An Analysis of the Marriage Theme in the Unknown Eros of Coventry Patmore

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE MARRIAGE THEME

IN THE UNKNOWN EROS OF COVENTRY PATMORE

by

DOROTHY KILEY BRESNAHAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Loyola University

JUNE
1949
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CHAPTER I
COURTSHIP OF THE IDEA

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for her."1 This metaphor set down by St. Paul was a vivid reality for Coventry Patmore, the poet not only of earthly nuptial love but the poet of Christ's nuptial love. The analogy of the love between bridegroom and bride and that between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the human soul, the bride, filled him with such wonder and excitement that he was left trembling at the marvel of his discovery and fervently desirous to share it with others.

In a day when the number of divorces threatens to equal the number of marriages, a study of Patmore, a man who reverenced and loved the institution which Christ raised to the same sacramental state as the Eucharist, should be enlightening and profitable. In his glorification of this holy sacrament, Patmore surrounded married life "with a philosophy of love that transcends all earthly bounds and finds its consummation beyond the bounds of Heaven."2

This poet, who stood apart from all other poets of the Victorian period, gave additional poetic beauty to the Church's doctrine of matrimony.

1 St. Paul, Ephesians 5, 22.
2 Coventry Patmore, Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love, ed. with notes by Terence Connolly, S.J., Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1938, xi, (Introduction by Joachim V. Benson)
His poetry pictures the union of men and women in marriage, in the natural order, as a reflection of Christ's union with the Church, in the supernatural order. Carrying this belief to its logical end, Patmore joined the mystics in exalting Christ's union with the individual soul.

The problem of this thesis is to show how Patmore demonstrates in his poetry, especially in *The Unknown Eros*, that human marriage foreshadows the Divine nuptials of God's union with the human soul. The strength and weakness of his philosophy will be indicated as well as its pertinency to modern times.

A poet who made love the basis of his entire philosophy was not totally new to literature, but a poet who completes that love in marriage, was, to say the least, unusual.

Early poetry was especially devoid of such philosophy. Symonds says sensual poetry rather than sentimental poetry was the vehicle for the love poets of Greece and Rome. The passion of love was always treated as a physical emotion by the classical poets. Nor did any of these poets treat the lady of his delight like a deity or seek to raise his soul above mere sensuality by a contemplation of her beauty.3

Plato, it is true, made love the basis of his philosophy -- the love of friend. Burdett, in his comprehensive volume on Patmore's idea, sees Plato's philosophy summarized through the wise Diotima in *The Symposium*. It was explained to her that the soul recognized beauty in human form as a recollection of a beauty which it enjoyed prior to its birth into the body of man.

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The soul aimed at a reunion with that beauty and so while here on earth it must be devoted to the pursuit of pure beauty. The soul would climb from a knowledge of beauty of the body, the supreme embodiment of beauty on earth, to a kinship with beauty of mind and from that finally embrace the absolute from which it sprang. The defects of this philosophy are well known. The Platonic theory of love idealizes only one human relationship -- friendship. An outline of Plato's philosophy on love would resemble a pyramid standing on its apex. His theory was equally removed from "civil affection and sensual passion." Burdett goes further and says that the Platonic theory of love "by the omission of woman sacrifices that natural man." Patmore's criticism of Plato is found in the Angel in the House:

The boy who held by Plato tried
His airy venture first; all sail
It heavy'ward rush'd till scare descried,
Then pitch'd and dropp'd, for want of tail.

Thus we can say that the Platonic theory fails to meet the needs of the greater number of persons. It is not grounded well enough for the mystical flight to which it aspires. It does not offer a measure of realization to mankind.

Following Plato's idea we have a new aspect of love resulting from the


5 Symonds, op. cit., p. 260.

6 Burdett, op. cit., ix.

The advent of Christianity. This aspect of love is most commonly termed "chivalry." God is allotted a place by the chivalrous lover. He is the final end of the lover's adoration. Woman, too, assumes a place. She is the link between the knight's soul and his God: a continuous reminder of Heaven. Symonds goes on to say, however, that "chivalrous passion never ended in marriage; and the lady who inspired it was not usually a wife."3

In these times of chivalry another, and much less Christian-like, kind of love flourished. It had its beginnings in France but thrived later in England. According to this system of courtly love and emotional disturbance was the natural companion of falling in love. The lover suffered innumerable physical and mental tortures. He indulged this condition by constant reflection upon his helpless state. If he found himself the recipient of a mutual feeling of love he would stop at no obstacles in attempting to commit great deeds for his lady. The court lover and his lady pledged absolute faithfulness to each other. The stringent code of courtly love held love to be impossible in the married state. Thus courtly love also was basically illicit and basely sensuous.

Dante, the next major poet to idealize love, was also with flaw. To him Divine wisdom was disclosed in the person of Beatrice. Here we find love embodied in the form of the unmarried woman. Half the attraction of this love was her unattainability. Burdett says this philosophy of Dante "busied itself too much with the flowers and the fruit; too little with the

3 Symonds, op. cit., p. 258.
While this may be a bit unjust on Burdett's part, we must admit that any practical theory of love must consider both the senses and the soul. Dante idealized woman but not woman as a part of nature. Both of these theories omit the necessity of the family. Thus they divide man's life into two separate, disunited parts - an ideal and a real.

Dante's idea of love certainly needed marriage. But he failed to realize that you cannot build a philosophy of life upon disorder; and certainly not on adultery - the logical result of Dante's philosophy - is a disorder. Dante, however, was not then, nor later, alone in ignoring this basic necessity. Marriage was considered too prosaic a subject for verse. It was only anticlimactical. The wedding ring, figuratively a sign of servitude through love, became literally the symbol of slavery for both parties. The beauty of the love shared prior to the wedding ceremony became enmeshed in the chains taken on in marriage.

True, a few marriage songs existed like Suckling's "A Ballad upon a Wedding" and Spenser's "Epithalamion." The latter is a beautiful nuptial poem but, like the former, it fails to see that love past the wedding night. Even Browning failed to see the opportunity awaiting him, although he looked straight at it. In fairness to that poet, however, it should be noted that the sort of love celebrated in "A Woman's Last Word" is different from the shallow, sensual love usually celebrated by the lyric poets.

Sister Mary Evarista Crowley, in her Master's Thesis, noted that it

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9 Burdett, op. cit., viii.
appears "remarkable that wedded love seemed to offer no satisfactory material to the poets up to the time of Patmore." 10

Married love was a fertile field for poetic treatment and yet it was completely overlooked. It was an entirely new subject for the lyricists. As we have seen, love was material for poetry, but always love before marriage, or even worse, illicit love after the marriage ceremony. In another Master's Thesis by Terence Toland, S.J., it is stated that the interest of such works "generally centers around the obtaining of the woman or man desired; not the life with that man or woman." 11

It is difficult to see why the foregoing is true. Certainly there is more vivid action in courtship and once the obstacles have been overcome the winning of the beloved's hand seems to be the finis instead of the end of a mere phase. It is no wonder that Patmore cried,

Idiots that take the prologue for the piece,
And that all is ended just when it begins. 12


12 Burdett, op. cit., p. 9.
Or again,

The love of marriage claims, above all other kinds, the name of love.  

Burdett scorns the poets who do not accept this philosophy, and in ridiculing them praises the courage that was Patmore's:

...we have had an abstraction, or a lust of the flesh, rarely a love that seeks to satisfy the soul as well as the senses and the senses equally with the soul. . . . In courtship, at all events, the imagination is satisfied, a vision comes to the soul, the windows of heaven are open. In marriage the body can find the mysterious point where flesh and spirit are indistinguishable. In the fruits of this embrace, the body makes its supreme return, and the family thus created is the unit in which the individual becomes complete, and is itself the foundation of society.

It is unique that marriage, since it is the foundation of society and as such is owed the gratitude of the world, should be completely lacking of lyric song. It took a lonely, opinionated poet of the Victorian Era to interpret and defend one of the most normal and least obtuse elements of life. Like Dante and Plato his life was dominated by one idea - love - but unlike them he completed the relationship of man and woman in marriage.

Coventry Patmore stands in the Victorian Era and yet wholly apart from it. At his birth, Father Alexander tells us, "... there was a reaction


14 Burdett, *op. cit.*, p. 4-5.

15 It is even more of a paradox that the one who should sing its praises was scornfully ignored by the majority, as we shall later see.
against the political and spiritual radicalism of the Romantics.\footnote{16} A new philosophy was arising which was completely hostile to mysticism. He goes on to say that Patmore should be complimented on the fact that he reconciled the two prevalent tendencies, mysticism and the scientific spirit, by "rejecting both in their current application."\footnote{17}

The critics all agree that in Patmore we have a poet who reveals his soul in his poetry so that actually no biography is necessary. But because Patmore is the poet of only a few, and because this paper concerns itself with only one phase of his work, it would be well to set down those facts which affect his works.

In the \textit{Portrait of My Family}, Derek Patmore announces Coventry's birth into the Patmore family thus: "The charming middle-class atmosphere of their lives was convulsed by the advent of a poetic genius."\footnote{18} This 'genius' was the grandson of a silversmith and the son of a "notorious rather than distinguished author."\footnote{19} He was born at Woodford, July 23, 1823. His father dedicated him to the muses at a very early age and this did not endear either of them to the heart of Mrs. Patmore with whom Coventry was in constant

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Loc. cit.}
\end{itemize}
revolt. His mother, an austere Scotch woman, would have preferred to devote her son to God. A close bond of affection united father and son, although they were totally unlike each other.

Frederick Greenwood, in an article in Blackwood's Magazine, said that Patmore was given every chance of being self-made. And he believed that it was the better kind of making for a lad of Coventry's temperament.20

His father was an atheist and refused to allow his son to be taught any positive religious beliefs. Coventry was an agnostic until he was eleven years old when he opened a devotional book and decided "what a wonderful thing it would be if there really was a God."21 Such a statement indicates the truth of Bregy's observation: "Patmore was brought up entirely outside the zone of the supernatural."22 Once Patmore admitted the possibility of the supernatural, however, he seemed to grow increasingly religious.

Derek Patmore quotes his grandmother as saying "all Patmores are street angels and house devils."23 But this statement does not seem to be true of Coventry, whose first noteworthy work, The Angel in the House, was a celebration of marriage and the home.

This narrative poem was written during the years of his marriage with

21 Gosse, op. cit., p. 18.
22 Katherine Bregy, Poet's Chantry, St. Louis: B. Herder, 1912, p. 117.
23 Loc. cit.
Emily Andrews. "Apparently no man ever had a wife more lovable or more entirely congenial to himself," says Virginia Crawford. It was not all light and joy, for the poet had to work hard (an unpleasant experience for him) in order to support his growing family.

Emily Andrews was his dream come true. She was beautiful, learned, and (most difficult of all) she shared his ideas on various subjects. To his credit it can be said that he truly appreciated her admirable attributes and was continuously grateful for the happiness of his marriage.

The importance of this marriage can hardly be overestimated. Gosse says,

Uplifted by companionship with this stately and kindly creature, daily illumined by her simplicity, he slowly gained, not merely what seems a very profound insight into the nature of womanhood, but the precise experience which was needed to make him, beyond all his peers, the consecrated laureate of wedded love.

After Emily's death in 1862, which had been long foreshadowed, the poet was completely lost in grief but at the same time finally free to take that step which had been dictated to him by his will for some time and which his wife foresaw: "Only a few days before she died she said to him, 'After I'm gone they [Catholics] will get you.'"

Contrary to the common notion that a poet is won by the ritual and liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, we fail to find any such superficial

25 Gosse, op. cit., p. 45.
26 Champneys, II, 53.
influence in the conversion of Patmore. His was a cold, willed conversion going strongly against the dictates of his heart. We can feel the loss he suffered at this final separation from her, to whom he had been so close, in "A Farwell."

With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now part.27

This marriage with Emily, which had been terminated by her death and finally severed by his conversion, was one of love and happiness. Their contentment and joy with each other and with their six children, had blossomed in their fifteen years of marriage and reaped many an hour of happiness. In her complete knowledge of him, however, Emily saw that he would marry again -- that he would be in need of another partner in marriage. Derek Patmore quotes from her will as follows:

'I leave my wedding ring to your second wife with my love and blessing ... also I leave my grateful acknowledgment of your goodness and love to me...'

'If in a year or two you are able to marry again, do so happily, feeling that if my spirit can watch you, it will love her who makes you happy...'.28

So Emily proved to be correct in both her apprehension and her prophecy. And both events occurred almost simultaneously in Rome. In May, 1864, Coventry Patmore was received into the Catholic Church and shortly afterwards became engaged to Marianne Byles, "whose beauty seemed to me the pure effulgence of Catholic sanctity."29

29 Recorded in D. Patmore, op. cit., p. 145.
If marriage with Emily had provided him with the germ of his philosophy of nuptial love, marriage with Marianne Patmore provided him with the love, understanding and leisure necessary to produce his most profound and most beautiful poems contained in the volume, The Unknown Bros.

Marianne's personality complemented Coventry's. Her quiet but discerning criticism must have piqued him frequently. But her unobtrusive handling of this 'problem child' brought his poetic powers to their mature fulfillment.

As we have said before, up until the time of his marriage with Marianne, Patmore had been forced to work hard to provide the necessities of life for himself and for his family but with her splendid disposition Marianne also brought to her marriage a considerable fortune, and finally Patmore was able to live in the manner which he had formerly desired.

Patmore valued Marianne's criticisms and usually gave her his manuscripts first for comments. Champneys records one of these knowing criticisms.

After reading some of his poetry Marianne says:

Then, if I may venture to say so, you touch the most delicate subjects with a purity which leaves scarcely a word to make a child's innocence wonder. A woman reading it would feel flattered; then at times, provoked; for it is a shame for you to have been initiated into a thing or two quite solely feminine.30

The bard of wedded love seemed to feel incomplete without marriage.

After the death of Marianne Patmore, in 1880, he took unto himself a third wife, Harriet Robson, a good friend of his daughter's. Piffie, the only

child of this marriage, upon hearing of his father's three marriages, cried,
"Why, Papa, you're half as bad as Henry the Eighth!"

The fourth woman to exert an influence on the life of this man, whose
days are marked by an abundance of friendships with women and almost totally
lacking in male friendships, was his daughter, Emily. This girl, nun and
poetess, was born physically of Emily and spiritually of Marianne. She was
a combination of the traits Patmore loved best in both women and Emily
Honoria probably exerted a stronger and more permanent influence than either
of the other two.

Patmore's admiration of Alice Meynell is one of the paradoxes of his
life. He scorned many of the 'masculine' characteristics which she
possessed, and yet faint praise from her pleased him inordinately.

This quick view of Patmore's life shows him to be equipped to sing of
'woman.' The feminine influence in his life was strong and positive. It is
to his discredit, however, that he can boast of no permanent masculine
friendships. In all his works he does not have one good word for friendship,
which is not unusual when we count the number of broken ones that marked his
years.

We have spoken of the dearth of nuptial lyrics and poetry of wedded
life. This void was noticed and repaired by Patmore. He desired to carry
love beyond the wedding day; yet he had no wish to set down in verse merely
a character analysis of the two parties involved or to conceive of the tragic
aspect of unfaithfulness in marriage. The sentimental novels of his
contemporaries were popular as pious, romantic tales of courtship rather
than as any statement of matrimonial fact. Then too, these stories always
ended with the wedding night and thus did not ring true because they ended the
drama with the first act. To Coventry Patmore, however, marriage was neither the end, nor the anti-climax of love but its fulfillment. Therefore his theme would be that of faithful love between man and wife, 'the first of themes, sung last of all.' In The Angel in the House this theme found its complete and lovely utterance.

This glorification of happy nuptial love was a theme, simple and universal, but to the mob, commonplace and vulgar. To those who appreciate marriage as a sacrament it is a revelation of Patmore’s vision of life in its “most blessedly human relation.”

This little germ of nuptial love,
Which springs so simply from the sod,
The root is, as my song shall prove,
Of all our love to man and God.

How long shall men deny the flower
Because its roots are in the earth;
And crave with tears from God the dower
They have, and have despised as dearth?

A brief summary of the narrative of The Angel in the House will aid in the better understanding of the significant passages which will be quoted to throw light on Patmorean philosophy: The poet, Felix Vaughan, filled with

31 Bregy, "Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore and Champneys", The Catholic World, XC, 1910, 796.
32 Burdett, op. cit., p. 21.
34 Patmore, Angel in the House, Bk. I, Canto VII, Prelude II.
the happiness of his marriage wishes to immortalize his name and state by writing a verse glorifying marital happiness. He does so by telling the story of his courtship of Honoria Churchill, oldest of the three daughters of the Dean at Sarum Close. There is very little action in the story. It deals chiefly with the moods of the lover. He, after much introspection and retrospection, wins the hand of the fair Honor and marries her.

It might seem strange to class this poem as a poem of marital bliss since only two of the twenty-four cantos deal with Felix and Honoria as man and wife. But a close analysis of the poem dispels all doubts. In the first place, Vaughan writes the poem because he is so very happy in his wedded life. All throughout the description of the courtship we sense that the engagement of the two is merely a stepping stone to something much higher. We feel, with Vaughan, that on their wedding day they stand only at the threshold of the realization of their love. Later he tells us that love's largest measure of fulfillment came with parenthood.

This lengthy narrative on married love begins with a prologue and is divided into two books which consist of twelve brief cantos each. The cantos are again divided into one or more short preludes followed by the narrative section. It is in these preludes that we find most of Patmore's philosophy.

In the Prologue to Book I Vaughan seeks to make a name for himself, for the sake of his wife, by singing of the "first of themes sung last of all." He was so very happy that, as we have said, he intended to glorify his state which he had enjoyed for eight years. So he writes of the wonders of the wedded life of Felix and Honoria.
Some years before the opening of the story, Felix had become intimate with the Dean of Sarum Close, a widower with three daughters. Within this complacent setting Felix falls in love with all three daughters: Honoria, Mary, and Mildred.

In the prelude to the Second Canto, Vaughan, still enamored with the material he has for his subject, says,

That Hymn for which the whole world longs,
A worthy Hymn in Woman's praise;
A Hymn bright-noted like a bird's.

The Second Canto speaks of Mildred and Mary who were to take second place in his affections. In this Canto Patmore speaks of the bachelor's continual and conscious search for a wife:

We who are married, let us own
A bachelor's chief thought in life
Is, or the fool's not worth a groan,
To win a woman for his wife.
I kept the custom. I confess
I never went to Ball or Fete
Or show, but in pursuit express
Of my predestined mate.

Honoria, who becomes his ultimate choice, gives title to the Third Canto. Here, this early in the poem, we have Patmore beginning the real theme of the divine nature of love:

He meets, by heavenly chance express,
The destined maid; some hidden hand
Unveils to him that loveliness
Which others cannot understand.

Following this Patmore begins the analysis of courtship. In the next Canto Felix meets his cousin Frederick, who is also in love with Honoria. Watching her reactions closely, Felix is confident that Honor does not return his affection in like manner. He is sorry, but whether his sorrow
stems from pity for Frederick or pity for himself in a possible similar situation he does not know.

The Fourth Canto, 'Rose of the World,' brings a break in the narrative and this and the next Canto deal with the reflections and mental meanderings of the lover. Felix meditates on the importance of love and its necessity to the well balanced life. We have the following passage concerning love:

For love is substance, truth the form;
Truth without love were less than nought.

In Canto Five, Felix, long unhappy at having been absent for so long from the deanery, finally receives an invitation to dinner written by Honoria and enclosed with violets which she had found in a place where he had claimed there were none.

In the prelude to the Sixth Canto, Vaughan, meditating on the joys of love, is grateful he had saved himself for his wife. He speaks of the happiness that will come to those who do the same:

Who is the happy husband? He
Who scanning his unwedded life,
Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free,
'Twas faithful to his future Wife.

We then have a return to the narrative of the story. Made brave by his love, Felix asks the Dean if he might try to win the hand of Honor, little knowing that his father and the Dean had long ago entertained such ideas.

The Seventh Canto was introduced with thought on woman's influence over man.
To heroism and holiness
How hard it is for man to soar
But how much harder to be less
Than what his mistress loves him for!

He tells those women who ignore their influence and who might have
"cheapen'd paradise" to

awake to thy renown
Require what 'tis our wealth to give.

In this and in the preceding canto Patmore, showing Felix's elation
and joy at Honor's acceptance of him, contradicts the popular notion that
what is attainable is no longer desired.

The Eighth Canto describes an expedition to Stonehenge. Here we see
that his loves grow from every facet of his lady's personality. He glories
in every aspect of her beauty and is continually struck afresh at the marvel
that she will be his.

Honor takes a trip to London and Felix suffers not only the pains
of parting but also the fears of what might happen to her while she is gone.
He fears that London may spoil her. He wonders if her possessions which are
dear to her will be taken care of in her absence.

In the Tenth Canto Felix visits church with the Dean and his daughters.
Waking early on the day he is to take the girls to church, he contemplates
his love and its place in religion. He says of Honor:

I loved her in the name of God,
And for the ray she was of Him;

and later considering her Maker,

How loving and how lovely fair
Must He be Who had fashioned her.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
... . . Him loved I most
But her I loved most sensibly.
Book One ends with Honor's acceptance of Felix and a description of his overwhelming joy at her reception.

Vaughan begins the Second Book, "The Espousals," on his tenth anniversary. He comments, in the third person, on his ten years of happiness:

Ten years today has she been his;  
He but begins to understand,  
He says, the dignity and bliss  
She gave him when she gave her hand.

The First Canto of the Second Book, "Accepted," resumes the story on the morning after Felix has been accepted. Patmore describes the lover's typical impatience at those things which seem to hinder him from seeking his love. Before he had come to see her, moreover, he had brought a pistol to protect his now important life!

The Second Canto introduces the lovable but irascible Aunt Maude. Before introducing her, however, Patmore gives us the strange comparison of a newly engaged girl to a bird set free from its cage. Both fear the freedom for which they have been longing. Paradoxically, they fear the restrictions which their new freedom will bring. The girl, despite the fact that she wonders whether she is glad that she said "Yes," realizes that it was wise for

He is her lord, for he can take  
Hold of her faint heart with his hand.

In this second canto, Felix makes a surprise visit to the Deanery and surprises Honoria, playing one of his songs on the piano. With the poise of one who knows that she is loved, Honor covers her momentary confusion beautifully. She mimics her Aunt Maude and tells of her more ambitious plans for Honor, than that of marrying Vaughan.
Vaughan, also confident of his charm since he has won the fair Honoria, upon meeting the aunt wins the irascible old girl over to his side.

"County Ball," the Third Canto, deals principally with a description of the Ball. In this canto, Patmore preludes the narrative with these discerning remarks on religion and marriage:

Maid, choosing man, remember this!
You take his nature with his name;
Ask, too, what his religion is;
For you will soon be of the same.

In Canto Five the ladies visit Felix's own home. Honor's visit to the place of which she will soon be mistress makes Felix all the more ambitious for that "unimaginable day." He glories in listening to others praise her for her charm, grace, and womanliness.

The next cantos deal with the reflections of the lover. In them we find many of his early ideas on love which later grew and blossomed into his wonderful philosophy of marriage.

Before dwelling on the wedding service, Vaughan reflects on the wonder of marriage and the joys of those who are faithful to its bonds:

I vow'd unvarying faith; and she
To whom in full I pay the vow,
Rewards me with variety
Which men who change can never know.

At the wedding Vaughan says,

I took the woman from the hand
Of him who stood for God, and heard
Of Christ, and of the Church his Bride,

and learns

how a man must love his wife
No less than Christ did love his Church.
The last Canto deals with the first few days of the honeymoon. Several little instances give Felix an inkling of the wonders that are his. His joy stems not only from his present happiness but also from a contemplation of future joys. Each day joins the other in a chain of bliss and felicity. One day the two meet Frederick Graham, the vanquished lover before mentioned, and Felix wonders if he would be as generous in receiving them as Frederick is, were their positions reversed.

The poem ends with an epilogue wherein Patmore praises the charm of the mature wife far above those of girlhood. The final lines are in praise of the wife who rejoices in praise of her child.

We have in the poem a narrative glorifying that love which ends in marriage. The Angel is woman. She brings to the home a sense of divinity. It lies within her power to transform the commonplace into something both practical and angelic. In this poem Patmore frequently breaks away from the story not to confuse us - but to give us his philosophy at the proper points.

Gosse classifies The Angel as a breviary for lovers. He claims that it was very superficially accepted by the majority of Patmore's contemporaries:

The curates and the old maids who were presently to buy the poem of Patmore as the sweetest, safest sugar-plums of their sheltered intellectual life, were themselves responsible for the view they took of The Angel in the House. They imagined the grim and sinister author to be a kind of sportive lambkin, with his tail tied in bows of blue ribband. 35

35 Gosse, op. cit., p. 73.
They did not take the trouble to inquire whether a deeper meaning lay in the poet's words. They saw only the poem's simplicity and entirely failed to see its complexity. 36

The more transcendental the philosophy, the deeper its roots must be grounded in the field of human capacity and experience. Because the philosophy found in The Angel in the House was to be the seed of the bloom found in The Unknown Eros, and because we should first acclimate ourselves before breathing the rare air of The Unknown Eros, a brief review of the philosophy of this poem of nuptial love will be helpful.

The poem was published in two parts: Betrothal appeared in 1854; The Espousals in 1856. As we saw it was the story of Felix Vaughan and of his love and courtship of the Dean's daughter. It is a poem intensely of its age. The ideal woman in The Angel bore a very accurate resemblance to the ideal fictional woman of the day.

For our purposes a summary of Burdett's complete explanation of the ideas found in The Angel in the House will suffice. He first shows Patmore as proclaiming love as an act of faith in a mystery. This act of faith was the beginning of all wisdom. All loves spring from God and are destined to return to Him and so in nuptial love we find the intimation of an immortal union. The Scriptures tell us that faith can move mountains. How much more can love do since love is the recognition of the mystery which faith confers. Thus he sees the hope of matrimony fulfilled in a new relation (the immortal

36 Ibid., p. 82.
union) for which it is the proper rehearsal. Love is also the key to the universe. It is not only the cause of civilization but the occasion of manners. In order to appreciate the full meaning that Patmore intended the 'her' to 'him' should be interpreted as the soul to God.37

Patmore distinguishes vice from virtue by noting that vice is passion in disorder while virtue is passion following its proper channels. In this creed he again differs from Plato. Plato regarded good and evil as two opposite forces while Patmore saw them as one original energy which is evil when disordered, and good when directed according to its proper goal.

The Angel in the House concerned itself with the position and right of woman, the holiness of love, and showed that through marriage one would be initiated into a deeper companionship of soul. The poem was a song of spiritual joy and a code for pure religion.

In an unsigned book review of Gosse's Life of Patmore, we find the following evaluation of The Angel:

The Angel in the House was entirely mature, and exhibits the perfection of the poet's first manner. Assuredly it does not merit the critical neglect which so long kept it obscure. Misled by the amatory and domestic subject, critics have failed to realize the lofty seriousness of its aim — which is nothing less than to vindicate the dignity of married love between Christ and the soul. Patmore following Pre-Raphaelite principles, resolved to relate a single story of modern domestic courtship and marriage, shrinking from no realism of detail. The sincerity of passion would enoble all.38

37 Burdett, op. cit., pp. 26 sqq.
Too many people consider this poem an over-elaborate, sentimental essay, or possibly a novel in verse. To make this philosophy of marriage the theme of a modern poem was more daring and original than anyone dreamed. Patmore, the only poet who considered wedded love worthy of serious song, was not without some recognition, although even at the height of his popularity he was only considered a minor poet, since fellow poets recognized his genius. From Tennyson to Hopkins they praised his power and simplicity, his subtlety and strength of intellect. The mixture of austerity and tenderness attracted these poets. Tennyson, Thompson, and Alice Meynell were most complimentary; and the dispassionate critic, Hopkins, referred to his second reading of The Angel thus: "To dip into it again was like opening a basket of violets." 39

All through the poem Patmore confesses himself to be the poet of a love made a willing captive of the marriage ties. He insisted that love was the only appetite which does not die in its gratification.

The ideas contained in the poem were brought to a close in "The Wedding Sermon," which anticipated the doctrine of the future "Odes." Praising marriage again Patmore says,

The love of marriage claims, above
All other kinds, the name of love,

and in furthering the analogy of Christ's marriage with the Church, he says,

Christ's marriage with the Church is more,
My Children, than a metaphor.

We are shown that true love has its home beyond the confines of the earth:

> For all delights of earthly love
> Are shadows of the heavens,

and so we must move constantly in accord with God's Will

> For 'gainst God's will much may be done
> -But nought enjoyed, and pleasures none
> Exist, but, like to springs of steel,
> Active no longer than they fell
> The checks that make them serve the soul.

In the early verses of the poem Patmore rejects the theory that marriage is a "compromise with frailty."⁴⁰

> That love, which does not wear the yoke
> Of legal vows, submits to be
> Self-ren'd from ruinous liberty.

In the latter verses he shows that if wedded love is regarded as a consecration of highest human virtue, and if those involved realize this and reverence the marriage ties as such, then they will be ready to pursue the heights suggested in this poem. The philosophy of love might be rooted in the home, but its branches spread to each phase of natural and supernatural life.

To a nation bred on amorous poetry from Sappho to Keats this poem seemed banal and was received with mixed emotions by Patmore's contemporaries. Burdett is very scornful of the English for their reception of The Angel in the House. He ridicules the gulf between public sincerity and public morals. They failed to give this concrete, universal subject applause whereas they were more than indulgent of a Shelley or a Blake. "So strange in the ear of a modern Englishman sounds the praise of those simplicities in which he

⁴⁰ Gosse, op. cit., p. 97.
professes all the beauty of religion and social order to be involved that he fails to accord it any recognition.

In Portrait of My Family, we read that Coventry Patmore wrote: "I have written only of my best. I have respected posterity; and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me." 42

To that we can add, should there be a posterity which wishes a divine philosophy formed from its own experiences, it will thank you.

41 Burdett, op. cit., p. 97.
42 D. Patmore, op. cit., p. 7.
CHAPTER II

THE MARRIAGE OF MYSTICISM AND REALITY IN THE UNKNOWN EROS

The Odes contained in The Unknown Eros form a body of mystical poetry which saw its forshadowing in The Angel in the House. In this book Patmore has achieved recognition of his genius. It might appear to the casual reader that there is a great gulf between the two works, but this is an unfair observation and no one will fully appreciate the message contained in the Odes if he has not overheard its whisperings in The Angel. In both poems we find hinted that root idea of his philosophy of love. Champneys agrees with this and says that the difference in the two is "of degree not of kind."¹ Over every page of each we can find the idea that marriage is the "perennial repetition of the drama of Paradise."²

In the Prologue to the Book I of The Angel in the House, Patmore says of nuptial love,

I have the very well head found
Whence gushes the Pierian Springs.

This well, married love, is indeed the Eros which is unknown and had never been tapped for poetic purposes before. The value to be gained from


drinking at this new-found spring is very healthful spiritually. Wheaton says that the Eros was to the soul of man what Tintern was to nature. 3

The musings on nuptial love begun in The Angel are carried into a higher sphere in The Unknown Eros. In this sphere Patmore moves with great strength and dignity, but it is not always easy to follow him. In the mystic symbolism of the earth, heaven, and man maintain a continual interplay. Throughout the poems Patmore expounds his belief that the relation of the soul to Christ as His betrothed wife is the key to the manner in which we should love, pray to, and honor God. His explanation of this belief and the mode of carrying it out are the subject matter of the odes contained in The Unknown Eros.

From the analysis of human love which forms the Patmorean philosophy we can trace his religious inference. Love transfigures life, and religion transfigures love. This analogy of Patmore's is supported by examples given throughout the odes and through these examples he proves that human love is a revelation of the love which God has for each of His creatures.

From beginning to end the theme is one -- human love as a revelation of the divine; the reconciliation of body and soul, in which matrimony is a type of the union wherein the man and the woman will realize his and her complete self (body and soul) in God. Every critic agrees that the Odes can be neither apprehended nor appreciated unless the relation between human and divine love is understood.

Alice Meynell feels that future generations will be able to understand

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and appreciate them when she says, "To prophesy that the odes of Coventry Patmore, shall be confessed a hundred years hence, high classic poetry, is assuredly to promise the critics of a hundred years hence high classic quality in their judgments."  

These Odes, best treated as a sequel to The Angel, are each closely related to the others. Their beauty and spirituality are unusual. Without breaking any continuity in mood most of these poems can fitly be read after a Kempis. Shane Leslie says, "No poet ever uttered such poignant memories of a dead wife. No medieval mystic had written more intimately of the human soul."  

Our first reading of The Unknown Eros shows it to be very beautiful poetry. The poems please the senses. A cursory glance gives no indication of the greatness of the contribution of these odes to the analogy of human and divine love. A close analysis dispels this lack.  

First, a brief analysis of the two books of The Unknown Eros as a preparation for a closer observation of each of the poems. The first book strikes the chord which sounds the preparatory period of the soul's progress. The crescendo begins with the delights and sorrows and sacrifices necessary to love. The forte is reached when the soul endures successfully those trials and sufferings that are the necessary purgation prior to its union with God.  

In the second book Patmore ignores the symbolism which he used so excellently in the first book. God and the soul now become the single melody.  

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In the following analysis of the odes on mystical love, Father Terrence Connolly's interpretation has been used as a basis for the author's interpretation unless otherwise indicated.6

This poet mystic knew love as very few knew or know it. His hunger after God left him unsatisfied in human love alone. That is why he conceived of God's relation to the soul as the Wooer and (at the soul's consent) a Husband,

Who woos man's will
To wedlock with his own and does distill
To that drop's span
The attar of all rose fields of all love.7

In the opening ode Patmore realizes that the song he has to sing will more than likely fall on deaf ears, despite the universality of his doctrine.

Therefore no 'plaint be mine
Of listeners none,
No hope of render'd use or proud reward,
In hasty times and hard;8

The first ode, "St. Valentine's Day," is one of the four nature odes on the seasons of the year. In this poem the coming of spring is the symbol of prenuptial love. The ode contains a beautiful description of the youth's first love. In the comparison of spring to first love we have the following

6 Conventry Patmore, Mystical Poems, ed. by Fr. Connolly.
7 Patmore, Mystical Poems, "Legem Tuam Dilexi."
8 Ibid., "Proem."
quotable lines:

O, Baby Spring,
That flutter'st sudden 'neath the breast of earth
A month before the birth;
Whence is the peaceful poignancy,
The joy contrite,
Sadder than sorrow and sweeter than delight,
That burthen's now the breath of everything,
Though each one sighs as if to each alone
The cherish'd pang were known?

In "St. Valentine's Day" there is a feeling of divine exultation.

Frederick Page says that this ode which contains the lovely parable of the earth in February quoted above, speaks of virginity as a difficult yet ideal life frequently imagined to be given up by the soul only on its awakening to the full life of the senses. 9 This poem contains the introduction to the theme of virginity found in the odes. In the first edition of The Angel he spoke thus of celibacy as compared to marriage:

But who with erring preference choose
The sad and solitary way,
And think peculiar praise to get
In heaven, where error is not known,
They have the separate coronet
They sought, but miss a worthier crown. 10

This is a far cry from the ideas on virginity contained in the Odes, wherein he praised that state in true Catholic spirit.

The doctrine of the necessity of sacrifice in love which is the subject matter for many of the later odes, is foreshadowed in the following lines in


"St. Valentine's Day":

And, lo, her lips averted from my kiss,
Ask from Love's bounty, ah, much more than bliss!

The completion of the marriage of May and Earth, which Patmore had urged in "St. Valentine's Day," "go to her summons gay," is consumated in "Wind and Wave." In this, the second of the symbolic nature poems, we see the spring of first love grown mature in summer and transfigured by sacramental grace. Here we have the overtones of the strong theme that Patmore invariably sang: marriage was not a remedy against sin but a glorious sacrament which permits a mediate approach to God.

He deems that love to be futile and barren which is not directed in its proper channels to God.

The wedded light and heat,
Winnowing the witness space,
Without a let
What are they till they beat
Against the sleepy sod, and there beget
Perchance the violet!

Once wedded love is so directed, however, it becomes a wonderful illumination of life:

She, as a little breeze
Following still Night,
Ripples the spirit's cold, deep seas
Into delight.

The final glory of this love is reached in the children begotten of it.

The last lines of this ode, of which Bridges said, "I never hope to write anything as beautiful...,"11 speak as follows of those children:

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And so the whole
Unfathomable and immense
Triumphant tide comes at last to reach
And burst in wind -- kiss'd splendours on the deaf'n ing beach,
Where forms of children in first innocence
Laugh and fling pebbles on the rainbow'd crest
Of its untired unrest.

In "St. Valentine's Day," spring is the symbol of first love; in "Wind
and Wave," summer is the sacramental marriage consumated; in "Winter," we
find that season the symbol of sacramental love of man and woman in the
reception of that grace which is the prelude to Eternal Life. As winter hides
beneath its mantle the beauty of the spring to come, so death hides the
wonders and the beauties of life to come:

It is not death, but plentitude of peace;
Hath less the character of dark and cold
Than warmth and light asleep,
And correspondent breathing seems to keep
With the infant harvest, breathing soft below
Its eider coverlet of snow.

Frederick Page has an entirely different interpretation of this poem.

He can see, though not obviously, a parable of the celibate life, living in
a cold world by faith in an unknown future.

Nor is the field of garden anything
But duly look'd into contains serene
The substance of the things hoped for, in the Spring,
And evidence of summer not yet seen.

Page urges, however, that if in pressing any interpretation the beauty
of this piece is spoilt, then, by all means, it should be abandoned. It is
a poem, if read in itself -- out of sequence -- which would not necessarily

need a mystical interpretation. In view of its place in the sequence of Patmore's idea it would seem as though it would require some sort of explanation and the one suggested by Father Connolly's notes does not mar the individual beauty of the poem.

Continuing in his sacramental aspect of marriage, Patmore, in "Beata," contemplates human love directly in its double aspect. The poem is spoilt if given in fragmentary quotations, hence, because it is so brief, it is quoted here in its entirety.

Of infinite Heaven the ray
Piercing some eyelet in our cavern black,
Ended their viewless track
On thee to smite
Solely, as on a diamond stabacite,
And in mid-darkness lit a rainbow's blaze,
Wherein the absolute Reason, Power, and Love,
That erst could move
Mainly in me but toil and weariness
Renounced their indistinguishable stress
Of withering white,
And did with gladdest hues my spirit caress,
Nothing of Heaven in thee showing infinite,
Save the delight.

In these fifteen lines we have the revelation of a purely spiritual love in which he again emphasizes the power of love to transfigure life. The idea of white refracted from a prism and breaking into constituent colors -- viewless to the eye until thus refracted -- is the symbol of God's infinite attributes becoming visible when reflected for man and woman. Again Patmore has woman assume the noble dignity of being God's agent in showing man the way to Heaven.

Patmore continued the theme of the delights of love in "The Day after Tomorrow." In this the most delicate of poetry, we see that love's delights
are a parable of the divine delights and that human love shall be fulfilled in Eternity.

This poem offers some difficulties of interpretation. Page says that it is supposed to refer to the reunion of beloved souls in Heaven. He believes that it is the anticipation of a literal reunion rather than a figurative one. Thus the day after tomorrow would be the day after tomorrow rather than Eternity. Connolly's interpretation that it is Eternity is more logical in the light of the symbolism of the rest of the odes.

One day's controlled hope, and then one more, And on the third our lives shall be fulfill'd!

Or again,

One day's controlled hope and one again, And then the third, and ye shall have the rein

all go to say that the perfect consumation of conjugal love is in Heaven.

Continuing the idea of death in "Tristitia" Patmore counts sloth as one of the deadly sins. He believes that the death of nuptial love is due to sloth. The idea of nuptial love dying as a result of sloth is a continuation of the same philosophy set forth in The Angel, wherein he said that man must continue in marriage the line of conduct toward his wife that he pursued in courtship days. Man shall be doomed for this spiritual sloth and laxness:

For else I should be hurl'd, Beyond just doom And by thy deed, to Death's interior gloom, From the mild borders of the banish'd world Wherein they dwell Who builded not unalterable fate On pride, fraud, envy, cruel lust, or hate; Yet loved too laxly sweetness and heart's ease, And strove the creature more than God to please.

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13 Fred. Page. Ibid., p. 775.
Death is once more the dominant theme in "The Azalea." This poem is a beautiful commemoration of the death of his first wife. In a dream within a dream he dreams that his wife is dead and awakens to the awful reality that she is dead! Even in this poignant utterance Patmore is aware of God's love. Fr. Connolly paraphrases the last line, "so sweet to myself that am so sweet to you," to read as it does in "Dieu et ma Dame": "Sweet to herself who is so sweet to Him."14

"Departure" is another of his mementos on the death of his wife, Emily, as is "Eurydice." In the former, the grief of Patmore is more human and he seems to lack the grace he needed to bear his loss. He is utterly amazed at his wife's desertion of him:

But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd:
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

In "Eurydice" we have the allegory built upon Orpheaus' search for Eurydice as his own aimless wanderings after his first wife's death. These poems are so human in their character and deal so directly with the emotions that they are within the bounds of everyone's experience.

Patmore returned to the idea of divine love in "The Toys." The love and solicitude of the father for his son is compared to the love of God the Father for His children. The poem is also one of those which contain the perfect mingling of the sternness and tenderness which so characterized

14 Patmore, Mystical Poems, ed. by Connolly, p. 170.
Patmore: after his son has disobeyed him he

struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken 'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own.

The comparison of the human father and the Divine Father comes in the
closing lines of the poem:

To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberst of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commandments good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay
Thou'llt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

"Tired Memory" brings Patmore back to the death of Emily. Father
Connolly says it is "literally a page of his spiritual biography," and in
his struggle to reconcile his second marriage he suffered as they suffer in
whom "intensity of human passion is joined with a fierce determination to be
faithful to God."15 The pathos in these little poems is overheard rather than
spoken to be heard. In this poem Patmore becomes aware of the fact that he
must sanctify his sufferings:

15 Patmore, Mystical Poems, ed. by Connolly, p. 175.
In agony, I cried:
'My Lord, if Thy strange will be this,
That I should crucify my heart,
Because my love has also been my pride,
I do submit!

We have spoken before of Patmore's final separation from Emily when he was received into the Catholic Church. We also noted how deeply he felt this cleft as expressed in "A Farewell." This sentiment is in perfect agreement with the thesis that since conjugal love and its union are chiefly spiritual, it will be effective only in a meeting of judgments and wills. He does not give up complete hope of her salvation:

Perchance we may,
Where now this night is day,
And even through faith or still averted feet,
Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazed meet.

A return to the supernatural was effected in "The Two Deserts," wherein Patmore scathingly denounced scientific inquisitiveness at the expense of divine faith. He says later, in "Crest and Gulf," that man's woe is resultant from his rejection of God and truth. Life fails to hold any significance for those who fail to conform to His Will. Although God's power is limitless to lead man when his will conforms to God's Will, He is completely powerless to stop man's trend to evil because He decreed that man shall have free will:

Nathless, discern'd may be,
By listeners at the door of destiny,
The fly-wheel swift and still
Of God's incessant will,
Mighty to keep in bound, tho' powerless to quell,
The amorous and vehement drift of man's herd to hell.

We finally return to the central theme, that of the relationship
between man's soul and God, in "Let Be." This and the succeeding odes in Book I deal with the awful purification which is the necessary prelude to supernatural contemplation. In one of his essays Patmore insists that there is no outward difference between the common man and the known saint. One can call to mind the Good Thief in the line, "and grace will sometimes lurk where who could guess?"

He further develops this idea and goes on to say that the only measure of the power of the soul for God is the strength of its passions:

And that which you and I
Call his besetting sin
Is but the fume of his peculiar fire,

He fiercer fighting in his worst defeat,
Than I or you,
That only courteous greet
Where he does hotly woo,
Did ever fight, in our best victory.

He finishes this piece of wisdom by being grateful that God knows everyone for what he really is.

The natural question which arises from this philosophy is the question of the mystery of divine grace and the explanation of the degrees of perfection in the souls of man. Patmore retains a balanced view on the matter and says over and over again that God gives to each sufficient grace and he will not give up hope regardless of how many times he falls.

Should Heaven withdraw, and Satan me immerse
Of power and joy, still would I seek
Another victory with a like reverse.

This alternation between victory and defeat marks the soul's passage on earth. Yet if our victories are the result of fear, they will be negated.
Love must be the motivation of spiritual achievement. With love in the background repentance will carry spiritual delights:

Yet what returns of love did I endure,
When to be pardon'd seem'd almost more sweet
Than age to have been pure.

Defeats can be accepted with Christian resignation for God's love will always pursue the penitent. The impenitent is the object of His pursuit also: "Come back, poor Child; be all as 'twas before." If we make the slightest gains in the battle we will receive the reward of our love for God, despite the number of setbacks that we receive.

After travelling the road of purgation the soul is perfected so that it is ready for union with God and because it never lost complete hope, in spite of its defeats; it is ready for that mystical attainment. All our hopes and prayers will be fulfilled a hundredfold in that direct union with God:

... lo I caught
(Oh, quite unlike and quite beyond my thought,)
Not the quick, shining harvest of the Sea,
For food, my wish
But Thee!

While the odes in Book I have been loud in their praise of virginity, they have been chiefly concerned with the divine institution of marriage and its foreshadowing of a permanent union with Christ. "To the Unknown Eros" serves as a transition from Book I to Book II and it is also an introduction to the actual union of God with the soul. Many of the odes in Book I are on this theme but not on its application. This opening ode in Book II begins with the stirrings of divine love in the soul, which, at first, it does not understand:
What this breeze
Of sudden wings
Speeding at far returns of time from interstellar space
To fan my very face,

And why this palpitating heart,
This meaningless desire?

Rapture stirs the soul when it hears the whisper of the Unknown Eros,

This rapture of the sense
Which by the whisper bid

becomes a prophetic sign of the divine love to come -

Reveres with obscure rite and sacramental sign
A bond I know not of nor dimly can divine.

Even in this early stage of the romance, the soul recognizes the need
for sacrifice if love is to flourish. Sacrifice will receive its crown --
union of the soul with God -- if it is joyfully given. The sacrifices
needed in human love are poor parables of those required for the completion
of divine love. In this divine romance, however, there is a paradox; only
those who are willing to relinquish its comforts will ever taste its full joy:

There lies the crown
Which all thy longing cures.
Refuse it, mortal, that it may be yours!

And such may no man, but by shunning hold.

At the end of our renunciation we see God standing as the Eros ready to fill
the longing of the soul.

"The Contract" is an application of the principle that sacrifice is the
necessary requisite of divine love. Of this poem Burdett says:
Adam, the lover, is used symbolically for natural man whom God, that is Love, converts into divine manhood, since the dogma of the Incarnation contains not only an historic statement, but a mystery repeated in and personally to be experienced by every human being. After man's fall in Adam his eyes were blinded to the sun of God's love and become

Ye fiery throes, and upturn'd eyeballs blind
Of sick-at-heart mankind.

Despite this rejection God pursued His lady, the soul, and so man was redeemed by the voluntary sacrifice of the Incarnation. This miracle was accomplished when,

... A heaven caress'd and happier Eve
... her fruit forth bring;
No numb, chill-hearted, shaken-witted thing,
Plaining his little span,
But of proud virgin joy and appropriate birth,
The song of God and Man.

God made the initial sacrifice in the Incarnation. Now the soul must travel the road to achieve a union with God. The indispensible guide in this journey is the "Arbor Vitae," the Catholic Church. Once that union has been accomplished through the interior means of sacrifice and through the exterior guidance of the Catholic Church, that Church will be the infallible norm in judging the authenticity of man's intercourse with God. Thus the Catholic Church stands as it has stood always

A single tree.
Thunder has done its worst among the twigs,
but it has not been harmed and those that will find its doctrines

16 Burdett, op. cit., p. 138.
Rich, through rejected by the forest-pigs,
Its fruits, beneath whose rough concealing rind
They that will break it will find
Heart-succouring savour of each several meat,
And kernell'd drink of brain-renewing power.

The next ode, "Sponsa Dei," was probably suggested to Patmore by the beautiful "Canticle of Canticles" of St. Bernard. This poem abandons the parable and speaks of the direct relationship between God and man. The subject matter is bold. It is an interpretation of the love between the soul and God by an analogy of the love between a woman and man as husband and wife. It was a "transcendental treatise on Divine desire seen through the veil of human desire." The poet insists that this relationship includes both body and soul. Here we have the essence of the theme; the heart of the matter.

The joys, gladness, expectations, consolations of human love fall to nought in the glorious realization of the divine:

What if this Lady by thy Soul, and He
Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be
Not thou, but God.

The compressed joy and exultation which would occasion the reading of these lines are curtailed when we read the stern reminder that purity in love is essential and dare not be forfeited. The soul has the consolation of knowing, however, that it cannot be lost. This purity would have to be deliberately forfeited:

17 D. Patmore, op. cit., p. 213.
A reflex heat
Flash'd on thy cheek from His immense desire,
Which waits to crown, beyond the brain's conceit,
They nameless, secret, hopeless, longing sweet,
Not by-and-by, but now,
Unless deny Him thou.

The above lines contain the explanation of the sigh which runs through all human love, and "it is the reason why love promises more than it performs" because "its home is not here."18

The felicity felt in this poem is not a mood which frequently lends itself to description. But here the poet, in order to make it so intensely interesting, has had to have an eye "for the smoothest ripples on the lake" and must "wonder at every several color reflected by shadows in its depths" which most of us would ignore.19

Burdett, in summarizing what Patmore writes in "The Precursor," shows that this poem is the poetic treatment of what that was in prose. In it Patmore says that what is commonly taken as the end of passion is no more than its accident. The love which exists between God and the soul is the highest perfection of the love between bridegroom and bride. But the only way which we can understand supernatural truths is by the mediation and contemplation of their types in nature.20

This ode is magnificent in its simplicity. If only we could realize the simplicity of it. How wonderful life would be if we each recognized our

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18 Burdett, op. cit., p. 137.
19 Ibid., p. 35.
20 Ibid., p. 6.
position as the Bride of Christ.

Love, as we have seen in the earlier poems, in order to be a positive value which would bring delight and peace, had to be banded by the vows of marriage, freely and joyously taken. This idea of law is carried into "Legem Tuam Dilexi." In this poem we have a development of the spiritual delights which are the result of our joyous and free observance of the restraints of God's law.

Infinity, which terrified Patmore, became more tolerable to him when he considered God's nature becoming finite in the human heart and soul where He lives in His love and grace.

How full of bonds and simpleness
Is God
How narrow is He,
And how the wide, waste field of possibility
Is only trod
Straight to His homestead in the human heart.

God, infinite, loves man, finite, and so man is

Darling of God, Whose thoughts but live and move
Round him, Who woos his will
To wedlock with His will
To wedlock with His own.

Thus we can see that the relationship of God to man is most tender. Man is mean until he is given life by God's great interest in him. His love is so great that He is satisfied with nothing less than a mystical marriage in which He pours out the choicest sweetness of His love.

"To the Body" contains the root idea of all human love. The doctrine that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost meant much to Patmore. But Patmore goes even further when he says that such a body became the actual dwelling place of God when the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became
Man. The true significance of the body is ultimately derived from the fact of the Incarnation in which a human body gave form, as it were, to God Himself and was thus made holy beyond all our powers of imagination. Following this statement the body becomes "Creation's and Creator's crowning good". It is the infinite attributes of God made visible to man.

This sanctified dwelling place of God may have many pleasures which are not sinful because it is the

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Little sequester's pleasure-house} \\
\text{For God and for His Spouse.}
\end{align*}
\]

The body thus conceived becomes

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{So rich with wealth conceal'd} \\
\text{That Heaven and Hell fight chiefly for this field.}
\end{align*}
\]

In line with the teachings of many saints, he goes to say that man must die because of original sin but the soul of the elect will not be completely satisfied until it is rejoined with that body which helped it to achieve its position. The soul, then, "into its old abode aye pants to go."

He returns to the idea of the legitimate pleasures of the body in the closing lines of the poem when he imagines the bliss of those who have retained their baptismal innocence, since he, a sinner, has known such joy in these pleasures:

\[
\begin{align*}
O, \text{ if the pleasures I have known in thee} \\
\text{But my poor faith's poor first-fruits be,} \\
\text{What quintessential, keen, ethereal bliss} \\
\text{Then shall be his} \\
\text{Who has thy birth-time's consecrating dew} \\
\text{For death's sweet chrism retain'd,} \\
\text{Quick, tender virginal and unprofaned.}
\end{align*}
\]

The praise of virginity sounded tentatively in one of the earlier odes,
is given full chord in "Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore." The growth of this idea through the poetry is an excellent example of his growth in the Catholic Faith.

After an invocation for the grace to sing worthily of the delights of love Patmore warns of those who are not worthy to hear his song - those who have never experienced pure love, or those who have purposely forgotten it.

Early in the poem he cautions of a love based only on a physical attraction without the spiritual element. Such a love is insensible and doomed to death:

The magnet calls the steel;
Answers the iron to the magnate breath;
What do they feel but death!

Such a love when not divine becomes something less than human, and it will know no permanence:

The clouds of summer kiss in flame and rain,
And are not found again.

He continues to say that when a man falls in love with a particular human being and thus ceases to be in love with love immortal, he must then wear the crown of mortal love which has many limitation.

All love when directed to its source will be completely satisfied in the marriage between Christ and the soul: "The dainty and unsating Marriage Feast."

Continuing on with thought of those who have remained in love with love immortal, he compares the rights of Religious with those of Our Blessed Lady. These prerogatives
Heard first below  
Within the little house  
At Nazareth;  
Heard yet in many a cell where brides of Christ  
Lie Hid.

The following passage describes one such who has grown old in the service of God:

And where, although  
By the hour 'tis night,  
There's light,  
The Day still lingering in the lap of snow.

The need of virginity, and in the case of those who have "the lily sacrificed," - the virginity of thought - is developed toward the end of the poem. Then Patmore again returns to his thesis - human love as the precursor of divine love. He does this and does not detract from the glory of those who have chosen the better part. This human love, he believes, will heighten the soul's enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. God is our End whether our approach be mediate (through human marriage) or direct (through the religious life):

Of generous love, how named soe'er affect  
Nothing but God,  
Or mediate or direct,  
Nothing but God,  
The husband of the Heavens.

The sacrifices attendant on love, are brought under the spotlight in "Auras of Delight." Once again he decries human love which overlooks the spiritual and uses only the physical attraction. Man should never forget his dignity as the chosen spouse of God. A physical attraction that is basely material results only in unrest. His symbol of the frightful nuptials of a serpent and a dove as the union of such a perverted love is awful enough to
See, oft, a dove
Tangled in frightful nuptials with a snake;
The tortured know,
Now, like a kite scant-weighted, flung bewitch'd
Sunwards, now pitch'd
Tail over head, down, but with no taste got
Eternally
Of rest in either rain or in the sky,
But bird and vermin each incessant strives,
With vain dilaceration of both lives,
'Gainst its abhorred bond insoluble,
Coveting fiercer any separate hell
Than the most weary soul in Purgatory
On God's sweet breast to lie.

Even in his darkest moments, Patmore is never without hope. God is
Love and love is forgiving and merciful so the repentent sinner can remain
in Love's light:

And Him I thank, who can make live again,
The dust, but not the joy we once profane.

The climax of Patmore's message is reached in the Psyche Odes. In them
we find the dogma, God is Love, particularized. Father Connolly feels that
these odes should only be read by those who can digest the thought found in
the earlier poems. These poems will be appreciated by those who have made the
flesh subject to the will. Page says that there is nothing to be found in
the Psyche poems that cannot be found in the saints "except only Patmore's
levity."21

These poems are too poignant to relate anything but personal spiritual
experiences, so we can say truly that these poems are the real love story

21 Fred. Page, A Study in Poetry, (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey
of God and the human soul. Patmore worked in the Greek myths to support his contention that the suggestion of the Incarnation is most beautifully related in the stories of Bacchus and Perisphone. His appeal to pre-Christian evidence is noted in his choice of Eros and Psyche. The Greek myths seem to show more clearly that the soul was God's bride-elect. There it was confessed simply, whereas in the saints it was confessed more obscurely.22

In these poems we have the flower of human love which blossomed from the rod of virginity which sprang from the consideration of the root of divine love in man's physical nature. Patmore treats of the course of the courtship of God and the human soul. He shows how God plays the part for which the human lover has rehearsed.

The three poems describe the nature and consequence of the divine union between God and the soul. "Eros and Psyche" treats of this marriage as an actual experience; "De Nature Deorum" shows the bride seeking to know the nature of the Bridegroom and of the bond which unites them; "Psyche's Discontent" expressed the bride's realization that pain and suffering and a will in perfect conformity with the will of God are the essence of the Christian ideal of love.

In "Eros and Psyche" Patmore shows the soul will become united with God the moment she submits to His Will. We will not accomplish our desire of embracing God if we seek impatiently after Him as Psyche

Long did muse what service and what charms
Might lure thee, blissful Bird, into mine arms.

22 Burdett, op. cit., p. 137.
Such 'nets' do not catch God but rather should we gain Him by a deliberate act of the will by which we can prepare ourself for His Grace and then accomplish our end by deliberately assenting to His Grace:

    Tonight I would do nothing but lie still,  
    And promise, wert thou once within my window-sill,  
    Thine unknown will.

God, not we, does the pursuing:

    Wanton, it was not you,  
    But I that did so passionately sue.

Once we have actively participated in the receiving of God's grace in our souls we cry with Psyche:

    Kiss me again, and clasp me round the heart,  
    Till fill'd with thee am I  
    As the cocoon is with the butterfly.

After we have received God as our Lover, how often have we been filled with misgivings because it does not seem possible that our joy should be so great:

    How know I that my Love is what he seems!  
    Give me a sign  
    That, in the pitchy night,  
    Comes to my pillow an immortal Spouse,  
    And not a fiend.

Our love will not leave us in doubt for long and then our joy increases even more to know that He lives in us,

    I own  
    A life not mine within my golden zone.

Then we have misgivings again. We find it difficult to believe that God has been so kind to us:

    But, Oh,  
    Can I endure  
    This flame yet live for what thou lov' st me pure?
Inequality seems to be the necessary quality in his Great Romance as is essential to all love:

Much marvel I
That thou, the greatest of the Powers above,
Me visitest with such exceeding love.

God knows that we can grow saintly with the aid of His grace, for

Some power, by all but him unguess'éd,
Of growing king-like were she king-caress'éd.

Even then in our knowledge of our sins our wonder can't be stilled:

What is this reed
Through which the King thought love-tunes to have blown,
Should shriek, "Indeed,
I am too base to trill so blest a tone!"

But our Bridegroom has seen perfection in us to it is not ours to despair:

I'll not call ill what, since 'tis thine, is good
Nor best what is but second best or third.

Knowledge of our unworthiness cannot be pushed completely into the background

and we cry for pain that we may enjoy the bliss:

Bitter be thy behests!
Lie like a bunch of myrrh between my aching breasts.
Some greatly painful penance would I brave.

Thus we become God's completely and give ourselves to Him to do with us what
He will: "Thy love has conquer'éd me; do with me as thou wilt." Because we have reached such heights of spiritual delight our spiritual desolation will be terrible:

Thou leav'ست me now, like to the moon at dawn,
A little, vacuous world alone in air,

but,

When dark comes back my dark shall be withdrawn!
We can also draw consolation from the fact that God's ways are different with every individual:

'Tis all to know there's not in air or land
Another for thy Darling quite like me.

Our joy must be tempered for the multitude would not understand. We are warned:

Bitter, sweet, few and veil'd let be
Your songs of me.
Preserving bitter, very sweet,
Few, that so all may be discreet,
And veil'd, that, seeing none may see.

Frequently throughout "Eros and Psyche" Patmore struck the discordant note of the soul's fear that she might lose her love. "De Natura Deorum" banishes that fear by revealing the nature of God and the supernatural life of grace. If God is to depart from the soul, He does so only because He has been deliberately rejected. The soul can also be assured that God can love deeply where He has forgiven much.

When the soul contemplates loss of that close union with God she fears what she may do,

I'm foolish, weak, and small,
And fear to fall,
If long he stay away.

But although He seems to depart He has not really done so - only a perverse and deliberate act of the will can send Him away:

He did but feign to go;
And never more
Shall cross thy window-sill,
Or pass beyond the door,
Save by thy will.

And again we are told that we do not need to fear our past infidelity if it is
past and if we are sorry:

    Love is not love which does not sweeter live
    For having something dreadful to forgive.

The soul (since it is always conceived as the feminine) with all its feminine frailties was sought after by God:

    A woman is a little thing,
    And in things little lies her comeliness.

So we must cherish that which God loves in us, "and I with all He loves in love must be," because

    The immortals, Psyche, molded men from sods
    That Maids from them might learn the ways of God.

We must always be reverent and respectful of this love:

    Respectful to the Gods and meek,
    According to one's lights, I grant
    'Twere well to be.

The aspect of God's love is even more overwhelming when the soul learns the nature of God. Realizing her unworthiness, however, the soul pleads to suffer and labor so that she can prove her love for God.

    The third of these odes is an expression of the soul's realization that pain, suffering, and labor are necessary to the fulfillments of God's love. In "Psyche's Discontent" God bids the soul to "accept the sweet and say its sacrifice." Yet, the soul still prays for a separation from this overwhelming love. Such a prayer may be very dangerous and we are warned:

    Be prudent in thy prayer!
    A God is bond to her who is wholly his,
    And, should she ask amiss,
    He may not her beseeched harm deny!

The soul has grown quite strong in the love of God and desires an opportunity
to show her fidelity:

    Leave me awhile, that I may show thee clear
    How Goddess-like thy love has lifted me.

But again she is told, "Accept the sweet and say 'tis sacrifice," for in love lies our sanctification.

In these "Psyche Odes" we have human love shown as an element of divine affection. This is so simple that it is apt to be misunderstood. From the poems we can also glean the Patmorean idea that the soul is to God as man is to woman and thus man received God's reflection from woman.²³

We see, too, that earthly love was a realization in itself as well as an anticipation of divine love. Wedded love could be compared to two flames kindling each other and when they are united they soar to that height which is Eternal Love.

The sublimity of these excellent odes brought forth a hesitating criticism from Gerard Manly Hopkins. Asked for his opinion, Hopkins wrote to Patmore "that these poems belong to such new atmosphere that I feel it as dangerous to criticise them almost as the Canticles."²⁴

Patmore has, in these odes, conveyed the intimacy between God and the soul in very sharp figures. He never lapses into haziness. Despite their brilliance, however, the poems are never bizzarre.

The beauty of woman as the soul and the Bride of Christ reaches its perfection in Our Blessed Lady. "The Child's Purchase" is a hymn of praise

²³ Toland, op. cit., p. 11.
²⁴ Hopkins, op. cit., Letter LXXXVII, p. 199.
to her in "whom are reconciled in their perfection conjugal love, maternity, 
virginity, and the love of God."25 This glorious poem is a fitting finale 
to the poet's aria.

Patmore was exultant when speaking of this poem. He felt that the 
Blessed Virgin's marriage was wholly unworked poetically and this should not 
be so because hers is the marriage of which every other marriage if the 
symbol and the human counterpart. He felt that this ode was a poem on THE 
great subject. It is an absolutely perfect subject for poetry.

Wheaton says that this beautiful poem to Our Lady contains many passages 
which rival Dante's Vergine Madre. Certainly we do find Patmore rising to 
heights undreamed of in this exquisite ode.

Father Connolly summarizes the first thirty-five lines of the poem 
briefly. A mother gives her child a coin which he may spend on any trifle 
that delights him. Grown weary after many fruitless hours of search the 
child returns to his mother and returns the coin to her in exchange for a 
kiss. This parable is explained in that the poet, to whom Mary has given 
the gift of poetry, spends time unavailingly on themes of human love. Weary, 
he now returns to his Mother the gifts to her, asking only her love in 
exchange.26

The Incarnation, God's love-gift supreme, was achieved only through Mary's 
"Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

25 Patmore, Mystical Poems, p. 286.
26 Ibid., pp. 287-88.
Thou speaker of all wisdom in a Word
Thy Lord!

Her previous and subsequent silences, however, are beautifully described in the phrase, "voiceless blue." Before and after the Magnificat she held her peace but spoke her will when it was necessary: so that

The Head for which thy Beauty doff'd its rays,
To thee, in His exceeding glad descending meant,
And Man's new days
Made of His deed the adorning accident!

Because Our lady consented to carry God within her virginal womb, by right of her divine maternity she was raised above the angels:

My Lady, yea, The Lady of my Lord,
Who didst the first descry
The burning secret of virginity
We know with what reward!

Mary is even more than a creature just above the angels: she is all to everyone. A

Rainbow complex
In bright distinction of all beams of sex,
Shining for aye
In the simultaneous sky,
To One, thy Husband, Father, Son and Brother,
Spouse blissful, Daughter, Sister, milk-sweet Mother.

She is the perfected woman in whom all womanhood has been glorified:

The extreme of God's Creative energy;
Sunshing Peak of human personality;
The world's sad aspirations' one Success;
Bright Blush that sav' st our shame from shamefulness.

Those who approach the throne of God directly without first approaching Mary are scorned by the poet:

Unguess'd by the unwash'd boor that hails Him to His face,
Spurning the safe, ingratiant courtesy
Of suing Him by thee.
These people will be hapless because she is "Our only Saviour from an abstract Christ." As the star led the Magi to the stable in Bethlehem, Mary, the star of stars, will lead mankind to God:

Peace becoming star, by which shall come enticed,  
Though nought thereof as yet they weet,  
Unto thy Babe's small feet,  
The mighty, wandering disemparidised,  
Like Lucifer, because to thee  
They will not bend the knee.

In a beautiful image, the Virgin is imagined as possessed with God the Father, at the same time crucified with God the Son. This piece of imagery tells us that bliss and pain can no more be severed than members of the Trinity can be dismembered: 27

And His sweet--fearful bed,  
Rock'd by an earthquake, curtain'd with eclipse  
Thou shar'dst the rapture of the sharp spear's head.

In such a position Mary is the Mediatrix of all grace; therefore she is

Queen wife  
Sitt'st at the right hand of the Lord of life  
Who, of all bounty, craves for only fee  
The glory of hearing it besought with smiles from thee!

So this poet who sang so gloriously of woman, finally sang of the beauty that was to be found in Mary alone. He aptly ends this ode by telling her so, for in her was fulfilled God's intention for every soul:

Mother, who lead'st me still by unknown ways,  
Giving the gifts I know not how to ask,  
Bless thou the work  
Which, done, redeems my many wasted days,  
Makes white the murk,  
And crowns the few which thou wilt not dispraise,  
When my clear songs of Lady's graces rang,

27 Bregy, op. cit., p. 158.
And little guess'd I "twas of thee I sang!
   Vainly, till now, my pray'rs would thee compel
To fire my verse with thy shy fame, too long
Shunning world-blazon of well-ponder'd song;
But doubtful smiles, at last, 'mid denials lurk;
For which I spell,
"Humility and greatness grace the task
Which he who does it deems impossible!"

Looking back over the material of the Odes we can see that Patmore's coherence was always undisturbed. In his own phrase his message was "Dieu et ma Dame." It is important to keep the two in their proper sequence as Patmore always did. God is always first and nature, woman, man continually are interlaced.

The Unknown Eros has shown that love and religion are his two masters. These two were not only the spirit behind his work but the very motivation of his life. Gosse says that if we are to trace his work as the biography of his earthly journey, we can neglect the evidence and contribution of neither.28

From The Angel in the House to The Unknown Eros Patmore has aimed at nothing less than an exposition of the divine mystery of wedlock. In marriage the ideal of nuptial love is described with "the purity of a saint and the passion of a flaming lover."29 The essential subject of his poetry, then, was the soul and whatever was necessary to it. After mastering the flight at the lower levels, his soaring into the higher regions of divine love becomes certain and unwavering. And while in the ether he does not forget the ground: the moral note is seldom absent from these odes. Patmore continually

28 Gosse, op. cit., p. 19.
29 Ibid., p. 73.
speaks of preparation, delay, warning, reticence, -- all the necessary elements if we are to follow his flight into the arms of God.
CHAPTER III

THE AFTERMATH

The first taste of the philosophy found in The Unknown Eros brings many questions to mind: Where did Patmore get his ideas? How valuable are they? Are they practical? Will they apply to every phase of life? How have they appealed to the critics?

There is no denying that Patmore was a mystic if we use Maynard's definition of a mystic as one for whom no mysteries exist, because Patmore seemed to penetrate these mysteries and lay hold on reality. 1 His background in mystical reading appears to have been sufficient to treat these subjects mystically. For hours each day he studied the early fathers and the mystical saints. From them his imagination grasped the idea of Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul. For him the perfect symbol of this union was conjugal love. The relationship between these two unions filled him with ecstasy. He had the melody; he needed only the lyrics.

Wheaton says his doctrine is an amplification of Dante's "la a sua voluntade e nostra pace." But Dante stopped at peace. Patmore goes farther; he shows the joy and fruition which accompany the surrender of the soul to God in spiritual marriage. 2

Two centuries before Patmore began writing, another poet, Crashaw,

1 Maynard, op. cit., p. 273.
2 Wheaton, op. cit., p. 355.
had been filled with the magnificence of the Incarnation. To him the Incarnation was the central fact in the world's history. Not that Christ had died for our sins to satisfy God's justice but that God should stoop His glory to the meanness of earth by becoming Man. That God should have such passion for the soul of His creature startled him.

This doctrine affected Patmore in much the same way. His heart, too, was particularly open to the beauty and the truth of the Word made Flesh. Bregy quotes him as saying that this doctrine was "the only reality worth seriously caring for." This reality was beyond the imagination of the greatest poets. That God should use the channels of creation to beget Himself upon the glorious Virgin.

Through the realization of this doctrine God became credible and knowable. In this way Patmore was like a mystic. There certainly can be no doubt that he was influenced by many of the foremost mystics of the Catholic Church.

A glance at St. John of the Cross' "The Obscure Night of the Soul" will show that there are many parallels between the philosophy of the two:

Upon my flowery breast
Wholly for Him, and save Himself for none,
There did I give sweet rest
To my beloved one;
The fanning of the cedars breathed theron.

When the first moving air
Blew from the tower and waved His locks aside,
His hand, with gentle care,
Did wound me in the side,
And in my body all my senses died.


4 Bregy, op. cit., p. 92.
All things I then forgot.
My cheek on Him Who for my coming came;
All ceased and I was not,-
Leaving my cares and shame
Among the lilies and forgetting them.

Many of the prose essays, as well as his poetry, are touched with the beautiful
fire found in the writings of the saints. It is very evident that he spent
time in meditation upon their lives and works. More daring than St. John,
St. Teresa, or Crashaw, Patmore also took for his theme the spiritual beauty
of the body which Christ had redeemed from degradation.

The reality of the supernatural had affected Patmore even in his early
Protestant days. The root was there and Patmore's conversion to the Catholic
Church brought rain to the root so that it blossomed into the beautiful flower
of Catholic mysticism. The distance that separates The Angel from the Odes
exemplifies his growth under the light of the truth that he found in the
Catholic Church. Once he embraced this religion it became more than just a
hobby, and, like all mystics, he has a terrible awareness of sin.

Frederick Page says that Patmore is a Catholic in a greater sense of the
word than most of his critics give him credit for. He says that he is not
only a Thomist but also a Franciscan both literally and spiritually.5 This
mysticism which resulted from his entry into the Church of Rome was more than
a mere sentimental experience. It is also philosophical -- a "truth-seeing
contemplation."6

5 Fred. Page, "Coventry Patmore --Points of View," The Catholic World,
CXIII (1921) p. 380.
The passages of the mystical poems often explain themselves. The longing of the soul for God is shown to be partially satisfied and further encouraged by the symbol of human marriage.

In *Religio Poetæ* Patmore gives the eighteen steps necessary in the analogy between human and divine love. The last step consists in the indissolubility of the union of the two lovers when it reaches the perfect stage. In Patmorean mysticism the soul sees and finds in all creatures, God. In loving these creatures he loves the God behind them.

To those for whom marriage is nothing but a temporary expedient the philosophy found in the Odes on nuptial love will be nothing more than sentimental drivel. They will find this philosophy as effective as a moth beating its wings against a flame. But for those who see in this sacrament a wealth of graces, a means to God, to those, then, the message of Patmore carries enormous significance when he translates human love into purely spiritual regions.

To those for whom the flesh is an utter anathema - the chief foe of the spiritual - there will be a feeling of repulsion when this poet-mystic sings of "creations and creator's crowning good." These people will be nervous at an explication of his poetry and very suspicious of him.

Doubtless there will be few who possess the religious purity and the poetic spirit which are necessary to a full understanding of these Odes. This should certainly not be the case. Too many people are driven from God because He seems inapprehensible, but here in Patmore's poetry we have God brought

within the experience of every human being. He shows us that God is not only
within our reach but within our embrace.

By showing that what a lover sees in his beloved is only the projected
shadow of his potential beauty in the eyes of God, Patmore raises the body
to its true dignity as the temple of the Holy Ghost. Those who were able to
scale the heights with Patmore are frequently alienated from him because of
the intimacy with which he presses home this analogy of human and divine love.8

His real contribution to Western Literature lies in this fact: he places,
properly, the emphasis on the divine nature of human love. He mapped every
meandering channel of its outward grace and its inward grace.9

Patmore failed to be able to visualize any love until it was legalized
by Church and state. This outlook on marriage as a sacrament can be found in
his days outside the Church. The Angel in the House showed in which direction
his face was pointed. The beauty of the love that existed in this sacramental
state was the idea which flamed his imagination. Not a mere caprice or fancy
but a love in which all love centers. This love he felt exalted all his
poetry. In The Angel in the House it sanctified human love - in The Unknown
Eros it glorified divine love.

Patmore considered himself to be almost supernaturally commanded to devote
himself to the praise of womanhood and nuptial love.10 He conceived of a

8 Patmore, Poems, intro. by Champneys, p. xxxiii.
9 Burdett, op. cit., p. 11.
10 Frederick Greenwood, "Coventry Patmore," Blackwoods Magazine, CLXXXVII
   (1905) p. 815.
passion that was so purely innocent and so entirely spiritual that it could only find its full expansion in the bonds of matrimony. Because of these bonds the limitations placed on marriage made it capable of delights and discoveries more wonderful than the adventures of a Don Juan. The bond of marriage is the very crown of love.

Through each line of his poetry, however, we must see the symbolism which he intends. Under the actual picture beneath our eyes is the picture of that other marriage - the marriage of the soul. In human marriage, the purely innocent passion is so exalted that so long as each of the partners continues in its purely sacramental aspect, it will ever burn brightly.

For this reason Patmore was hailed as the poet of nuptial love, the singer of marital bliss. According to his creed, this marital happiness, as we have seen, goes farther and the love which exists between husband and wife is the earthly expression of God's love for the soul. This phase of life is so important that all others may be said to depend upon it.

Here we have the poet of Man and Woman; not, like Browning, of "Men and Women." Chesterton speaks of Patmore as the Catholic Browning. 11 His Catholic and catholic qualities raised him out of the Victorian era and made him a poet for all ages; his solution is the Catholic solution in every sense of the word.

Patmore emphasizes that the essence of marriage as a sacrament lies in

the betrothal of the man and the woman as soon as they confess "a full and mutual complacency of intellect, will, affection, and sense, with the promise of an inviolable faith."12

There is an aspiring boldness in Patmore's attitude in which he sees married love as the highest expression of perfect felicity. The bond of marriage is the very crown of the whole theme of love.

In his canons on marriage Patmore continually exalts woman as the unconscious revelation of spiritual truths to man. Her glory rests on the thesis that she is the means whereby man may obtain his full perception of Reality. She is the prophecy of some good beyond herself. The beauty and virtue which men admire in women is that beauty and virtue which he must induce in himself - that his soul will induce in itself that it might correspond to God's love.13

In his attitude toward woman he was in complete antagonism with his times. Men, in the order of being, was above woman, - on this he would brook no argument. Thus the soul represents the feminine in the spiritual life and woman surrenders herself completely to man in the natural sphere. It is very possible that the writings of the early Fathers gave him this seeming monastic contempt for women. For in this sense Patmore was a born tyrant, "but his severity was really not at variance with his doctrine."14 Woman should be

13 Page, Studies, p. 129.
receptive and passive; man, impressive and active. But as Lubbock goes on to say, "It is better to be a tyrant than to patronize." 15

Yet who will object to his view on woman when we see her as the female half of that harmony which opposes God. One of the severest criticisms on Patmore is that woman is never a mystery to him. And in his complete knowledge of her he raised her from merely being a perfect lady to a place above the angels and a little lower than the Madonna.

Patmore did not ignore children. They are considered to be the first purpose of matrimony and they transmit energy to the whole circle of family life. Patmore and all his wives were intensely interested in their children and always showed the greatest desire to love and educate them.

Patmore was singular enough to be misunderstood, and, according to his temperament, even to desire to be misunderstood. In spite of himself he won the praise of the discerning critics. From Alice Meynell to Francis Thompson, to his own daughter (and perhaps the severest critic of all) we hear his art and philosophy praised because he has so accurately yet delicately uttered the capacities of human passions.

He had achieved popularity by writing _The Angel in the House_, but he deliberately turned his back on his public to follow another course. On this road he found little company except, perhaps, Crashaw and Constable. 16

He did a very wise thing in turning his back on this popularity for it is by _The Unknown Eros_ that he will live if it is enough claim to immortality

15 _Loc. cit._

"to have written the most devout, subtle, sublimated love-poetry of our century."\(^{17}\)

Those that say The Unknown Eros is a revelation in literature and a gift to life seem to speak extravagantly.\(^ {18}\) The opinion that this volume is the most significant one to appear since Keats seems incredible.\(^ {19}\)

Burdett says that Patmore is one of the few poets who had any system of thought and that we should be very grateful for this.\(^ {20}\) No critic disagrees with Burdett on this.

In comparing Patmore with the other poets Gosse says that he differed from them because wherein they celebrated the liberty, freshness, and the delirium of love - whether physical or metaphysical - it was always in anticipation, never in a mood of possession, and never, never, never, within the bonds of custom. It falls to Patmore alone to beautify these ties in poetry. He was more than a poet in the abstract, rather, he was one of love made willing captive by the marriage ties.\(^ {21}\)

Patmore had assimilated much of the thought of many of the classical philosophers. Because of this Francis Thompson called him "an oceanic vast of intellect." He was able to see clearly both the wood and the trees. His

\(^{17}\) Bregy, op. cit., p. 161.
\(^{19}\) Louis Garvin, "Coventry Patmore," Fortnightly Review, LXVII (1897) 207.
\(^{20}\) Burdett, op. cit., p. vii.
\(^{21}\) Gosse, op. cit., p. 38.
poetry had the deep lucidity of the coral seas. Yet despite all this and the universality of his subject, Patmore is still the poet of a chosen few.

One critic said that The Unknown Eros was to Patmore what Paradise Lost was to Milton. It is the crown of his previous work and displays an entirely new power. The same critic in comparing these odes with The Angel says that when Patmore wrote these odes it was as though "a Pre-Raphaelite should suddenly start painting like a Rembrandt."22

The art of the Odes has compelled the admiration of all. It is commonly said that all Patmore's poetry is confined to The Unknown Eros. It is probably true that he is a poet remembered today by reason of the subtlety of thought and the simplicity of emotion found in the Odes. They suggest a virile and delicate intellect, and emotion wide. They display, at once, one of the saintliest and one of the healthiest minds in English literature.

Not all of the critics were favorable. Many turned from him because they did not understand him. The criticism of George Cotterell is representative of this type of criticism. He says that the odes contain nothing but theological narrowness. He maintains that the poet has doffed his singing robes to put on the priest's cowl. He continues by saying "if one were able to sympathize with Mr. Patmore's Romanist reconstruction of a Pagan idea, the difficulty one is conscious of might disappear."23 This is a criticism of little consequence because those who have read The Unknown Eros with the

23 George Cotterell, "Coventry Patmore," The Academy, XXXVIII (1897), 358.
proper sort of spiritual background find little or no difficulty. Those who
have not this background are not likely to see the symbolism behind the poems
and so again there will be no difficulty. 24

Patmore delivered his thought with a deliberate directness, without
any sort of hesitation. His good qualities were slightly offset by his
defects. He was so filled with his dominant idea that he narrowed the range
of his poetic powers. He thus becomes more keen and penetrating at the loss
of his inclusiveness and tolerance.

Symons tempers this criticism by saying that Patmore might be considered
narrow, for he has brought to blossom in a cultivated corner of a little
garden a rare flower whose color seems too pale for some but which the poet
thought to be the best loved by the Virgin. 25

Patmore did fall in love with his own analogy between human and divine
love. Every analogy will limp and like any other analogy, it has its
limitations. However, Patmore himself did not wish those who could not
appreciate what he had to say to look beyond the surface of his work.

In classifying Patmore's ideas in relation to his place in literary
history, we see that he is the poet of nuptial love, an opponent of woman's
rights (in the 'masculine' sphere), and a political reactionary. Despite
the impression which might be created by his poetry, he was not a weak
sentimentalist. He was an uncompromising, opinionated snob. He hated the mob.

24 There is at least one exception to this statement. Aubrey de Vere after
reading the Odes strongly suggested that they should be suppressed.

25 A. Symons, Dramatis Personae, p. 368.
despised poverty, and was constantly convinced of his own rightness.

In the odes which dealt with the social and political issues, Patmore was an uncompromising Tory. He indulged a continuous state of pessimism over the economic and political state of England. He constantly feared the rule of the mob. He was unreasoning in his attitude that whatever came from the multitude was unintelligent, unfeeling and impossible.

His attitude toward woman seems to contradict itself in his life and in his art. Patmore agreed with Victoria that all advocates of women's rights should be severely punished. He believed that woman was an unreasoning, emotional, scarcely intelligent creature. In all things she was man's inferior. Yet this irrational creature is the one which he glorified as wife and mother. It was this same 'unthinking' creature without whom he was incomplete as is borne witness to in his three marriages. These weaker 'vessels' were the ones that exerted the strongest influence on his life. From his grandmother to his third wife he seems to have been able to act only under their inspiration.

In his poetry the idea of the mastery of man is not forgotten. But in his treatment of woman as the weaker half of creation he is more kind than he was in actual life. He recognized the dual principle in nature and felt that the feminine half offered more philosophic material than did the masculine. As followed from this idea, woman's glory lay in her inferiority to man, to be a useful wife in the home. Thus if she is to be idealized she must be placed in her proper setting -- the home, hence, his domestic verse. Basically, however, Patmore really did love woman and so was able to rise
above this narrowness and really to glorify her in the Odes.

In the odes, woman faired better in more ways than one. She is a reflection of the Divine. In making the analogy between human and divine love, Patmore does not give woman any place on the Divine level. Unlike St. Thomas with whom, in his attitude on woman, he agrees on many points, Patmore forgets that man and woman are equal in the sight of God.

Reason and truth were the qualities, masculine, of course, which Patmore believed that he possessed in large quantities. In his conceit he believed himself to be an able composer and critic. And he is consistent in this attitude concerning the rights and prerogatives of the male over the female.

If this description pictures a glowering, hateful male, it is in error. In personal matters Patmore was an optimist. He loved humor and those who knew him speak highly of his sense of humor. He was also an idealist and despite his seeming arrogant and dictatorial ways, he was a good Catholic and in all ways submissive to the authority of the Church.

Patmore should be grateful that posterity has overlooked many of the condemning facts listed above and remembers him, rather, as the laureate of wedded love. His place in literature rests both on The Angel in the House and The Unknown Eros. The two are complementary. Married love was his theme and it was strikingly original in that it had never before been made the central theme in the work of any of the great poets. He sang of the glory of the wife and mother in a day of decadence. Despite the fact that his theme seems strange, he gives us a philosophy which is within the range of all human experience. He began at Sarum Close, and from the Deanery there he
climbed to the summit of Catholic mysticism. He is obsessed with the idea of love, but unlike most of the love poets he does not leave us with a vague and hazy notion of love. The moods of love occasioned by courtship are unified and fulfilled in the sacrament of matrimony.

In making this nuptial love his religion and philosophy, he sees human marriage foreshadow the divine union. In this philosophy he merely reiterates the doctrines of the early Fathers of the Church, the Saints (especially St. Bernard) and the mystics.

The relation of the love of God to the soul is the prototype of the relations of lovers before and after marriage. In the human love we have the period of courtship, with all its setbacks, and finally the marriage. In the Divine Order God also courts the soul, and it suffers many setbacks until it reaches the summit of Divine love which is God Himself. Both types see sacrifice as the measure of love; but God's love is without measure. Love thrives on association, and so God gave us His Only Son so that souls might reach Him. As the human lover forgives, and loves the forgiving, so God—and how much He has to forgive.

The symbols and parables which Patmore uses are richly mystical. In many different ways he tells us that love is the most gratifying of gifts and that God is Love!

Despite his ethereal flights Patmore was a very practical person and does have a message for all who will receive it. Actually he is kind to the 'mob' which he supposedly despised.

Of those who were not frightened off by Patmore's haughty manner, some are left to praise—others to criticize. All agree upon his individuality
in thought and action and many agree respecting his consistency but there the concord ends. Many of those who are lavish in their praise of the Odes condemn The Angel in the House for being sentimental, trivial, and uncompromising. Many who enjoy The Angel criticize the Odes in that they are confused, unintelligible, and obscure. Others feel that the analogy between human and divine love has been carried beyond due bonds, that these poems are too graphic and vulgar.

Today we are more lenient with Patmore. Many critics now feel that he will receive his measure of appreciation both for his ideas and for his literary achievement; for his mastery of the poetic art, and the originality of his verse. Today our background allows us to be more tolerant of this arrogant poet. We have the Encyclical on Christian Marriage which develops St. Paul’s consideration of marriage between man and woman as the counterpart of Christ’s marriage with the Church. Woman has been ‘freed’ and has come down from her pedestal to be equal to man; we see what this freedom has done to love and to life in the home. Slowly but surely woman is dragging herself down to the very depths of degradation.

Glancing back, we see that Patmore was a poet who lived in a decadent, pessimistic age. To those dreary, unhappy people he gave an optimistic doctrine. He showed them the way in which they might maintain their sanity. His optimistic outlook on life led him to the Catholic Church for he saw that true and lasting optimism which would result from man’s relationship with God, which was as intimate a relationship as the one shared between husband and wife. He saw life whole and so was able to see the mountain tops instead of only the ground of the vale he might be in.
Modern love psychologists, who often are led to suicide as a result of their own confused principles based on Freud, would do well to go back to The Angel for their psychology of sex. If they have the background, they could do no better than to read The Unknown Eros. They will, within these two works, find sanity if they can imbibe of Patmore's sane doctrine: the most important relationship in life is that with God. The bridge necessary to complete this relationship is love.

Patmore stands to our age much the same as Dante stood to his. He has pointed the way to the regeneration of poetry and a regeneration of life. Theology and philosophy can lead man to God; but the average man needs to see Theology and philosophy assume a form so that they can live right along with him and thus become realities by which he can guide his actions on the road of life.

Patmore felt that the "proper study of mankind was woman." So woman is the root which is at the base of his philosophy. Not the siren, mistress, or madonna with child but the wife - the backbone of the home. When man and woman embrace the sacrament of matrimony their love shall grow with the years if they live in the sacramental aspect of this institution. Their love for each other will be strengthened by their love for their children. This love, then, becomes the foreshadowing of the love to come in which God becomes the Husband of each life. Love is the most universal and the most gratifying of all gifts in life. The perfect realization of love lies in the marriage state and through man's knowledge of the relationship that exists between the bridegroom and the bride he can come to know how he may achieve union with God which is the ultimate goal of life.
Patmore elevated dogma to song. The Incarnation as viewed through marriage was the true subject for real poetry. His devotion to the Blessed Mother stands as the crowning virtue of his poetic power. In her and in the Incarnation he has found the true meaning of life and love. It is often very difficult to follow Patmore to the feet of Our Blessed Lady and to the feet of Christ, because so many of us lack his experience and sense of assurance. We are too much like Psyche. But at least Patmore has pointed a way and has given us hope. Man pursues his beloved despite the obstacles she puts in his way. If her infidelity is past, he loves forgiving her for it. The same thought can be applied to God and Mary Magdalen, and to God and the Good Thief. They stand as guideposts on the way to our Love showing us the smoother way ahead if we can be persistent.

Patmore's philosophy is dazzling. It hurts to look at the sun. Once we have accustomed ourselves to what he has to say we will find that it is a most healthful air that his philosophy breathes. Nor is it one which does not allow room for the rarer man to breathe.
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C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS


The thesis submitted by Dorothy Kiley Bresnahan has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Nov. 14, 1949

Date

James J. Young
Signature of Adviser