logic the liberal art par excellence, and in a sense the chief type-analogy of art, they show that in every art there is as it were a vivid experience of Logic."17 In the words of Baudelaire,

There all is ORDER and beauty,
Richness, tranquillity and voluptuousness.18

To the fundamental soundness of Patmore's theories must be attributed Calvert Alexander's opinion that when the authoritative work on modern Catholic aesthetic is written, Patmore's prose will be heavily drawn upon.19 But his title to lasting fame as a critic rests on three contributions in particular: his definition of the nature and function of criticism, his interpretation of the poet, and his remarks on the relation between art and morality. One can scarcely find a more precise statement of the nature and function of criticism than the one he presents in the essay called "Principle in Art." As for his interpretation of the poet, to borrow the words of Herbert Read, "no poet since Wordsworth and Coleridge,

18 Quoted in ibid., 51.
19 The Catholic Literary Revival, 68.
not even Matthew Arnold, has such a clear conception of the poet's func-
tion."20

These two contributions are of value to the field of criticism as a whole; for present-day criticism the value of Patmore's remarks on art and morality is more immediate. As one reads the essays entitled "The Ethics of Art," "Bad Morality Is Bad Art," "Ancient and Modern Ideas of Purity," and "Unnatural Literature," as well as certain passages in other essays, one is inclined to think that not only as poet but also as critic Patmore has turned prophet and is addressing the world of today, with its morbid emphasis on sex and its frequent disregard of the canons of good taste and morality. And the strength of his position lies in this: that he speaks not as a Catholic merely, but as an artist who has grasped the fundamental truth of human destiny -- the relation of man and all that concerns him to his ultimate end, God. His theories of art, like his poetry, are built on the rock of the Catholic Church, the visible repository of Supreme Truth. "To say this, is to define the length of his fame, the depth and height of his scope"21 as a critic. His contribution is not large, but the seal of Truth is upon it. Like the Precursor of old, Patmore is "a voice crying in the wilderness" and giving testimony, by his artistic ideals, to the Light that is Life.

20 "Coventry Patmore," in In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays, 96.
21 Frederick Page, Patmore: A Study in Poetry, 37.


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The thesis, "Coventry Patmore: Critic of Literature and Art", written by Sister Julitta Gaul, S.C.C., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Zabel
Dr. Steward
Mr. Young

October 10, 1940
October 18, 1940
October 18, 1940