

## COVENTRY PATMORE'S POETICAL THEORY

by

Rev. Thomas Peyton, M.M.

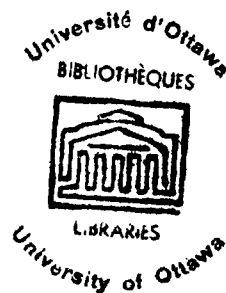
Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts  
of the University of Ottawa through the  
Department of English as partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

August

1962

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

*Degree conferred  
Sept. 6, 1962  
E. Thorneycroft  
[Signature]*



UMI Number: EC55777

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform EC55777  
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to express his gratitude to his director Dr. Paul Marcotte, Ph.D., for his kind and patient assistance. He would also like to express his gratitude to the staff of the English Department of the University of Ottawa for the background their lectures provided. Finally, gratitude is expressed to Father Terence L. Connolly, S.J. (R.i.p.), an outstanding scholar in this field, who generously made available for research the Boston College Library's Thompson Collection.

CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Name: Rev. Thomas Anthony Peyton, M.M.

Born: San Mateo, Calif., USA, Sept. 19th, 1931.

B.A. Maryknoll Seminary, Glen Ellyn, Ill., USA, June 1953.

M.R.E. Maryknoll Seminary, Maryknoll, N.Y., USA, June 1958.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Introduction	
I. Poetic Theory	
1. Poetic Apprehension.....	4
2. Poetic Inspiration.....	19
3. Poetic Expression.....	26
II. Poetry and Religion.....	46
1. A General Consideration.....	47
2. Poetry and Dogma.....	58
3. Poetry and Morality.....	67
III. Poetry and Personality.....	80
Summary and Conclusion.....	90
Bibliography.....	93

## Coventry Patmore's Poetical Theory

## INTRODUCTION

The present status of research into Coventry Patmore's Poetical Theory is best summarized by J.C. Reid in the following statement:

If Patmore's verse has rarely been submitted to close scrutiny, his writings on aesthetics, literary principles, metrics, architecture, politics and theology have been almost completely ignored save for the purpose of illuminating an aspect of the poetry. Yet it is possible to regard Patmore's prose as a substantial contribution to nineteenth century thought on a variety of topics.<sup>1</sup>

The writings that Mr. Reid is referring to are Patmore's critical essays which he began to write as early as 1845. These essays appeared in such magazines as the Edinburgh Review, Fortnightly Review, St. James Gazette, National Review, British Review, North British Review, and Merry England. Patmore's essays were occasional in appearance, and, in an effort to insure preservation of his central critical principles, Patmore selected from his previous essays those he considered significant and published them

---

1. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry, pp.8-9. Italics mine.

## INTRODUCTION

in a single volume together with some new writings. This volume entitled, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae, and other essays, was first published in 1889, eight years before his death. In 1895, just one year before his death, Patmore published a small vade tecum type volume of aphorisms and brief observations entitled, The Rod, The Root, and The Flower. These two volumes contain all the critical principles that Patmore wished to hand on to posterity.<sup>2</sup>

There are several reasons which can be put forward to explain why these two critical volumes, relatively small as they are, have not attracted the literary attention that such critics as Francis Thompson, Herbert Read, Theodore Maynard, Terrence Connolly S.J., and J.C. Reid consider they deserve.

Patmore is still potential...

This the more remarkable because no poet since Wordsworth and Coleridge, not even Matthew Arnold, had such a clear conception of the poet's function.<sup>3</sup>

Among these reasons are three which are worthy of mention.

---

2. Paul Franklin Baum, "Coventry Patmore's Literary Criticism", University of California Chronicle, p.245.

3. Herbert Read, Collected Essays in Literary Criticism, p.315 & p.317.

## INTRODUCTION

The first is Patmore's Catholicism, a factor which has prejudiced or slowed up the critical evaluation of most of the members of the Catholic Literary Revival. The second is the popularity of his "The Angel in the House" which tended to brand Patmore as simply another typical Victorian. The third is the style of the essays themselves. This last reason, their style, is certainly the most significant one, and the reason which directly concerns this paper.

It may seem strange that such a scholarly and dedicated critic as Patmore should have chosen a form of essay that appears to be a series of conclusions without premises, and a sentence structure which is aphoristic rather than explanatory. However, the distinctness of his style is a direct result of the essays' contents and Patmore's own critical approach rather than any personal rhetorical failings. E.J. Oliver gives a good explanation of the reasons for Patmore's condensed yet challenging style in the following words:

One characteristic of his prose, which has made it impossible to confine it within the limits of a separate chapter, is that the thoughts and feelings in it not only arose from the meditations of a long life,

## INTRODUCTION

but are in some sense a commentary on that life, for they recollect his dominating impulses...<sup>4</sup>

This above explanation should not be taken as an indication that Patmore tended to be an impressionistic critic, rather the phrase "commentary on that life" should be understood as indicating the close connection between Patmore's theory and his own practice of that theory. Patmore's critical prose, and especially the two volumes he published at the end of his life, represent the fruit of a life-time of constant analytical thought and faithful adherence to that thought. Patmore's insight gained through a life-time of study and meditation and reinforced by the testimony of his own experience is his strong point. Patmore's critical insight is not drastically original, but it is significantly deep. It is an insight which strives to reaffirm the importance of certain basic principles as indispensable norms for the evaluation of an artistic product, and in particular, a piece of poetry. Patmore indicates the direction of his insight in the following words:

To-promulgate sound principles of criticism is one of the most serviceable offices that can be performed to

---

4. E.J. Oliver, Coventry Patmore, p.175.

## INTRODUCTION

literature. There is in everything a positive as well as a relative excellence. To judge of positive excellence requires a knowledge of the principles and elements of the thing criticized, whilst to judge comparatively is a mere empirical test applied according to the experience and capacity of the individual.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in evaluating the distinctive style of Coventry Patmore, one must first consider what Patmore was trying to say. He used his essays to state his own insight into the principles governing the nature of art - especially poetry - the relationship which great art - and great poetry - must have with life. As the result of some fifty years of reading and studying, these principles tended to be more ultimate and hence were economically terse in their statement while being universally inclusive in their extension.

He did not aim at producing a well-rounded critical system, but at ~~pathily~~ , suggestively and forcefully restating basic truths about literature and about the relationship between art, life and religion, and this he did admirably.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that an essay deals with the statement of an ultimate principle would limit its reading to a process of careful study, and this fact would thereby limit its popularity. However, in the case of Patmore there is an

---

5. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.183.

6. Ibid., p.202.

## INTRODUCTION

additional difficulty, and that is his purpose in revealing these rediscovered principles. Patmore had more in mind when collecting his essays than simply presenting an argument for their place in the field of criticism. Patmore was not arguing for his principles as Macauley, Newman, or Arnold might argue; rather, he was calling attention to these principles as self-evident in themselves but susceptible to being overlooked because of the particular zeitgeist of the time.

It is very easy to speak splendidly and profusely about things which transcend speech; but to write beautifully, profitably, and originally about truths which come home to everybody, and which everyone can test with common sense; to avoid with sedulous reverence the things which are beyond the focus of the human eye, and to direct attention effectively to those which are well within it, though they have hitherto been undiscerned.. ..is a very difficult attainment.<sup>7</sup>

Such was the difficulty that Patmore saw facing the writer of critical prose. This difficulty arose for him because he wanted to "direct attention effectively", that is, he wanted his readers to come to an experiential rediscovery of a self-evident principle. As a result of this desire, he was content with stating his conclusion or

---

7. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae, and other essays, p.123.

## INTRODUCTION

principle, and then supporting that conclusion or principle with corollaries rather than premises. Corollaries were, so to speak, "proof of the pudding" while premises were logical arguments. From the corollaries, he hoped to give his reader the delight and satisfaction of a rediscovery made in life - rather than the forced acceptance of mere argument. For Patmore, the critical principles he spoke of needed no explanation, for they were self-evident - that is, self-evident after they were tried by personal experience. And so it is that the important connection between Patmore's own literary life and the principles he stated becomes such an evident and vital factor in his essays as noted by E.J. Oliver on page two of this introduction. Patmore was content to state his principles and then illustrate these principles with examples taken from his own literary experience gained from reading, discussions, personal creative efforts, and life itself. What Patmore attempted to effect by such an approach was a reform of the literary taste of his own day. He wanted his reader not just to reason with him but to catch the self-evident proof of experience that his principles included.

## INTRODUCTION

A few infallible and, when once uttered, self-evident principles would at once put a stop to this sort of representation among artists; and the public would soon learn to be repelled by what now most attracts them, being thence - forward guided by a critical conscience, which is the condition of "good" taste.<sup>8</sup>

Together then with the normal difficulty that would result from a style trying to state ultimate principles as succinctly as possible, there is the added difficulty in Patmore's statements of principles arising from his desire to write so that the self-evident may attract in an "effective" manner, that is, through corollaries rather than premises and definitions.

Such, therefore, is the difficulty of Coventry Patmore's style. He does not argue, but he does present evidence. He does not define, but he does state principles. He does not explain, but he does analyze. And as a result of this distinct way of expressing himself, Patmore's essays have lent themselves to only spot analysis. As J.C. Reid expressed it, up to now his prose has simply been used to elucidate parts of his poetry - and usually those aspects taken from his prose are not the principles but the corollaries.

---

8. Ibid., p.3.

## INTRODUCTION

Patmore remains a challenging figure, unsusceptible to neat cataloguing either as a man or as a poet. Yet the amount of serious critical writing on his work is exceptionally small: the very superfluity of occasional appreciative articles is a hindrance to full understanding of his achievement.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to discover in his collected essays and aphoristic statements the body of principles by which he wrote his own poetry and which he used to evaluate the poetry of others.

The true significance of Patmore's literary criticism is not so much in his individual judgments (interesting and important as they are) as in the small but genuine body of principles on which those individual judgments were based.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with this purpose, three chapters are planned. The first chapter deals with the "Poetical Theory" itself, that is, his strictly poetical principles explained and defined in their relationships to the process of poetic creation as he conceived it. The second chapter, "Poetry and Religion", and the third chapter, "Poetry and Personality", are intended to further relate his concept of poetry to religion and to the poet himself. These latter

---

9. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.8.

10. Paul Franklin Baum, "Coventry Patmore's Literary Criticism", University of California Chronicle, p.255.

## INTRODUCTION

relationships are not arbitrary; they occupy a very important place in his "Poetical Theory". For Patmore, any criticism of poetry needed a supplementary relating to life and that which ultimately explains life - religion. These supplementary relations were the corollaries of Patmore's body of critical principles, corollaries in the sense that Patmore's concept of true and great poetry logically lead to his discovery of the vital connections he enumerated between "Poetry and Religion" and "Poetry and Personality". As "corollaries" these two chapters are meant to complete the explanation of Patmore's "Poetical Theory".

Remembering the previous discussion concerning Patmore's "style", it will be clearly a difficult task to define his terms. In dealing with his concepts and the notes of those concepts, a tentative definition must at times lead to a final definition, and, at other times, several partial definitions will have to precede a complete definition. This approach is necessitated by the highly concentrated thought contained in Patmore's essays. This concentration is the result of his expression of personal insights rather than of logical explanations. Nevertheless, these insights do constitute a consistent body of poetic theory,

## INTRODUCTION

though often the central principle which a group of insights reflect can not be fully defined until one has first understood the contexts within which these different insights occur. For example, the complete notes of a particular idea or principle will not always appear in the same essay. Consequently, in this paper a definition or final explanation will have to follow the exposition of several key concepts found in different contexts or essays dealing with different corollaries. However, this present approach of gradual defining has a distinct advantage in so far as it allows the reader to grasp the extension as well as the depth of Patmore's "Poetical Theory".

And finally it may be stated that though Patmore's "Poetical Theory" represents a relatively small body of principles, its depth and extension is not small. Patmore is one of those who is best described by J. Middleton Murry's term, "a pure poet". That is one who does not lose himself in abstract and ideal perfection, but rather seeks through his poetry, and hence through his poetical theory, "to see and feel what life is". His essays thus represent an unflinching and consistent attitude toward poetry which reflects a critical tradition both Christian and humanistic

## INTRODUCTION

that has never ceased to invigorate English poetry throughout its history despite the contemporary zeitgeist.

In his conception of great literature as achieving a degree of impersonality beyond the ordinary emotional responses...in his recognition of order and control in successful but apparently lawless verse, he looks forward to the writings of such critics as Eliot and Leavis. Despite changes in taste, and shifts in values, which outmode some of his premises, a large part of his general critical statement still stands.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.191.

## Chapter I

## POETICAL THEORY

Father Calvert Alexander, S.J. showed a penetrating insight into Coventry Patmore's poetical theory when he stated, "It was Patmore's achievement that he reconciled these two tendencies, mysticism and the scientific spirit".<sup>1</sup> In regard to the mystical tendency, Patmore's concept of poetry emphasized the subjective and the intuitive nature of poetic knowledge; and in regard to the scientific tendency, Patmore's concept of poetry explained the psychological activities involved in the process of poetical creation. On the one hand, then, Patmore defended the highly personal and the unique kind of truth contained in poetic expression; on the other hand, he insisted upon a definite scientific awareness of what faculties and activities that process of poetic expression involved.

This blending of the two tendencies of mysticism and the scientific spirit is itself the result of Patmore's concept of the essential business or function of the poet.

---

1. Calvert Alexander, S.J., Catholic Literary Revival, p.56.

## POETICAL THEORY

"His function is to bridge the gulf between severe verity and its natural enemy, feminine sentiment."<sup>2</sup> By "severe verity" Patmore was referring to philosophic and theological truth or those ultimate spiritual truths and mysteries which explain man's life. By "feminine sentiment" Patmore meant a poetical expression whose only purpose was to voice emotional responses to reality. Therefore, the poet's function was to "bridge the gulf", that is, to express truth which was both an insight into reality and into the person of the poet as he was reacting to that reality. In other words, Patmore wanted the poet to be sufficiently aware of his experience, himself, and his art in order that he could write poetry which would be a balance of significant thought and deep emotion. Patmore's poetical theory, as expressed in his essays, aimed at pointing out how the poet could achieve this necessary combination of insight into reality and true self-expression. In keeping with this aim, Patmore's discussion of his poetical theory revolved about a few key concepts and the relation of these concepts to the process of poetic activity. Therefore, this present

---

2. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.339.

## POETICAL THEORY

chapter, dealing with an explanation of Patmore's "Poetical Theory", has been divided into three sections. These sections, "Poetic Apprehension", "Poetic Inspiration", and "Poetic Expression" are designed to direct attention towards Patmore's key poetic concepts as they are related to Patmore's conception of the poetic process.

## POETICAL THEORY

## Section 1

## Poetic Apprehension

The principal concept in the first phase of the process of poetic creation is "real apprehension". "Real apprehension" may be tentatively defined as an intuitive grasp of truth made by the intellect of the poet. This real apprehension is the formal cause of the poem in so far as the poem is the expression of the real apprehension for the purpose of fully knowing that real apprehension. In discussing the real apprehension, then, three areas must be explained. The first is Patmore's concept of the intellect and how it operates; the second, the nature of the intuition made by the poet's intellect; and the third, the kind of truth which the poet apprehends.

To begin with, Patmore uses the term "intellect" to designate a faculty different from the one commonly designated by this term. For Patmore, the "intellect" is a special non-reasoning faculty distinct from the "memory" and from the "understanding", the latter being the faculty

## POETICAL THEORY

of discursive reasoning.

The intellect, the understanding or discursive reason, and the memory, it need scarcely be said, are three distinct faculties...Intellect, though it is constantly spoken of as synonymous with the understanding, is really an incomparably rarer quality...The intellect discerns truth as a living thing...without anything that can be properly called ratiocination.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, though Patmore's understanding of "intellect" includes the notion of truth as a proper object, his "intellect" differs in a twofold manner from man's other spiritual faculties; it operates by a non-reasoning process and its truth is a "living truth", not the truth of abstract essences. For now, a "living truth" may be described as one which is seen in some of its relationships to other truths at the time that that particular truth impresses itself upon the person of the poet.

Although the intellect does not operate by ratiocination or the process of discursive reasoning, the poet can deliberately set about to use his intellect. The first thing the poet has to do in order to use his intellect is to give his "attention" to some external reality. This giving of one's "attention" to some reality is a conscious suspension of active thought or reasoning while at the same time

---

3. Ibid., p.289. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

continuing to concentrate or look at a particular piece of experience or reality. Obviously, this concept of "attention" indicates that the operation of the "intellect" is a type of contemplation, but without reasoning. "Attention" itself is a kind of meditative disposition which arrests the poet's active reasoning and concentrates the external faculties of the poet upon some piece of external experience.

Despite his endeavor to give a coloring of philosophic logic to his view of 'apprehension' in such essays as 'Attention' and 'Real Apprehension', he is, in fact, only describing, out of his experience, the poet's 'wise passiveness' before natural phenomena. The poet in contemplation is submitting himself to the facts of human life and Nature, seeing them anew.<sup>4</sup>

The necessity of the poet's "attention" being attached to some real reality or definite piece of experience is most important to Patmore's poetic theory. The poet's "attention", as the beginning of his intellectual activity in so far as it is a necessary disposition, is not simply a form of daydreaming or a means of escape from reality. Rather, "attention" is the focusing of all the receptive powers of the poet, and especially the intellect, on the poet's own experience. "Attention" therefore

---

4. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry  
Patmore, p.120. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

demands that the poet be selective, that is, that the poet concentrate on what he considers a significant area of his own experience. In short, "attention" is a conscious act of the poet by which he suspends active reasoning and attaches his receptive or sensing powers, and especially his intellect, to a definite area of experience for the purpose of discerning truth. Through the exercise of "attention", the poet becomes a man with a definite purpose - to prepare himself for the apprehension of a "living truth".

In the eyes of fools there is no such foolishness as the knowledge of things of which they know nothing; and from such he who attends faithfully to his own true business will probably have much to suffer...He will also have to sequester himself from many natural and innocent interests and pleasures, in order to have time for the great learning, which is usually of slow acquisition, and the result of patient listening and of the hardly acquired habit of suspending active thought, which is the greatest of enemies to attention; for "good thoughts are the free children of God, and do not come by thinking."<sup>5</sup>

The above statement by Patmore offers a summary of the previous explanation of "attention". The statement is a warning of the discipline which the poet must be willing to accept. This discipline of "attention" arises

---

5. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.248.

## POETICAL THEORY

from the seriousness of the poet's task or his "true business" previously explained as the gaining of insight into truth and into himself as effected by that truth. This true business demands that the poet be selective, choosing a definite area of his experience. Once having chosen his area of experience, the poet must suspend "active thought" or the process of thinking and devote himself to "patient listening". In other words, the poet, having selected a particular area of his experience and having quieted any process of active thought, must still patiently wait for that moment of real apprehension or intuition by the intellect.

The moment of real apprehension or intuition of truth is in one sense a moment of great frustration to the poet, for, though he is aware of great learning having taken place, he is not aware of exactly what that great learning is until he has found a way of expressing his real apprehension in a poem. To understand this frustration, the act of real apprehension, or the mode of operation of the intellect, must be examined. Patmore described the act of real apprehension in the following passage.

## POETICAL THEORY

But contemplation - a faculty rare in all times, but wellnigh unheard of in ours - is like the photographic plate which finds stars that no telescope can discover, by simply setting its passively expectant gaze in certain indicated directions so long and steadily that telescopically invisible bodies become apparent by accumulation of impression.<sup>6</sup>

The intellect's operation is described by the words "become apparent by accumulation of impression". These words describe the intellect, within the passiveness of attention, discerning truth as a living thing. It's operation, then, is a sudden grasping of spiritual truth gained from the experience of the poet without any reasoning process of abstraction taking place. In short, the operation of the poet's intellect is a type of intuition of truth, not truth in its essence, but truth as it has impressed itself upon the poet. Patmore calls the intellect the faculty of "direct vision". By this he means that the poet can not reason his way to the "living truth" which the intellect discerns. Rather, the poet is hit by the experiential evidences of a particular truth when, through the disposition of attention, the poet's experience suddenly gives way to a grasping of the truth itself. The experiential evidence of a particular truth is that experience

---

6. Ibid., p.286. Italic mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

which contains that truth as that truth is lived. Thus the intellect is a faculty which discerns truth as that truth has effected, through experience, the whole person of the poet, body and soul. The moment of discernment or apprehension is the moment of strongest impression, that moment of impression that can not be denied, and that moment of impression when, in a state of passive attention, the poet's intellect suddenly sees the evidence of truth give way to the living truth itself.

No one, probably, has ever found his life permanently affected by any truth whereof he has been unable to obtain a real apprehension, which, as I have elsewhere shown, is quite a different thing from real comprehension...The Poet is, par excellence, the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him, unless he can, as it were, see and touch it with the spiritual senses, with which he is pre-eminently endowed.<sup>7</sup>

The greatest perversion of the poet's function is to falsify the memory of that transfiguration of the senses and to make light of its sacramental character.<sup>8</sup>

Intellectual apprehension is thus a moment of truth when that truth comes alive to the poet because he "sees and touches" that truth precisely as it is effecting his very being. This moment of truth thereby brings a special experiential conviction of the reality of the truth

---

7. Ibid., pp.219-20.

8. Ibid., p.337.

## POETICAL THEORY

apprehended. This experiential conviction is a direct result of the manner in which the intellect has grasped its truth, that is, seeing and grabbing hold of the truth as part of experience and not abstracted from it. What the poet sees is not the essence of a particular truth but the experiential dimension of a particular truth, or the way in which a particular truth effects the poet here and now.

There are two ways of seeing: one is to comprehend, which is to see all round a thing, or to apprehend, which is to see it in part, or to take hold of it.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, I think that it must be manifest to fitly qualified observers, that religion, which to timid onlookers appears to be on a fair way to total extinction, is actually, both by tendency from within and compulsion from without - through heresies and denials of all that cannot be "realized" - in the initial stage of a new development, of which the note will be real apprehension, whereby Christianity will acquire such a power of appeal to the "pure among the Gentiles", i.e., our natural feelings and instincts, as will cause it to appear almost like a New Dispensation...<sup>10</sup>

Previously, in this present section, the intellect was referred to as a receptive faculty. This term "receptive" was used to emphasize its non-reasoning operative mode. However, the intellect's act of apprehension is a definite searching for truth. The difference between the

---

9. Ibid., p.282.

10. Ibid., p.224.

## POETICAL THEORY

searching of the intellect and man's reasoning faculty, the "understanding", is that the intellect takes hold of a part of the truth, that is, that part of a truth which has become real and personal to the poet through experience; while the understanding comprehends the universal aspect of a truth by abstracting from the experience to reach the universal essence. Patmore distinguished the mode of operation of the "intellect" and the "understanding" when he explained that the poet was "all vision and no thought, while the scientist was all thought and no vision."<sup>11</sup> The poet is thus "all vision" because his intellect sees truth as it is reflected through his own experience and takes hold of that truth at the moment of strongest impression. The poet's intellect does not work towards truth as the "understanding" does, but patiently awaits the accumulation of impressions made by a particular truth upon the person of that poet.

"The harvest of a quiet eye," and the learning of the ear which listens in a silence of thought, are the wealth of the pure intellect. And the fainter and the more remote the whispers which are heard in such silence, the more precious and potential are they likely to be.<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Ibid., p.222.

12. Ibid., p.293. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

So far, this first section has dealt with the important concept of "real apprehension" as it is the product of "attention" and the operation of the special faculty, "intellect". However, there yet remains the question of what the "real apprehension" is in itself, or the kind of truth that it is.

Patmore calls "real apprehension" the intuition of a "living truth". Previously this concept of a "living truth" was tentatively described as seeing truth as it effected the person of the poet, as opposed to merely seeing truth as an abstract essence. When the poet focuses his "attention" upon a particular piece of experience, he is, by that very fact, bringing his previous experience to that particular experiential encounter. But this previous experience contains knowledge of other truths. Thus, at any one moment of real apprehension, the poet already has within him a font of other truths gained through previous experience. Therefore, when the poet's intellect sees the truth of some particular experience impressing itself upon the poet, the intellect sees not only the present truth which is effecting the poet here and now, but also it sees the relationship of this particular and present truth to

## POETICAL THEORY

the truths of the poet's previous experience. Hence, when the intellect takes hold of a truth as that truth impresses itself upon the person of the poet, the intellect grasps or apprehends that truth as it is experientially related to the truths already experienced by the poet. Patmore described this seeing of truth in its relationships by the poet's intellect in the following manner.

The intellect...discerns truth as a living thing... It discerns with a more or less far-reaching glance the relationships of principles to each other, and of facts, circumstances, and the realities of nature to principles without anything that can be properly called ratiocination.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the truth apprehended in the act of real apprehension is a related truth, related to the truths contained in the previous experience of the poet. Thus, in its essential aspect, the "living truth" of real apprehension is an individual truth contained in experience and clothed with certain relationships to other truths contained in the previous experience of the poet.

The artistic confines itself...to phenomena and to the First Cause, and takes note of no relationships between the former and the latter, but such as are immediate and direct. The artist does not regard phenomena as unreal but rather as the only realities, apart from his soul and from God...The artist reveals reality

---

13. Ibid., p.289.

## POETICAL THEORY

whenever he exhibits or suggests the true relation of any object to the rest of the universe.<sup>14</sup>

However, these relationships between truths as found in experience are not completely objective relationships. Rather, as previously implied, these relationships are tainted by the present and previous experience through which the truths are grasped. This fact means that these relationships make the related truth of real apprehension a reflection of truth as seen through the poet's own peculiar background. That is, the real apprehension is a vision of related truth as only an individual poet could see that truth because only that poet would have the peculiar combination of experiences to allow the intellect to see those peculiar relationships. Patmore emphasizes the personal quality of the truth of real apprehension in the following passage.

No mortal intellect or genius is other than very partial, and, even in that partial character, imperfect. Absolute genius would be nothing more or less than the sight of all things at once in their relationship and origin; but most imperfect genius has an infinite value - not only because it is a peculiar mode of seeing a reflection of truth coloured but not obscured by the individual character, which in each man of genius is entirely unique.<sup>15</sup>

---

14. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, pp.44-5. Italics mine.

15. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio and other essays, p.291. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

The nature of the real apprehension, then, may now be fully explained as a reflection of a certain truth related to other truths within the living dimensions of the poet's present and previous experiences containing those truths. The word reflection emphasizes that the poet sees and takes hold of a truth in its relationships to other truths in the very act of experiencing, as opposed to gaining a knowledge of truth through universal abstraction. This reflection of truth is truth indeed, but truth given the added dimensions of relationships and experience. In short, it is a vision rather than an understanding of truth as only an individual poet could see it because he is an individual. Real apprehension is truth individualized by the poet experiencing it.

To conclude, then, this first section on "Poetic Apprehension", it should be pointed out that poetic apprehension or real apprehension is a complex concept used by Patmore to explain the poet's contact with and reaction to reality. There is evident in this complex concept a twofold emphasis. The first part of this emphasis is upon the poet's contact with truth, that is, philosophic and theological or spiritual truths as they effect man's

## POETICAL THEORY

life, and not as they are found in text books. And even though the real apprehension is a personal, individualized, experiential insight into truth; nevertheless, as Patmore points out, this fact of seeing truth through the eyes of a particular poet colours the truth but does not obscure it. And as will be seen in the following chapter on "Poetry and Personality", this colouring of truth is a kind of truth in itself and a very desirable element in poetry.

The second part of this twofold emphasis is an ordering of the poet's faculties with the intellect having the dominant and central position. The whole poet experiences truth, but it is the intellect which takes hold of that truth as related to the whole poet. In the very beginning of this section a reference was made to "feminine sentiment" or mere emotional response to reality. The opposite of this feminine sentiment is the masculine power of intellect. According to Patmore, poetry is a marriage of the masculine and feminine powers in man, but a marriage which always follows the principle that the masculine power of intellect must be the dominant and guiding force throughout the entire poetic process.

## POETICAL THEORY

The masculine power of intellect consists scarcely so much in the ability to see truth, as in the tenacity of spirit which cleaves to and assimilates the truth when it is found, and which steadfastly refuses to be blown about by every wind of doctrine and feeling.<sup>16</sup>

This twofold emphasis, if understood against the background of Patmore's attempt to achieve a harmony or balance of the poetic powers and appeals, is the key to understanding Patmore's own poetry and criticism.

Crabbe mistakes actuality for reality; Shelley's imagination is unreal. Coleridge...is always both real and ideal in the only true poetic sense, in which reality and ideality are truly one. In each of these poems, as in every work of true art, there is a living idea which expresses itself in every part, while the complete work remains its briefest possible expression, so that it is as absurd to ask What is its idea? as it would be to ask what is the idea of man or of an oak.<sup>17</sup>

---

16. Ibid., p.88. Italics mine.

17. Ibid., pp.102-3. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

## Section 2

## Poetic Inspiration

The mere fact that a poet has had a real apprehension of some truth in reality does not mean for Patmore that the poet can sit down and write his poem. What is yet needed before the actual work of poetic expression can begin is poetic inspiration. This poetic inspiration consists of a sudden illumination in which the manner by which the real apprehension can be expressed is discovered.

So I shall go on hoping that after years of thinking and note taking, as was the case in the composition of the "Angel", in the ripeness of time and knowledge, a sudden illumination will come, and I shall write the whole poem off as easily as a letter, as I did the "Angel".<sup>18</sup>

Here Patmore describes his own experience in writing poetry, an experience which demonstrates the relation which poetic inspiration has to the process of poetic expression.

As the above quotation implies, poetic inspiration or illumination represents the moment when the poet must decide in a practical manner whether to express his real apprehension or whether to suppress it. The reason for

---

18. Frederick Page, Patmore, A Study In Poetry, p.85. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

this moment of decision in the practical order is a discovery made by the poet's imagination, the faculty of poetic expression (to be explained in detail in the following section), of a satisfactory means of expressing the poet's real apprehension. Thus poetic inspiration is the imagination actually fitting a satisfactory plan of expression to the real apprehension lodged in the poet's intellect. The plan is satisfactory in the sense that the poet is aware, in general, that he has found the proper mode of expression for his real apprehension.

I don't at all see at present how the subject is to be treated, but I have the great negative qualification of knowing exactly how it ought not to be treated. And this perhaps is as much knowledge as it is good for a poet to have before the actual commencement of his work. For the discovery of the mode of treating a subject is a great inspiration and delight, and ought to be co-instantaneous with the actual composition.<sup>19</sup>

The terms "inspiration" and "sudden illumination" are not used by Patmore to make the process of poetic creation more a mystery than it is. Rather, these terms are used to indicate a further insight into the poetic process. This insight is an appreciation for the fact that the poet's own knowledge of all that his real apprehension

---

19. Ibid., p.85. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

contains is made more complete by the poetic expression of that real apprehension. Patmore expressed such an appreciation in the following passage.

It is no condemnation of the thought of Hegel that he is reported to have replied to some questions as to the meaning of a passage in his writings, that "he knew what it meant when he wrote it."<sup>20</sup>

Patmore's appreciation of the fact that poetic expression completes or clarifies the poet's own knowledge of all that his real apprehension contains is consistent with Patmore's concept of real apprehension. As previously explained, real apprehension is not conceptual knowledge. Rather, real apprehension is an insight into a living truth, that is, a particular truth as it relates to or impresses itself upon the poet himself. As a result, what the intellect takes hold of in a moment of real apprehension is a reflection within the poet of a unit of truth made up of various living relationships of truth to truths and of truth to experiences. Also, in connection with the concept of real apprehension, it must be remembered that the intellect's function of "taking hold of" is not an act of reasoned analysis and synthesis. That is, the intellect does not

---

20. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.293. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

actively reason to or put together the different relationships comprising the unit of truth or real apprehension. The intellect operates more like a camera which snaps a picture of the real apprehension at the moment of most vivid impression within the poet.

As a result of the above concept of the real apprehension and the distinct operation of the intellect in grasping the real apprehension, what the poet knows at the moment of real apprehension is a unique kind of experiential certitude about the reality of a particular truth. This unique kind of experiential certitude is a direct result of the poet having apprehended a particular truth in its living relationships as opposed to a knowledge of truth gained through abstracted essences.

A man may not be able to convey to another his real apprehension of a thing; but there will be something in his general character and way of discoursing which will convince you, if you are a man acquainted with realities, that he has truly got hold of what he professes to have got hold of, and you will be wary of denying what he affirms.<sup>21</sup>

Considering, then, the fact that at the moment of real apprehension the poet knows only a unique kind of

---

21. Ibid., p.282. Italics mine.

## POETICAL THEORY

experiential certitude having to do with the reality of some truth, the poet's knowledge of the real apprehension before poetic expression can be called "potential" knowledge. By potential knowledge is meant that the poet himself does not yet realize or fully know all the relationships which combine to make up the reality of the truth he has really apprehended. In contrast to this idea of a poet's potential knowledge, a man who knows a universal concept through the process of reasoning may be considered to have complete knowledge. That is, by the very nature of the reasoning process, the man knows the essential notes of that universal concept at the moment that he first knows the universal concept as such.

Patmore implies this idea of the poet's grasp of real apprehension being potential knowledge by describing the real apprehension in such terms as "whispers", "loving guess", and "accumulation of impressions". These terms indicate that the poet's knowledge of the real apprehension at the moment he grasps the real apprehension is far from being complete. Patmore describes the poet's real apprehension at the moment of "taking hold" as potential knowledge in the following passage.

## POETICAL THEORY

"The harvest of a quiet eye," and the learning of the ear which listens in a silence even of thought, are the wealth of a pure intellect. And the fainter and the more remote the whispers which are heard in such silence, the more precious and potential are they likely to be.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, in the light of the above explanation of the kind of potential knowledge which the poet has at the moment of real apprehension, the previously quoted statement in which Patmore agrees with the experience of Hegel, "he knew what it meant when he wrote it", takes on its full significance to Patmore's poetic theory. To go beyond the stage of merely affirming his real apprehension to a stage wherein the poet can fully know what his real apprehension is, the poet must express his real apprehension. But to express his real apprehension, the poet needs poetic inspiration or the discovery of the proper mode of poetic expression for that real apprehension. The terms "illumination" or "sudden illumination", then, stress the poet's sudden awareness of and delight in the prospect of coming to a full knowledge of his real apprehension and all that it contains by means of an adequate poetic expression.

The soul contains world upon world of the most real realities of which it has no consciousness until it is

---

22. Ibid., p.293.

## POETICAL THEORY

awakened to their existence by some parable or metaphor, some strain of rhythm or music, some combination of form or colour, some scene of beauty or sublimity, which suddenly expresses the inexpressible by a lower likeness.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude this second section then, poetic inspiration is neither a further insight into truth nor a type of private revelation experienced by the poet. Poetic inspiration is the poet's awareness that his imagination has found, in general, a satisfactory plan for expressing his real apprehension. The poet's own desire to fully know his own real apprehension is the ultimate "muse" behind the poetic inspiration. Thus, within the poetic process of creation, poetic inspiration is the beginning of the process of poetic expression whereby the real apprehension, resting deep within the soul of the poet, starts to work itself out into a conscious or knowable poetic expression.

---

23. Ibid., p.306.

## POETICAL THEORY

## Section 3

## Poetic Expression

The two previous sections of this chapter have dealt with the key concepts of "intellect", "real apprehension", and "poetic inspiration" within their respective areas of the poetic process. This last section which deals with the final phase of the poetic process, poetic expression, will be the most complex section. It will be complex in the sense that the explanation which it contains will have to involve several key-concepts presented in such a way that each helps to explain the other, the present phase of "poetic expression", and summarizes the entire poetic theory of Patmore. These key-concepts which must be so considered in this section are "poetic language", "poetic emotion", "imagination", the "inter-function" of the intellect and the imagination in the phase of poetic expression, and finally, "real words".

Since "real apprehension" is a unique kind of truth, poetic expression must be a unique kind of language. The essential purpose of poetic expression is to adequately express the poet's real apprehension.

## POETICAL THEORY

The most peculiar and characteristic mark of genius is insight into subjects which are dark to ordinary vision and for which ordinary language has no adequate expression.<sup>24</sup>

The poet's real apprehension is an insight into living truth, which means he sees a reflection of truth related to other truths within his own experience. Real apprehension is thus a grasp of truth in some aspect of its experiential reality, or as truth is a part of man's life. Therefore, because real apprehension is a real dimensional grasp of the reality of truth and not just a conceptual understanding of truth, ordinary language can not express the poet's real apprehension. And the reason why ordinary language is inadequate for poetic expression is because ordinary language is that language which man uses to express a conceptual understanding of truth, that is, the ordinary word is a symbol for a concept in the mind of its user. According to Patmore the only way the poet can adequately speak is by using language in which the words used express realities rather than concepts. Poetic expression thus requires language which conveys the experiential reality of truth rather than the concept of

---

24. Ibid., p.304

## POETICAL THEORY

truth. Patmore discovered this unique kind of language in the "language of religion".

Hebrew, Greek, Indian, and Egyptian religions all spoke in parables: and poets deal in images and parables simply because there is no other vehicles for what they have to say. "The things which are unseen may be known by the things which are seen," that is, by way of symbol and parables.<sup>25</sup>

The language of religion is an analogical language which expresses the higher spiritual realities by using the lower likenesses of the visible, material world as analogues for those spiritual realities. Patmore's concept of poetic language is the same as his understanding of religious language, a language of images and parables rather than of concepts.

However, Patmore's concept of poetic language as a language of analogy is based not only on the poet's task of expressing non-conceptual truth, but also upon Patmore's own religious insight into external nature.

And here it may be noted, by the way, that Nature supplies the ultimate analogue of every divine mystery with some vulgar use or circumstance, in order, as it would seem, to enable the stupid and gross to deny the divine without actual blasphemy.<sup>26</sup>

For Patmore experience is much more than mere sensation or

---

25. Ibid., p.295.

26. Ibid., p.306.

## POETICAL THEORY

scientific evidence, it is an analogue for Divine mysteries. Thus, to fully understand Patmore's concept of poetic language, one has to understand the similarity which he saw between the poet and the prophet. Both poet and prophet share the same task; namely, to testify to the living reality of spiritual truth. The difference between them is that the prophet has a moral responsibility to give testimony, while the poet has an artistic responsibility to express his real apprehension.

His [poet] intellect seems capable of a sort of independent sanctification, while his moral constitution usually enables him to prophesy without a Prophet's responsibility. The saint dreads lest he should receive praise of men for the holiness through which he has acquired his knowledge; the Poet understands very well that no one will or ought to think the better of his righteousness for his being a seer.<sup>27</sup>

The prophet or saint perceives the religious or sacramental character of external nature by means of his holiness, while the poet perceives the sacramental character of external nature by insight or real apprehension.

The Poet is, par excellence, the perceiver, nothing having any interest for him, unless he can, as it were, see and touch it with the spiritual senses, with which he is predominantly endowed.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, Patmore's concept of poetic language

---

27. Ibid., p.220.

28. Ibid., p.219.

## POETICAL THEORY

as a language of analogy using "images and parables" is not only an insight into the non-conceptual knowledge of real apprehension, but also an insight into the similarity of the functions of the poet and prophet - to testify to the sacramental character of external nature as an analogue of spiritual truth.

...the greatest of all functions of the poet is to aid in his readers the fulfilment of the cry, which is that of nature as well as religion, "Let not my heart forget the things mine eyes have seen." The greatest perversion of the poet's function is to falsify the memory of that transfiguration of the senses and to make light of its sacramental character.<sup>29</sup>

Further complicating the difficulty which the poet faces in his task of expressing his real apprehension are his own emotions which accompany his act of real apprehension. The concept of "poetic emotions" is meant to deal with the place of the emotions in poetic expression. In the present chapter, a discussion of poetic emotions has thus far been avoided, and the reason for this avoidance is Patmore's own insistence upon the proper place that the emotions must have in poetic expression.

The first two sections in this chapter dealt with what might be termed poetic conception. Thus, the essence

---

29. Ibid., p.337.

## POETICAL THEORY

of poetic conception consists in the intellect's grasp of the real apprehension. For Patmore, the truth of the real apprehension was enough to constitute the essence of poetry and the formal cause of the poem.

Poetry, in common with, but above all the arts, is the mind of man, the rational soul, using the female or sensitive soul, as its accidental or complimentary means of expression...Art indeed, works most frequently and most fruitfully through such appeals [emotional]; but so far is such appeal from being its essence, that art, universally acknowledged to be of the very highest kind, sometimes almost entirely dispenses with "emotions" and trusts for its full effect to an almost purely intellectual expression of form or order - in other words, of truth...<sup>30</sup>

The above quotation, then, clearly establishes the following points concerning Patmore's concept of emotions in poetry: first, an emotional content is not essential for poetic expression, but only accidental; and second, emotional content can be useful in giving the poetic expression a greater appeal.

The above position taken by Patmore on the "accidental but complimentary" role of emotions in poetic expression should not be viewed as an attempt to play down the emotions. Nothing is farther from Patmore's real intention. However, Patmore realized that if poetry were

---

30. Ibid., pp.20-1.

## POETICAL THEORY

to achieve a blend of thought and emotion, then the exact relationship of emotions to poetry had to be defined. Emotions are not of the essence of poetic expression. However, Patmore does not deny that the poet does feel the truth of real apprehension.

It is his [poet] pontifical privilege to feel the truth...He [poet] insinuates in nerve convincing music the truths which the mass of mankind must feel before they believe. He leads them by their affections to things above their affections.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the poet, precisely because he can feel the truth of real apprehension, is thereby in a position to be more effective in reaching the mass of mankind with his testimony of the reality of spiritual truth. Though the poet is essentially expressing his real apprehension, the poet's desire to be read and understood is a real concern for the poet. "But no true artist in words can do his arduous though joyful work except in the assured hope of having, sooner or later, an audience."<sup>32</sup>

Patmore gave the emotions an important but subordinate place within his concept of poetic expression. The poet does indeed feel the truth that he really apprehends, but he has to be careful lest his poetic

---

31. Ibid., p.339.

32. Ibid., p.114.

## POETICAL THEORY

emotions blot out the truth of real apprehension by becoming the end of poetic expression. Poetic emotions are a means to an end, for they enhance the poet's expression of truth so that the reader of the poem may be more easily led to experience the same real apprehension that is expressed in the poem.

Persuasive music [emotions] assisting commanding truth to convince - not God's chosen, to whom truth is its own evidence and its own music - but the Gentiles, to whom pure truth is bitter as hyssop, until, on the lips of the poet, they find it to be sweeter than honey.<sup>33</sup>

As a means to the end of poetic expression or as "accidental but complimentary" components of poetic expression, the emotions are subordinate to the masculine truth of real apprehension; and the poets who attempt to write poetry which appeals to the emotions only thereby place themselves outside the first rank of great poets.

In the first class, which contains all the greatest poets, with Shakespeare at their head, intellect predominates; governing and thereby strengthening passion, and evolving beauty and sweetness as accidents, though inevitable accidents of its operation.<sup>34</sup>

Having thus completed an examination of Patmore's understanding of poetic language as the analogical use of

---

33. Ibid., p.20.

34. Ibid., p.61.

## POETICAL THEORY

images, parables, and symbols to express the living truth of real apprehension, and having established the accidental but complimentary place of emotions in poetic expression, it is now possible to examine Patmore's concepts of the imagination and its relationship to or inter-function with the intellect in the phase of poetic expression.

Patmore clearly distinguishes and establishes the imagination as a separate faculty from the intellect in the process of poetic expression. He refers to the power of expression and to the latter as the power of discerning truth.

Shelley made a mistake in a totally different direction when he declared that the imagination is the power by which spiritual things are discerned: whereas the truth is that intellect is the power by which such things are discerned, and imagination is that by which they are expressed.<sup>35</sup>

Having established this distinction, Patmore goes on to describe imagination's function by the following expressions: "tracking likeness in difference", "seizes on the likenesses and images", and the "analogy-discovering faculty".

As the faculty of poetic expression, it becomes the function of the imagination to choose the right words

---

35. Ibid., p.295.

## POETICAL THEORY

for the required poetic language, that is, to choose those images, parables, and symbols that will adequately express the real apprehension.

Imagination is rather the language of genius: the power which traverses at a single glance the whole external universe, and seizes on the likenesses and images, and their combinations, which are best able to embody ideas and feelings otherwise inexpressible.<sup>36</sup>

The realm of the imagination is the external world of the senses, and it chooses from this realm concrete analogues which can embody the spiritual, living truth apprehended by the intellect. The imagination does not discover or discern spiritual truth itself, but tracks the lower likenesses of those truths as contained in the external world of the senses. Thus, imagination does not give the poet any further insight into truth, but rather the imagination makes the once inexpressible truth of real apprehension sensibly credible or fully known to the poet in the poem.

The poet's eye glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; and his faculty of discerning likeness in difference enables him to express the unknown in the terms of the known so as to confer upon the former a sensible credibility, and to give to the latter a truly sacramental dignity.<sup>37</sup>

---

36. Ibid., p.304.

37. Ibid., p.306.

## POETICAL THEORY

The above quotation is a description of the function of the imagination as the power of expression. The imagination is the "poet's eye", and having been presented with the spiritual truth of the real apprehension, "heaven", the imagination looks for those "likenesses" or images contained in the seemingly different world of the senses, "earth", which images can give the real apprehension sensible credibility. However, at the same time that the imagination is giving sensible credibility to the real apprehension so that the poet himself comes to fully know his previously "unknown" apprehension, the imagination is also demonstrating the sacramental character of external nature as analogues of spiritual truths.

Though the main burden of the work of poetic expression necessarily falls upon the imagination as the analogy-discovering faculty, nevertheless, the imagination should not be thought of as working in isolation within the phase of poetic expression. In other words, the function and influence of the intellect does not abruptly cease in favour of the imagination once the poet begins the work of poetic expression. On the contrary, the active

## POETICAL THEORY

influence of the intellect is most important to the successful operation of the imagination. The concept of the "inter-function" of the imagination and the intellect within the phase of the poetic expression is a recognition of this active influence of the intellect extending beyond the time of poetic conception.

The masculine power of the intellect consists scarcely so much in the ability to see truth, as in the tenacity of spirit which cleaves to and assimilates the truth when it is found, and which steadfastly refuses to be blown about by every wind of doctrine and feeling.<sup>38</sup>

It must always be remembered that the imagination is nothing more than a power of expression; it does not discern spiritual truth. As a result of its limitation as a power of expression, the imagination is vitally dependent upon the intellect's "tenacity" of spirit which "cleaves to and assimilates" truth. The imagination operates in contact with a spiritual truth which it did not discern, and, therefore, the correctness of expression displayed by the imagination in choosing its images is directly proportionate to the depth and assimilation of truth attained by the intellect. By depth and assimilation

---

38. Ibid., p.88.

## POETICAL THEORY

is not meant an immediate understanding of the real apprehension before poetic expression, but a vigor of intellectual activity that will not rest until it is completely satisfied that its particular real apprehension is fully known through adequate language chosen by the imagination. In speaking of the inter-function of the intellect and imagination within the phase of poetic expression, it can be said that the imagination depends upon the intellect for direction and encouragement.

The imagination as a scanning or discovering type of faculty, whose realm is all of external nature, can easily dissipate its power of discovery and selection if it is not made to search for the expression of a particular truth. In other words, the images discovered by the imagination can become an end in themselves, sought for their novelty rather than for the truth they express. The dominance of the intellect seeking to know its real apprehension prevents the imagination from running wild. The intellect presents the imagination with the spiritual truth to be expressed. Then, throughout the process of poetic expression, the intellect keeps that one particular truth of real apprehension before the imagination as the

## POETICAL THEORY

one truth to be expressed. The dominance of the intellect is thus directing and encouraging the imagination as it searches all external nature for adequate images of expression.

Stupid persons fancy they derogate from the supremacy of the pure intellect or genius by observing that it is always associated with a vivid imagination, which they regard as a faculty for seeing things as they are not...Imagination, though it is not, as Shelley says it is, the power of spiritual insight, is its invariable concomitant; and even that dull kinsman of genius, common sense, would feel sadly hampered in its endeavors to convey its perceptions to the minds of others, were it wholly without the faculty of speaking in parables.<sup>39</sup>

This concept of the inter-function of the intellect and imagination, based as it is upon the dominance of the intellect's insight into spiritual truth and a clear cut explanation of the function of the imagination as a subordinate but concomitant power of expressing that spiritual truth, is again the result of Patmore's desire to achieve a perfect blended poetry, a perfect blending of idea and expression, ontological truth and personal insight, thought and feeling. Such perfect blending is the task that Patmore gives to the poet and the way he opens to the poet for bridging the gulf between mediocrity

---

39. Ibid., pp.295-6.

## POETICAL THEORY

and greatness. Patmore's own insight into this "way to poetical greatness" is that balance or blending of different elements in a poem is not done from a viewpoint of considering all the elements as equals, rather it is accomplished by an understanding of which elements are essential and which are accidental, though complimentary. (This chapter has attempted to point out in the discussion of the various concepts which elements were essential and which accidental.)

Patmore's concept of poetic images being "the only real words", following as it does upon the concept of the inter-function of the intellect and the imagination, offers an excellent opportunity to summarize both this present section and the entire chapter.

Such likenesses, when chosen by the imagination, not the fancy, of the true poet, are real words - the only real words; for "that which is unseen is known by that which is seen," and natural similitudes often contain and are truly the visible ultimates of the unseen.<sup>40</sup>

Briefly, the reason why poetic images "when chosen by the imagination" become "real words" is because the imagination in its work of expression is always in contact with the

---

40. Ibid., p.221.

## POETICAL THEORY

real apprehension tenaciously held by the intellect.

The vulgar cynic, blessing when he only means to bray, declares that love between the sexes is "all imagination. What can be truer?...Because the imagination deals with the spiritual realities to which the material realities correspond, and of which they are only, as it were, the ultimate and sensible expression.<sup>41</sup>

Poetic images are "the only real words" not for what they signify or represent but for what they are - true analogues, "lower likenesses", the "ultimate and sensible expressions" of the real apprehension.

Therefore, poetic expression, viewed as "real words", emphasizes the poet's grasp of the experiential reality of a particular spiritual truth through his real apprehension. Through the disposition of "attention", the poet places himself in contact with external reality for the purpose of really apprehending some spiritual truth. This poetic disposition to seek in experience the reality of spiritual truths is the result of Patmore's own insight into the sacramental dignity of external nature. For Patmore, experience becomes the means for "seeing and touching" Divine mysteries.

Natural sciences are definite, because they deal with

---

41. Ibid., p.306.

## POETICAL THEORY

laws which are not realities but conditions of realities. The greatest and perhaps the only real use of natural science is to supply similies and parables for poets and theologians.<sup>42</sup>

The poet, facing the sacramental dignity of reality through his own experience, becomes a kind of "seer" or "prophet" who seeks not to explain as the theologian, but to testify to the living reality of spiritual truth and mystery contained analogically in the lower likenesses of external nature and human experience.

But in giving this testimony, the poet has to put aside the way of the scientist and become all vision and no thought. The poet is, therefore, a type of mystic whose knowledge of truth must come from truth as it is lived, that is, as it is seen and felt within his own life. This insight of truth impressing itself upon the whole person of the poet in actual life is real apprehension.

The truth of real apprehension is a living truth or a dimensional view of truth as it is related to certain other truths already a part of the poet. However, such a "related truth" does not mean that real apprehension is merely subjective truth; rather it means that real

---

42. Ibid., p.336.

## POETICAL THEORY

apprehension is real truth but grasped in a personal, experiential manner. Therefore, when the imagination finds the right image to express the real apprehension, the words of the poet become "real words". They are real words because they express real ontological truth, though coloured by the person of the poet, and because the very concept of poetic language demands that the poet express one reality with another similar reality, though only analogically similar. In short, poetic expression is real expression because of what it is and not because of what it says; and for this reason Patmore could summarize his whole concept of poetry in his definition of a poem - "the song that is the thing it says."<sup>43</sup>

For Patmore there is no artificial or decorative gulf separating the idea of the poem from its expression.

The Tempest, like all very great works of art, is the shortest and the simplest, and indeed, the only possible expression of its "idea".<sup>44</sup>

The idea of the poet and the expression of that idea have to be one reality - the poem.

In all his criticism, Patmore is reaching out towards an organic conception of poetry in which form and

---

43. Coventry Patmore, The Rod, The Root and the Flower, p.219.

44. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.304.

## POETICAL THEORY

content are integrally related, and in which the completed work has a unity which is its individuality.<sup>45</sup>

According to Patmore, then, the job of the critic is to see if indeed the poem contains "real words". The critic must determine whether the idea and the poetic expression of that idea are really one. This means that the critic is to look for interior finish or true poetic insight and passion adequately expressed rather than to give all his attention to exterior finish or technique, though Patmore always recognized the importance of the poet as an artist who must know his craft.

To a soundly trained mind there is no surer sign of shallowness and of interior corruption than that habitual predominance of form over formative energy, of splendour of language and imagery over human significance.<sup>46</sup>

It is only against the panoramic view of Patmore's entire poetic theory with its consistent stress upon formative energy over form, and human significance over splendour of language that Patmore's own conclusion to his poetical theory can be appreciated, even if not completely understood. That conclusion was best stated in the title to one of his odes, "Prophets Who Cannot Sing". The

---

45. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.88.

46. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.36.

## POETICAL THEORY

insight behind this title and its relation to the theory explained in this chapter are seen in the following words of Patmore himself.

It is true that the outward form of poetry is an inestimable aid to the convincing and persuasive power of poetical realities but there is a poetic region - the most poetical of all - which is incapable of taking the form of poetry. Its realities take away the breath which would, if it could, go forth in song; and there is such a boundless wilderness of equally inspiring subjects to chose from that choice becomes impossible, and the tongue of love and joy is paralysed.<sup>47</sup>

---

47. Ibid., p.224.

## Chapter II

## POETRY AND RELIGION

One need only glance through the critical writings of Patmore to realize that religion, and in particular his Catholic Faith, had a profound effect upon his poetical theory.

...it is easy to understand why what impressed Arthur Symons most when Patmore talked to him of his poetry was not what the poet said of technique, but 'The profound religious gravity with which he treated the art of poetry, the sense he conveyed to one of his own reasoned conception of its immense importance, its divinity.'<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this second chapter, "Poetry and Religion", is to trace the relationship between poetry and religion as Patmore conceived it. The tracing of this relationship will help to further explain the concepts of the first chapter and will reveal, in the sense of corollaries, some of the particular insights into the area of poetic subject matter which Patmore's poetic theory allowed him. In order to trace this relationship between poetry and religion, this chapter will be divided into three sections, "A General Consideration", "Poetry and Dogma", and "Poetry and Morality".

---

1. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.187.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

47

## Section 1

## A General Consideration

Patmore made no excuse for the fact that his poetry and literary criticism revealed a definite religious view of life. However, he was equally explicit in denying that he simply advocated poetry with a didactic strain.

The advocate of art for "the emotions and the emotions only", cannot be brought to understand that the alternative is not "didactic" art, which is as much a contradiction in terms as his own notion of art is.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the best statement made by Patmore concerning his own concept of the relationship between poetry and religion is found in his preface to his last and, what he considered, his most representative expression of ideas.

I make no ridiculous pretence of invading the province of the theologian by defining or explaining dogma...my work being mainly that of the Poet, bent only upon discovering and reporting how the "loving hint" of doctrine has "met the loving guess" of the souls of those who have so believed in the Unseen that it has become visible...<sup>3</sup>

The "loving guess" in the above quotation may be taken as the equivalent of real apprehension. Therefore, Patmore reveals that he has a definite purpose in writing about "doctrine", but his purpose is to express his poetic

---

2. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.22.

3. Coventry Patmore, The Rod, The Root and The Flower, p.v.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

reaction to doctrine, not to teach it as a theologian would. This "elevation of dogma to song", as described above in his quotation, was the ambitious task which Patmore set for himself as a poet, and as a prophet among poets.

Patmore was able to fit such a task into his poetic theory because of his "moral or religious" concept of poetry. This concept was a double aspect one which involved first of all a belief that poetry and religion coincided in producing a similar effect upon their experiencers - both attracted men to accept an ideal in life. "The common object of both religion and art should be the stimulating of men to the pursuit of the ideal life."<sup>4</sup> Patmore saw this attraction as a type of elevation of the aspirations of the experiencer to the acceptance of an ideal presented through the medium of a thing of beauty.

There is no true poem or novel without a "moral": least of all such as, being all beauty (that is to say, all order), are all moral...<sup>5</sup>

The other aspect of this "moral or religious" concept of poetry was the conviction that the ideal presented to man by a poem as a thing of beauty was a moral ideal, that

---

4. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.184.

5. Coventry Patmore, (quoted in) Ibid., p.185.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

is, an ideal which gave true insight into the real significance of love as revealed by God.

The implication is that the essential content of great art is moral or religious in that, without even fully comprehending the moral values implicit in their work, the great writers, the 'seers', by their understanding of human beings, and by their intuitive insight into the 'extra dimensions of existence', offer empirical proof of the reality of the truths expressed in religion.<sup>6</sup>

An analysis of Patmore's "moral or religious" concept of poetry shows an immediate dependence upon the poetic activity of real apprehension. Basically, poetry was moral because of what it was and what it did. Poetry gave man a true insight into life and led man to live by that insight. Therefore, poetic activity must start with a real apprehension which was an experiential and intuitive insight into the spiritual truths that are revealed by God to men of insight or "seers" through the very order of creation and the instincts of man himself.

The old commonplace that "art is essentially religious" is so far true as that the true order of human life is the command, and in part the revelation, of God; but all direct allusion to Him may be as completely omitted as it is from the teaching of the Board School, and yet the art may remain "essentially religious."<sup>7</sup>

Patmore's relating of poetry and religion could

---

6. Ibid., p.184.

7. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.18.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

have easily taken the path of Wordsworth's "worship of Nature" by which poetic experience became a substitute for religious experience. However, Patmore's knowledge of Catholic dogma would not permit him to be so duped. The similarity that Patmore perceived between poetry and religion could only mean one thing to him - that poetry was a kind of handmaid to religious truths and experience, giving to the latter a new dimension. For, in so far as poetry put man into contact with a living spiritual truth, then poetry is a God-given instrument by which certain abstract dogmas of Faith can be effectively expressed as experiences rather than mere formulae.

For a good many years past the worth of the philosopher and poet has been measured by the width of his departure from the fundamental truth of humanity. But the orthodox truth of humanity is a perennially young and beautiful maiden...The worthiest occupation of the true poet and philosopher in these days is to provide her with such new clothes as shall make her timely acceptable...<sup>8</sup>

Patmore looked at poetry, not as a means of philosophically proving the Faith he held, but rather as the only way of adequately expressing the "confirmations" or "corollaries" which the living of the dogmas of Faith daily showed to

---

8. Ibid., p.16.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

him. In short, Patmore realized that poetry could never be an act of Faith, nor a cause of an act of Faith, but it could stimulate man to live more fully the attractive life of Faith once he has that Faith within him.

However, in viewing poetry from its concomitant "moral or religious" function, Patmore did not consider that he was infringing upon the necessary freedom of art. Rather, he felt he was calling the poet's and the critic's attention to an aspect of poetry that was capable of revitalizing the poetry of his day and of giving to poetry that quality of excellence or greatness that all poets desired for their works.

In the very greatest poets, the standard of human law has been absolute sanctity...and every poet - the natural faculties of the poet being presupposed - will be great in proportion to the strictness with which, in his moral ideal, he follows the counsels of perfection.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Patmore never ceased to be a poet in his essays dealing with the relationships of poetry and religion. This fact is also evident from a reading of his essays which reveal such questions as the following, either implicitly or explicitly, directing his discussions. How can

---

9. Ibid., p.19.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

Revelation help the poet as a poet? How can poetry present a moral without becoming didactic? May poetry deal with immorality? Just how far can poetry go in presenting religious experience? Is there any correlation between the natures of religious and poetical experience? It would be naive to assert that Patmore conclusively answered these questions. However, he did seriously consider them, and in attempting to explain his own concept of poetry, he has given future generations of poets much practical food for thought.

Theodore Maynard has called Patmore the most considerable Catholic poet since Dante. He stands to our age much in the same position as Dante stood to his. He has not only pointed out the way for the regeneration of poetry, but has taken us a considerable distance along the road of achievement. He has dug again "the wells which the Philistines have filled" that we may drink the waters Chaucer drank.<sup>10</sup>

In general, Patmore considered the truths of his Faith as indispensable aids to the poet in producing great poetry.

"Everything which is not of faith is sin." Nature without faith, whereby the internal realities of Nature are acknowledged and discerned, is a nut of which the kernel is dust and corruption.<sup>11</sup>

The reason for this indispensability of Faith, that is,

---

10. Calvert Alexander, S.J., The Catholic Literary Revival, p.69.

11. Coventry Patmore, The Rod, The Root, and The Flower, p.35.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

some knowledge of Revelation, is Patmore's demand that true poetry contain "human and moral truths".

Herein lies the strength, and also the weakness, of modern romance: its strength, inasmuch as the charm of the mediaeval colour and mystery is unfailing for those who feel it at all; its weakness, inasmuch as under the influence of that charm both writer and reader are too apt to forget the need for human and moral truth; and without these no great literature can exist.<sup>12</sup>

However, Patmore's conception of poetry's "need for human and moral truths" does not mean that poetry is simply to be looked at as a dogmatic or moral tract put to verse. Rather, Patmore's demand was that human and moral truths become the background or the general experience against which the poet interprets and portrays life.

In the very greatest poets, the standard of human law has been absolute sanctity. The keynote of this their theme is usually sounded by them with the utmost reserve and delicacy, especially by Shakespeare, but it is there...<sup>13</sup>

Patmore is not saying that the poet must become a saint in order to write great poetry, but he is saying that, at least at the moment of poetic creation, the poet must have an outlook on life that approximates the outlook

---

12. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.62-3.

13. Ibid., p.19.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

of the saint, that is, a hierarchy of values based upon certain truths of Divine Revelation. The writer of true poetry need not live by these truths as the saint must, but he has to write by these truths. So convinced is Patmore of the writer's need for some knowledge of Divine truths for the writing of great poetry, that he further postulated the writers need for "grace".

When Homer and Milton invoked the muse they meant a reality. They asked for supernatural "grace", whereby they might interpret life and nature.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, in this a "General Consideration" of Patmore's concept of the relationship between poetry and religion, it can be said that the dogmatic and moral truths of religion afforded the poet a means of penetrating more deeply and feeling more passionately the experiences of life.

...so the greatest poets have been those the modulus of whose verse has been most variously and delicately inflected, in correspondence with the feelings and passions which are the inflections of moral law in their theme.<sup>15</sup>

And for this reason, no poetry making a claim to greatness could dispense with the valuable aid of Revelation, nor could the poet disclaim the enlightening influence of

---

14. Ibid., p.18.

15. Ibid., p.16-7.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

grace enabling him to write against the background of those spiritual truths.

As we all know, a man may be a very good poet, and very little indeed of a Saint. Therefore, I trust that I shall not offend the shade of Shelley, and such of his living successors as feel Shelley's abhorrence of "men who pray," if I say that, notwithstanding their heretical notions of what art should be, there are passages in the works of some of them which distinctly prove that, while writing thus, they were "under the influence of divine grace," of that supernatural spirit without which Nature is not really natural.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with his "religious or moral" view of poetry, Patmore sees the Divine truths leading the poet into the more significant areas of poetic experience. This fact is best exemplified in his own choice of a poetic subject - married love.

Whereas many earlier poets had tried to express the inwardness of love, its fervour and passion, by removing it from earth, or from the restraint of law, Patmore set out to show that within the limitations of Christian marriage was to be found the most rapturous joy and the fulfillment of all human passion; and that in an exploration of the facts of marriage there lay as much chance for psychological subtlety as in the description of defeat, disillusionment and extra-marital adventure.<sup>17</sup>

This choice, of what Patmore considered to be a more "poetic" subject matter for poetry, is probably his most

---

16. Ibid., p.19.

17. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.150.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

personal contribution to his discussions of the relationships between poetry and religion. What he is attempting to express by this choice of married love is neither the raptures of true love nor the truths of religion. Rather it is a poetic apprehension that the greatest human conflicts of thought and emotion, and consequently the greatest challenge to poetical expression, are to be found in man's struggle to keep the moral law not in his breaking of the moral law. In short, it is the order of "human rectitude" that offers poetry its greatest challenge and potential for significant expression, not human disorder.

...and every poet - the natural faculties of the poet being supposed - will be great in proportion to the strictness with which, in his moral ideas, he follows the counsels of perfection.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude then this first section dealing with "A General Consideration" of Patmore's concept of the relationship between poetry and religion, it must always be remembered that Patmore's concept of poetry as the handmaid of religion is his way of regenerating poetry as such. Patmore is not calling for a rhythmical paraphrase of the Summa Theologica nor for Victorian

---

18. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.19.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

prudery in the poetic treatment of life; his own poetry excludes both of these extremes. However, he is calling upon the poet to concentrate his poetical powers of sensibility, subtlety, and structure upon what is most real and natural in life - what is true and good, not what is false and evil. Patmore is demanding that the poet as poet seek ultimate values in reality, and from such a "religious or moral" view of reality Patmore believes that great poetry of the type written by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton will result. The poetical insight which these great poets express in their writings is not moral teaching as such, but it is real apprehension which expresses at least a temporary insight into the ultimate ordering of human life. This ultimate ordering constitutes for Patmore the "morality of a sphere too pure and high for 'didactic' teaching", for this kind of ordering needs to be expressed more than taught. In other words, the reality of this ultimate ordering in life, which no man can really contradict, needs the confirmation of real apprehension more than reasoning; and, in this sense, poetry becomes the handmaid of religion.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

## Section 2

## Poetry and Dogma

For Patmore, the art of poetry could not be divorced from the art of living without doing harm to both. That is, poetry had no right to withdraw itself from what Patmore called the "first business of mortal life", which was the "acquisition of knowledge...not knowledge of 'facts', but of realities."<sup>19</sup> Thus, when the poet expresses his real apprehension in a poem, he is contributing to a knowledge of realities, in contrast to the scientist who contributes by his findings to a knowledge of facts. However, as previously explained when discussing the nature of poetic apprehension, the poet's apprehension of some living truth or reality is dependent upon the previous experience of the poet. The poet looks at life through his experience as well as through his senses. Therefore, in Patmore's poetic theory, there is a vital connection between the depth and verity of the poet's previous experience and the depth and verity of the poet's real

---

19. Coventry Patmore, The Rod, The Root and The Flower, p.64.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

apprehension. The living relationships among truths, which relationships constitute the living truth of real apprehension and also distinguish "realities" from mere "facts", depend in part upon the truths which the poet brings with him into his act of poetic apprehension. For Patmore then, theology or dogma, in some way and to some extent, has to be a part of that poet's experience who intends to make any significant apprehension of reality and thereby add to his knowledge of realities.

Each great Catholic dogma is the key, and the only key, to some great mystery, or series of mysteries, in humanity...<sup>20</sup>

One obvious importance of dogma as a "key" is its ability to guide the poet. As a guide to the poet, a knowledge of Revealed truth leads the poet to search certain areas of life which he knows from Revelation to have more human and Divine significance than others. For example, Patmore searched the area of married love because of its mystical and sacramental value rather than the area of extra-marital love. However, by examining the place of dogma in the very poetic process per se, Patmore's insight into dogma as a poetic subject as well as a guide becomes

---

20. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.254.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

apparent.

In speaking of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven, Patmore makes the following observation.

Not but that he knows better than to make his religion the direct subject of any of his poems unless it presents itself to him as a human passion, and the most human of human passions, as it does in the splendid Ode just noticed, in which God's long pursuit in final conquest of the resisting soul is described in a torrent of humanly impressive verse as was ever inspired by a natural affection.<sup>21</sup>

This statement reveals a concrete example and an explanation of what Patmore considered the ideal way of writing poetry whose subject matter was some religious reality or dogma.

The poet, as a rule should avoid religion altogether as a direct subject. "Law", the rectitude of humanity, should be his only subject, as, from time immemorial it has been the subject of true art, though many a true artist has done the Muse's will and knew it not.<sup>22</sup>

The poet is not to treat of dogma scientifically as the theologian does when he explains a particular question and offers an example for his explanation. Nor is the poet to tack on a moral to everything he writes. Rather, the poet is to apprehend and express human life as life itself expresses living dogma. This is the way that dogma can become poetry.

---

21. Coventry Patmore, "Mr. Francis Thompson, A New Poet", Fortnightly Review, p.22.

22. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.16.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

In one sense, Patmore is repeating the advice of Newman that if the artist wishes to revitalize his art then the artist himself must be "reborn". Patmore is calling upon the poet to make the truths of Revelation part of his own living experience.

With them [Spanish literature], religion has been, as it was meant to be, a human passion; they have regarded dogma as the form of realisable, and, by them, realized experience.<sup>23</sup>

However, Patmore is giving Newman's advice a practical poetical slant by pointing out to the poet that among the general experiences needed by any poet, the living realisable experience of dogma is the most fitted to the production of great poetry. And by experience here Patmore means the deep joy, sorrow, frustration, and hope which are the human passions of dogma experienced in the life of one who sincerely tries to live those truths.

The Incarnation is still only a dogma. It has never got beyond mere thoughts. Perhaps it will take thousands of years to work itself into the feelings, as it must do, before religion can become a matter of poetry.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, Patmore's poetic appeal for dogma is twofold. First, he sees dogma as a guide pointing out

---

23. Ibid., p.157.

24. Coventry Patmore, Catholic Literary Revival, p.69.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

and confirming what are the deeper and more significant areas of human experience.

The soul dares not believe its own marvelous guesses and instincts, unless, it can fall back upon definite dogma for confirmation and justification, nor can the corollaries of dogma, which are often of far more personal weight than dogma itself, be inferred without a definite premise.<sup>25</sup>

In order to use dogma as a guide and key to human mysteries, the poet needs a knowledge of dogma. But in order to make dogma the subject of his poem or to "elevate dogma to song", which is the other aspect of Patmore's appeal to dogma, the poet must make a sincere effort to live dogma.

But, wherever the elementary dogmas of Christianity are taught, there the man who is perfectly sincere and faithful is in the possibility of an infinitely precious experimental knowledge.<sup>26</sup>

The poet must see dogma as a realisable experience, so realisable that it becomes the most natural of all experiences. Most natural in the sense that it is the experience most inclusive for and vital to man. Dogma in this second sense of realisable experience as opposed to being a mere guide to significant experience means that the poet "sees" dogma in life rather than bringing dogma to

---

25. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.223.

26. Ibid., p.254.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

life as a kind of slide rule to measure values. Both aspects of dogma are important to the poet, but, in order for dogma to actually become poetry, the poet must make that dogma part of his living experience. Once the poet has accomplished this - an accomplishment brought about by a sincere effort and not necessarily by acquired perfection, he may sing of dogma as it has taken on "flesh and blood"; for it has become human, and hence a proper subject of poetry.

A "moral" is only inartistic when the artist has not the sufficient strength of character and language to make it a real force, either as the kernel of disaster or felicity.<sup>27</sup>

Only by living dogma is the poet in a position to really apprehend dogma; for real apprehension begins with "attention", and attention attaches the poet to experience.

Dogma, therefore, which is really apprehended is an explicit but indirect subject of poetry. Explicit in that the poet is expressing a real apprehension of dogma, but indirect in that the poem portrays human passion and human activity.

...those passages <sup>in</sup> his [Dante] poems which we read with most passionate delight and real apprehension

---

27. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.185.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

are precisely those in which the argument rises from natural to the dizziest heights of spiritual probabilities.<sup>28</sup>

In his attempt to elevate dogma to song, Patmore has expressed his own insight into the relationship of dogma to poetry, a relationship perfectly consistent with his theory of poetry. For Patmore, the techniques of poetry always being taken for granted, the greatness of poetry is based upon the quality of the poet's real apprehension. The deeper the experiential insight into truth and the relationships of truth, the greater will be the lasting value of the poem. The area of real apprehension is therefore most vital to poetry - and there is no greater area than dogma or the truths of Revelation. But the poet is not a theologian; rather, he is a "seer" of life. Therefore, the poet has to grasp dogma as it is lived, that is, as realisable and realized experience rather than as matter in a catechism.

Therefore, the poet's task is to really apprehend dogma, and this he can do because of the nature of real apprehension which is an "intellectual" grasp of living truth. But, the poet can do more than apprehend dogma,

---

28. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.221.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

for he can also imaginatively express his real apprehension of dogma through the "real words" of his imagination. That is, the imagination can find in external nature the analogues necessary to express the spiritual truths of dogma, because all nature is a "sacrament"; at times, to the vision of the poet; and constantly, to the vision of the saint. Therefore, in summary, it can be said that Patmore's moral or religious view point of poetry is the result of Patmore's own real apprehension of the possibility of elevating dogma to song. And his poetry is the poetic expression of that real apprehension. Father Terence L. Connolly, one of the greatest scholars on the Catholic Literary Revival, and the best interpreter of Patmore's poetry, says the following "final" words concerning Patmore's elevation of dogma to song.

In their words [Francis Thompson and Alice Meynell] the present writer found the chief inspiration of this effort to elucidate Patmore's meaning and to help others to attain to the apocalypse of hidden delight and spiritual exaltation in his poetry. Here the truths of conjugal love and genuine mysticism are blent as intimately and as reverently as they are in the inspired words of Holy Scripture and in the sublimest utterances of the Saviour of the World.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

Those truths, in the perfection of the lyrical form which Patmore has given them, cannot but delight and expand the hearts of those who believe. They may, even, attract those who are repelled by the unadorned and austere truths of Christian dogma.<sup>29</sup>

---

29. Rev. Terence L. Connolly, S.J., Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love by Coventry Patmore, p.vii.

## POETRY AND RELIGION

## Section 3

## Poetry and Morality

In line with the close connection which Patmore saw between poetry and life, he demanded that the poet always remain the conscious critic of his own work. By "conscious critic" is meant that the poet was responsible for both what he wrote and how he wrote it. Therefore, the poet had an obligation to himself and to his poetry to make sure that neither insincerity or falsity of expression nor mere sentimentality of content could be charged against his poetry.

Much of this poetry has about as much relation to actual or imaginative reality as the transformation scene of a pantomine; and much more - called "descriptive" - has so low a degree of significance and betrays so inhuman an absorption in the merest superficialities of nature, that when the writer pretends to deal with those facts and phenomena of humanity which, directly or indirectly, are the main region of every true poet's song, he has to overcome our sense that he is an habitual trifler before he can gain credit for sincerity, even when he is giving utterances to what may really be a passing strain of true poetic thought and feeling.<sup>30</sup>

Patmore's consideration of the relationship of "Poetry and

---

30. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, pp.36-37. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

Morality" follows upon his concern to guard against any vitiation of "true poetic thought and feeling" through mere poetic pretending "to deal with those facts and phenomena of humanity which, directly or indirectly, are the main region of every true poet's song". For a poet then, to make bad morality the hub in the wheel of his poetic expression in the sense that bad morality is portrayed as the sole idea in the poem is poetic pretending; for, according to Patmore, "art is human" and derives necessary poetic value from a true conception of human nature and life.

Bad morality is not a necessary condition of good art; on the contrary, bad morality is necessarily bad art, for art is human, but immorality inhuman. 31

The first point, then, which must be made concerning Patmore's understanding of the relationship between poetry and morality is that great or true poetry must be written from a view point of true morality.

...and every poet - the natural faculties of the poet being presupposed - will be great in proportion to the strictness with which, in his moral ideal, he follows the counsels of perfection. 32

Patmore does not hedge on this vital connection between

---

31. Ibid., p.15. Italics mine.

32. Ibid., p.19. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

true poetry and true morality.

It must be confessed that a large portion of the writings of the very best poets of the past and passing generation has been not art at all, since the one real theme of art has been absent.<sup>33</sup>

That "one real theme of art" is "Law, the rectitude of humanity".

The poet, as a rule, should avoid religion altogether as a direct subject. Law, the rectitude of humanity, should be his only subject, as, from time immemorial, it has been the subject of true art, though many a true artist has done the Muse's will and knew it not.<sup>34</sup>

For Patmore the "subject" of poetry is of vital importance to the ultimate worth of poetry. But "subject" here means more the viewpoint from which the poet interprets his life's experiences, which viewpoint though ultimately colours or shows through the poem. In other words, it is not what the poem is portraying that matters, but how it is portraying it. A poem may treat of immorality, but it cannot wholly express immorality as its real apprehension.

Perhaps two or three of Iago's speeches are "coarser" than anything else in English poetry - there is nothing more so in the Bible itself; but the splendour, purity, and solidity of the most splendid, pure, and solid of all dramas that were ever written, depend in the very large measure on the way in which these qualities are heightened by those very passages.<sup>35</sup>

---

33. Ibid., p.18. Italics mine.

34. Ibid., p.16.

35. Ibid., p.16.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

Clearly, then, Patmore allows the poet the artistic freedom of using the immoral if it furthers the expression of his real apprehension; however, he denies the poet the liberty of expressing a real apprehension which purports to be immoral in its viewpoint of life. In other words, the immoral may be part of the poem, but it can never be the living idea of which the whole poem is the shortest and most complete expression. This restriction is not the result of an affective whim of Patmore, but follows logically from his concept of what constitutes true poetry and true poetic activity.

In the previous section, it was shown how Patmore's concept of poetry was "moral or religious" in that poetry had the function of elevating man to the consideration of the ideal life. This function of poetry to elevate or inspire man in his pursuit of the ideal life can explain in part Patmore's insistence that poetry be written from a moral point of view, that is, a point of view which recognizes the ultimate consequences of sin upon man in both the present and future life. However, to reduce Patmore's concept of true poetry to merely his "moral" concept of poetry would not be a full explanation

## POETRY AND MORALITY

of true poetry.

True poetry also includes the idea of a poetry which has a proper balance of thought and emotion - a balance arising from a recognition that the thought is the essential poetic element and the emotions the "necessary or accidental means of expression".<sup>36</sup> The function of "Law, or human rectitude" as the "only subject of true poetry", then, is to insure this proper balance of thought and emotion. "Law, or human rectitude" is thus not only a recognition of the ultimate ordering in human life itself, but as a poetic "subject" or point of view it is an insurance that the poetry itself which deals with life will be dominated by the masculine or intellectual idea, rather than the feminine sentiment.

True poetry, therefore, is poetry which inspires man to lead the ideal life through the emotional expression of truth.

Be the theme of the poet magnificent or humble, be it his purpose to justify the ways of God to man, or to publish the praise of the "small celandine", it is certain that, in order to sing, he must first feel. Poetry is truth or fact of properly human import and general intelligibility verbally expressed so as to affect the feelings.<sup>37</sup>

---

36. Ibid., p.20.

37. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.188. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

Truth or intellectual dominance is the essence of true poetry; emotional expression or appeal, its complimentary or accidental element. As a result of this concept of true poetry, true poetic activity must begin with a real apprehension of living truth. For it is only an intellectual grasp of truth which can produce the masculine or intellectual dominance needed for true poetry. Therefore, any piece of poetry which attempts to appeal to the emotions only, or which proceeds from an affective grasp of reality instead of an intellectual grasp of reality, can not be true poetry since it must necessarily lack the proper balance of thought and emotion.

Now for Patmore, a poem which appeals solely to immorality or which attempts to make immorality its sole "subject" must necessarily be deficient as true poetry. First of all, such poetry can not inspire man to the ideal life; and secondly, such poetry is necessarily sentimental since it does not maintain an intellectual dominance of truth or thought. The reason for this latter opinion is that when a poet denies human rectitude in his poem, he must by that very fact deny truth and right reason. But to deny right reason and truth is to reduce

## POETRY AND MORALITY

the idea of a poem to mere sentiment or emotional instinct. Therefore, true poetry must have as its "subject", "Law or human rectitude".

Masculine law is always, however, obscurely the theme of the true poet; the feeling, with the correspondent rhythm is its feminine inflection, without which the law has no sensitive or poetic life. Art is thus constituted because it is the constitution of life, all the grace and sweetness of which arise from inflection of law, not infraction of it, as bad men and bad poets fancy.<sup>38</sup>

Following upon Patmore's insistence that true poetry is "essentially catholic and affirmative, dealing only with the permanent facts of nature and humanity", is his concept of poetic pretending, the second important relationship between "Poetry and Morality". By poetic pretending is meant that the poet attempts to present a view of life which is not true, which is also the equivalent of saying not real. Poetic pretending usually arises from a poet's attempt to invent human passion. The word "invent" means that the poet is trying to express human emotion whose truth he did not really apprehend, and as a result he fancies circumstances or imagery trying to supply the lack of "real words" normally chosen by the imagination.

---

38. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.17.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

If, in the utterance of what he offers to you as the cry or deep longing of passion, you catch him busily noticing trifles - for which very likely he gets praise - "accurate observation of nature" - you will put him down as one who knows nothing of the passion he is pretending to express.<sup>39</sup>

The basic poetic error involved in this attempt to invent or directly portray emotions as an end in themselves, is the fact that the true human emotions that have the significance of real passions must follow upon the poet's grasp of "human and moral truth".

To see rightly is the first of human qualities; right feeling and right acting usually are its consequences.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, any expression of human passion which attempts a real intensity of feeling must be the indirect effect of the poetic expression of the real apprehension of living truth.

But it is a fact of primary significance, both in morals and in art...that the highest beauty and joy are not attainable when they occupy the first place as motives, but only when they are more or less the accidents of the exercise of the manly virtue of the vision of truth.<sup>41</sup>

An example of poetic "pretending" would be a poet who fancies that the deepest raptures of love are expressed through the portrayal of an illicit love affair.

---

39. Ibid., p.38. Italics mine.

40. Ibid., p.282.

41. Ibid., p.62. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

No matter how well the poet might succeed in his expression of the illicit love affair in this above case, Patmore would deny such an expression the significance of true poetry since the deepest raptures of love can only be expressed by a real apprehension of licit love. The fault of the poet in this case is that instead of apprehending the spiritual truth of love and then expressing this apprehension through the real words of the imagination taken from the ultimate analogues of external nature, the poet has attempted to express emotion before apprehending its real source.

Indecency is an endeavour to imitate sensations and appetites in the absence of natural passion; and that which passes with so many for power and ardour is really impotence and dullness.<sup>42</sup>

But true poetry which is essentially constituted by a balance of dominant truth and complimentary emotion does not permit such pretending.

In the highest poetry, like that of Milton, these true modes of inflection, metrical, linguistical, and moral, all chime together in praise of the true order of human life, or moral law. Where this is not recognized there is no good art.<sup>43</sup>

The question yet remains of how the poet can treat of immorality without vitiating his poetic thought

---

42. Ibid., p.15. Italics mine.

43. Ibid., p.17.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

and emotion through poetic pretending. Patmore's answer is his distinction between inflection and infraction of the law. "Are those great poets wrong, then...whose works abound with representations of infraction of law and its consequent disaster?" is the question which Patmore answers by means of the above distinction.

No. But there are two kinds of inflection and infraction of law: first, of the inner law, which is inflected when a man feels disposed to covet his neighbour's wife and does not, and inflected when he does; secondly, of the outer and vaster law of God's universal justice, which cannot be inflected, but only inflected, even by sin and disaster; the law by which the man shall find it good that he has not followed his natural inclinations, and that by which the man who has so done shall be effectually convinced that the game was not worth the candle.<sup>44</sup>

This quotation from Patmore clearly explains the limits which he sets upon the poetic expression of immorality. There is nothing which prevents the poet from portraying temptation to sin or sin itself. This is human and hence a subject for true poetry. But the poet may not express an infraction of God's "outer and vaster law of universal justice". This is to say that the poet can not express a portrayal of sin in which sin has no further consequences.

---

44. Ibid., pp.17-18.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

If the poet represents folly, vice, or any kind of uncomeliness, it is not in order to contemplate such evils in themselves, but in order to supply foils which shall set forth more strongly the irrefragable splendour of truth embodied in sensible loveliness.<sup>45</sup>

The reason for this is that "God's universal law of justice" cannot be broken and, therefore, for a poet to attempt such a portrayal would be poetic pretending - or letting his feelings and fancy get the better of his intellect.

Patmore, therefore, sums up his concept of the relationship between poetry and morality with the following statement.

The Decalogue is not art, but it is the guide-post which points direct to where the source of art springs; and it is now, as in the days when Numa and Moses made their laws: - he is profane who presents to the gods the fruit of an unpruned vine; that is, sensitive worship before the sensitive soul has been sanctified by habitual confession of and obedience to the rational.<sup>46</sup>

This statement shows the blending of the scientific and the mystical, of the objective and the intuitive, and of the mind and the heart in Patmore's poetic theory. The poet cannot completely separate himself from life

---

45. Coventry Patmore, (quoted by) J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.185. Italics mine.

46. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.23. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

and the human and moral truths which constitute the spiritual meaning of life. True poetry as true art needs the guide posts of the Decalogue in order to portray the deeper, more significant, and truly human emotions. Man, who simply follows in a blind manner his feelings and instincts is no longer man the rational animal, he is simply man the animal. Blind feelings and instincts are not human passions for Patmore; they are animal passions - and these are not the subject of true poetry, for "art is human".

God's law is the "ten-stringed harp" of David, and all the music of life resides in the various and measured vibration with which it responds to the touch of the passions. Sins snap the strings in its ignorant and brutal preference of noise to music.

However, for Patmore, "Law" is not the guide to didactic art as those assert who would think that "Law" destroys human emotion and hence becomes a handicap to poetry. For Patmore, "Law" is a guide to true poetry, that is, poetry which aims at a perfect blending of truth and passion by an obedience of the latter to the former. Human passion must follow upon "human" truth, and human truth must follow upon moral truth. To this extent, the poet is limited by the Decalogue. But this

---

47. Ibid., p.31. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND MORALITY

limitation is in reality a guide since it helps the poet to steer clear of the "sirens" of poetic "pretending" which rely upon a sentimental, inhuman portrayal of life or simply bad poetry. Only real human truths and true human passions can go forth in song, and anything short of these is "noise", or bad poetry.

## Chapter III

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

In considering Patmore's "Poetical Theory", the latter two chapters on "Poetry and Religion" and "Poetry and Personality" are more than mere convenient headings meant to include isolated poetical concepts. Rather, the areas covered in these two chapters are logical outgrowths of Patmore's concern that poetry be grounded in truth. According to Patmore, the very process of poetic creation must start with the poet's real apprehension of a living truth, that is, some intuitive insight into the spiritual (in the sense of ultimate) significance of human experience. Dogmatic and moral truths are consequently essential to the poet who seeks after the significant insights into reality that Patmore demands in his concept of true or great poetry.

However, as a personal insight into living truth, poetry is more than the analogical expression of theological mysteries; it is also the expression of psychological truth.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

Patmore holds the age of narrative poetry to be passed forever. He looks on the present race of poets as highly "self-conscious" in comparison with their predecessors, but yet not sufficiently so, for the only system now possible - the psychological.<sup>1</sup>

By the "expression of psychological truth" is meant that the poet who faithfully attempts to express his own real apprehension will, by that fact, necessarily reveal his most inward and hence most true aspects of personality. Personality is here taken in its general meaning of including those inward traits of character that constitute the individuality of a person.

...and the words of the man will infallibly declare what he thus inwardly is, especially when, in the case of the poet, the powers of language are so developed as to become the very glass of the soul reflecting its purity and integrity, or its stains and insincerities, with a fidelity of which the writer himself is but imperfectly conscious.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, for Patmore, poetry ultimately includes two levels of truth, theological and psychological. The present chapter, "Poetry and Personality" is an examination of Patmore's concepts of poetic "individuality" and "style" as these concepts express his idea of the relationship between poetry and psychological truth as described above.

---

1. Basil Champneys, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, Vol. I, p.91. Italics mine.

2. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.36.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

Poetic "individuality" has a much deeper meaning for Patmore than simply a novel point of view of some truth or a highly imaginative poetic expression. Rather, "individuality" is the "soul" of the poet showing through his poem.

As the human face, the image of the soul, is incomparably the most beautiful object that can be seen by the eyes, the soul itself is the supreme interest and attraction of the intellectual vision; and the variety of this interest and attraction is limited only by the number of those who, in action, manners, or art, are endowed with the faculty of expressing themselves and their inherent distinction, which could it be fully displayed, would be found to be absolutely unique in each person.<sup>3</sup>

Poetic "individuality" is the poet expressing his "inherent distinction", or simply the poet revealing his inmost character traits. The "soul" of the poet is the unique personality of the poet, and the unique personality of the poet as it effects his real apprehension constitutes the poet's "individuality" as a poet.

Poetic individuality, like all the other poetic concepts of Patmore, demands a connection with truth. But the connection in this instance is with psychological rather than theological truth - psychological, in the

---

3. Ibid., p.110. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

sense that the poet must reveal his "real self" in order to be considered distinctly individual.

For Patmore, the personality revealed in the highest kind of poetry is something other than a manner; it is a reflection of the poet's real self, which can only be expressed when freakishness and coarseness have been removed.<sup>4</sup>

By "real self" is meant that self which one reveals without any intentions of impressing or deceiving others. Therefore, closely tied in with the idea of individuality in poetry is the additional note of poetic discipline - that is, a conscious effort to keep the odd, the eccentric, and the self-selling aspects of one's ego out of poetry.

Lawlessness, self-assertion, oddity instead of individuality, and inorganic polish where there should be the breathing completeness of art, are no longer the delight only of the "groundling".<sup>5</sup>

It would appear then, that poetic individuality excludes a type of poetry which would be an advocate of any kind of cult of the ego or self-expression for the sake of the self rather than the knowledge which the self-expression brings. Patmore, through his demand for individuality in poetry, is thus calling attention to the unique expression of personality which takes place in poetry as long as the

---

4. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.189. Italics mine.

5. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.115. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

poet attempts to express his real apprehension and not simply himself.

...its real apprehension is a peculiar mode of seeing, a reflection of truth coloured but not obscured by the individual character, which in each man of genius is entirely unique.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, Patmore's concept of poetic "individuality" is a twofold recognition of two important aspects of "true" poetry - the personal nature of the real apprehension of living truth and the conscious, disciplined effort the poet must make in faithfully expressing his personal insight into spiritual truth. The secret to leaving the indelible stamp of one's own personality on one's poetry is an artistic discipline consciously imposed by the poet himself avoiding novelty for its own sake in favour of expressing his real apprehension as it is.

But consciousness is the life of art, and there must be a quiet rejoicing in strength, solidity, and permanence, to give these characters that power over the imagination which a work of art must have.<sup>7</sup>

The real self, that is, the self involved in making the real apprehension, will therefore be found most prominently in the best part of the best work of a particular poet.

---

6. Ibid., p.291. Italics mine.

7. Ibid., p.173.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

The best part of the best play of Shakespeare is Shakespeare himself, the vast, wholesome, serene, and unique individuality which stands above and breathes through tragedy and comedy alike.<sup>8</sup>

"Style" is the poet's individuality actually and successfully expressed in the poem.

This unique character is, in its expression, what is called "style" - the sure mark of genius, though the world at large is unable to distinguish "style" from manner, even from mannerism.<sup>9</sup>

"Style" represents the highest accomplishment of the poet, or what Patmore calls, the "sanctity of art", because in order to successfully express his unique character or personality, the poet has at the same time to completely express his real apprehension which is the formal cause of poetry. In considering Patmore's critical evaluation of poetry, his dominant concern for the real apprehension must be kept in mind. But as previously explained, the real apprehension is a "coloured" reflection of truth, that is, it contains two levels of truth - theological and psychological. And these two levels of truth are not separate strata in the poem, but rather they are the one "idea" which is the poem - the personal insight into living

---

8. Ibid., p.165. Italics mine.

9. Ibid., p.291.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

truth. However, in judging how successful the poet has been in expressing his real apprehension, Patmore looked more to the uniqueness of the insight rather than simply to the truth communicated. It was the poet's own insight into truth, or theological truth combined with the psychological, that really mattered. Patmore's critical emphasis upon "style" is therefore the logical development of his demand that poetry be formally constituted by the absolutely faithful expression of the real apprehension in its complete and delicate nuances.

The absolute pre-eminence of style above all other artistic qualities seems not to have been sufficiently perceived or at least insisted upon by critics, and a few words on that subject are therefore proper in a notice of a writer whose individuality, though it may not be so forcible, is more clearly and delicately pronounced than it is in any other poet of our day.<sup>10</sup>

In the above quotation, Patmore is speaking of a minor poet, William Barnes. But it is important to note the criteria of Patmore's judgment. The style of Barnes is the accomplishment that Patmore is praising.

His [Patmore] consistently high praise of William Barnes' poetry undoubtedly arose from a conviction that in Barnes' work the delicate and intangible traits which express personality are invariably revealed.<sup>11</sup>

---

10. Ibid., p.109.

11. J.C. Reid, The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p.189. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

Patmore further describes the stylistic accomplishment of Barnes in the following words:

The words of Barnes are not the carefully made clothes but the body of his thoughts and feelings. And still rarer praise of his work is that he never stops in it till he has said all that should be said, and never exceeds that measure by a syllable; and about this art there is not the slightest apparent consciousness either of its abundant fullness or its delicate reticence. He seems, in fact, never to have written except under the sense of a subject that makes its own form, and of feelings which form their own words - that is to say, he is always classic both in form and substance.<sup>12</sup>

This above quotation is Patmore's clearest expression of his own practical canon for judging poetry, and it can be seen how carefully it follows his concept of style. Barnes is classic because he has imposed upon himself the artistic discipline of expressing his own real apprehension and nothing else. The "novelty" of expression in Barnes' poetry is not the result of eccentricity, but of the "sense of a subject that makes its own form, and of feelings which form their own words". In other words, Barnes is faithfully adhering to the poetic plan of his "poetic inspiration". And by absolutely following his poetic inspiration, Barnes is expressing a perfect

---

12. Coventry Patmore, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, p.112. Italics mine.

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

combination of theological and psychological truth as contained in his real apprehension of reality.

Style as a final expression of Patmore's poetical theory represents the concrete blending of theological with psychological truth and of artistic discipline with artistic originality that he considered essential for true and great poetry. It is an "organic" concept that focuses the critic's attention upon every element within the poem and the poet's attention on his real apprehension and poetic inspiration. Style as a critical concept demands a total experience of the poem before an adequate judgment can be made as to the quality of the poem. Rhyme, rhythm, images, thought, and emotions must be considered as a unit in the final analysis. In short, the question the critic must answer is whether or not the "poem" is "the thing it says". The answer to this question will require a poetical ideal that places higher value on "interior" rather than "exterior" polish. And by "interior" finish as opposed to "exterior" polish, Patmore means that the words of the poem must be the "body of the poet's thoughts and feelings" instead of simply the "carefully made clothes".

## POETRY AND PERSONALITY

If you detect him in the endeavour to say "fine things" in order to win your admiration for himself, instead of rendering his whole utterance a single true thing, which shall win your sympathy with the thought or feeling by which he declares himself to be dominated, the result will be the same; as also it will be if you discover that the beauty of his words is obtained rather by the labour of polish than by the inward labour and true finish of passion.<sup>13</sup>

This above quotation appears in an essay which Patmore entitled, "Poetical Integrity". This term sums up Patmore's entire "Poetical Theory". For, though a poet's words may be "unequal and sometimes inadequate", they may "never be false". They may never be "false" to the "outer and vaster law" of God's justice. They may never be "false" to the poet's own real apprehension of spiritual truth. They may never be "false" to the real self of the poet. "Poetical Integrity" thus implies a concept of poetry that insists that the poet have something of true value to say and that he say it in the shortest yet most complete manner.

---

13. Ibid., p.38. Italics mine.

## COVENTRY PATMORE'S POETICAL THEORY

## CONCLUSION

The formal objective of this thesis has been to present that central body of ideas of principles which constitutes Coventry Patmore's Poetical Theory. The material object of this thesis has been that definitive collection of critical essays and observations edited by Patmore himself at the close of his life. The method of this thesis has been to arrive at those dominant ideas or principles in Patmore's approach to poetry through an examination of his important poetic concepts and the notes and relationships of those concepts.

Peculiar to this thesis' enumeration of "Coventry Patmore's Poetic Theory" has been its attempt to present that poetic theory as a body of principles or a unit of thought showing the particular interdependence of one idea upon another. As presented in the previous chapters, Patmore's poetic theory may be reduced to two all-inclusive critical questions - Is the poem "the thing that it says"? Is the poem worth saying? The former question insures that the poem contains true self-expression, and the latter question insures that the poem contains some significant insight into reality. If either one of these

two elements is missing, then that poem has no claim to be "true poetry" and hence no claim to be "great poetry".

Because this thesis has attempted to indicate the depth and extension of Patmore's poetic theory, its conclusion is that it contains valuable groundwork for a contemporary "revaluation" of Patmore as a critic and as a poet. The contents of this thesis could thus serve as source material in two additional areas of Patmorean research - a "revaluation" of Patmore's poetry in the light of his complete poetic theory and a comparison of Patmore's critical approach to poetry with that of other important critics. Of particular interest would be a comparison between the poetic ideas of Patmore and those of the contemporary school of Christian humanistic critics, such as T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, and J. Middleton Murry. Such a study could give Patmore the contemporary importance as a critic to which this thesis would like to contribute.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY \*

## Books

Alexander, Calvert, S.J., "Coventry Patmore", The Literary Revival, Three phases in its development from 1845 to the present, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Co., 1944, 54-70.

This book is the most authoritative and comprehensive book on the Catholic Literary Movement. In the above chapter the author traces the influence of Patmore upon this Movement and its influence upon him. The chapter contains some excellent insights into Patmore's theory concerning poetry and dogma.

Burdett, Osbert, The Idea of Coventry Patmore, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1921, vii-213.

This book is one of the first to relate some of Patmore's poetry to his prose. Half the book deals with the "Angel In The House". The author is mainly concerned with elucidating the poetic meaning rather than explaining Patmore's poetic theories.

Champneys, Basil, Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore, 2 Vol., London, G. Bell and Sons, 1900, xxvi-396, 1-468.

A close friend of Patmore, the author wrote the first biography of Patmore. Though restricted in some of the observations he could make because of contemporary parties still living, the author's work gives valuable information about the influences on Patmore's life and work.

Connolly, Terence L., S.J., Literary Criticism by Francis Thompson, Newly Discovered and Collected, New York, E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1948, xiv-617.

This book contains some twenty-five references by Thompson to Patmore. Thompson defends Patmore's

---

\* Unless otherwise stated in the aotation, the above books do not contain detailed explanations of Patmore's poetical theory. Nevertheless, these books do contain general criticism of Patmore's poetic endeavors, and they were useful as general background. This list shows the paucity of Patmorean criticism.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Catholicism and its influence upon his philosophy and literary endeavors.

-----, Mystical Poems of Nuptial Love by Coventry Patmore, Boston, Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1938, xix-316.

This collection of Patmore's later poetry, including the odes, contains valuable notes explaining the texts. These notes show the depth of the theological insight that Patmore was expressing in his poetry.

DeVere, Aubrey, "Coventry Patmore", Essays, Chiefly Literary and Ethical, London, Macmillan and Co., 1889, 126-150.

This chapter is one of the earliest defences of Patmore's poetic style. The author discusses the "Angel In The House" and the first edition of the "Odes".

Freeman, John, "Coventry Patmore", English Portraits and Essays, London, Hadder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1924, 175-197.

The author sketches the life and poetical achievement of Patmore. He concludes by reevaluating Patmore as following in the tradition of the English Metaphysical poets.

Gosse, Edmund, Coventry Patmore, New York, Scribner's and Sons, 1905, vi-213.

The author is one of the first to trace the influence of Patmore's personality upon his poetry. He particularly points out the originality of Patmore's poetical task.

Harris, Frank, "Coventry Patmore", Contemporary Portraits, New York, Published by author, 1920, 191-210.

The author discusses Patmore as a minor poet, but he does hail Patmore as a prime representative of the best in English character traits.

Johnson, Lionel, "Coventry Patmore's Genius", Post Liminium: Essays and Critical Papers by Lionel Johnson, Edited by Thomas Whittemore, London, Elkin Matthews, 1909, 238-245.

Like DeVere, Johnson gives testimony of the high personal and poetic regard for Patmore which his contemporary associates held.

Lucas, F.L., "Coventry Patmore", Ten Victorian Poets, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1948, 75-99.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The author has a general discussion of Patmore's poetic techniques. He represents a critical group who consider Patmore's personality more interesting than his poetry.

Page, Frederick, Patmore, A Study in Poetry, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, 11-184.

This book is an extremely sympathetic reevaluation of Patmore as a poet. The different phases of Patmore's poetry and prose are introduced biographically.

Oliver, E.J., Coventry Patmore, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1956, 1-211.

This is the most recent biographical study of Patmore. The author has a chapter emphasizing the religious and mystical quality of Patmore's later prose writings.

Patmore, Coventry, Principles In Art, Religio Poetae and other essays, London, Duckworth and Co., 1913, viii-362.

As explained in the introduction, this volume is Patmore's own definitive collection of his critical ideas. This volume has never been systematically analyzed for its critical principles, though parts of it have been used to explicate a piece of his poetry.

-----, The Rod, The Root and The Flower, revised 2nd ed., G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1923, vii-234.

This volume contains aphoristic statements which represent Patmore's deepest insights into Catholic philosophy and theology. This volume has received limited attention in connection with Patmore's mysticism.

Read, Herbert, "Coventry Patmore", Collected Essays in Literary Criticism, London, Faber and Faber, 1938, 315-330.

The author discusses Patmore as one who fought the trends of his own day. This author does service to Patmorean criticism by calling attention to the still "potential" position which Patmore enjoys in English literary history.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reid, J.C., The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, vii-358. This book is the first real attempt to analyze the aesthetic and literary theories of Patmore. The scope of the author is comprehensive. His particular contribution is a tracing of the major influences upon the thought of Patmore. The book is the first to indicate the completeness of Patmore's critical principles in covering an adequate concept of poetry.

## Articles

Baum, Paul Franklin, "Coventry Patmore's Literary Criticism", University of California Chronicle, XXV, No. 2, April 1923, 249-260.

This article is the only evaluation ever done of Coventry Patmore's practical criticism in the light of contemporary criticism concerning the same authors. The author concludes that Patmore's theoretical criticism is more valuable than his practical criticism. The article is important in affirming a body of critical principles used by Patmore, though he does not discuss them at length.

Bradley, Reverend Francis H., "Coventry Patmore", Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, VI, No.3, July-September, 1936, reprinted in booklet form.

A forerunner of Patmorean study, this article effectively suggests the need for a reevaluation of Coventry Patmore's fame as a poet. The author makes valuable evaluations of the theological and philosophical content of Patmore's poetry.

Patmore, Coventry, "Mr. Thompson a New Poet", Fortnightly Review, London, CCCXXV, Jan. 1894, 19-24. This article is very important for its insight into Patmore's attempt to use Catholic philosophy and theology as subjects of poetry. Patmore reviews Thompson as a poet who has accomplished this task.

## Coventry Patmore's Poetical Theory

## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents in three chapters an examination of "Coventry Patmore's Poetical Theory". The materials that it draws upon are the collected critical essays and observations which Patmore edited late in his life, Principle In Art, Religio Poetae, and other essays and The Rod, The Root, and The Flower.

The first chapter, "Poetical Theory", presents those concepts discovered in the above essays and observations which pertain strictly to the nature of poetry. These concepts are defined within their respective phase of the process of poetic creation as Patmore conceived it. Thus, the first phase defines and explains the concept of "real apprehension" in relation to the poet's contact with reality. The second phase defines and explains the concept of "poetic inspiration" in relation to the preparation needed for poetic expression. The third phase defines and explains the concept of "imagination" in relation to the actual process of poetic expression. Through these concepts,

## ABSTRACT

Patmore's approach to poetry as essentially an intellectual activity concerned with the expression of real and personal truth becomes apparent.

The second chapter, "Poetry and Religion", examines the relationship of poetry to religious truths, both dogmatic and moral. After a general view of this above relationship, the second section, "Poetry and Dogma", examines how dogma can both help the poet in his act of "real apprehension" and also become itself a subject matter for poetry in so far as it is "realisable experience". The third section, "Poetry and Morality", examines the relationship between moral order and discipline in real life and poetic order and discipline needed for true and great poetry.

The third chapter, "Poetry and Personality", examines the relationship between poetic expression and true originality. This chapter brings out Patmore's psychological insight into poetry, especially the need for impersonality or "poetic integrity" in order that the poet may express his true self. This chapter concludes with a summary of Patmore's poetic principles as contained in the concept of "poetic integrity".

## ABSTRACT

The conclusion points to the value that this thesis can have in a "revaluation" of Patmore's place in English Literature as a major critic and as a major poet. This value lies in the presentation of Patmore's poetical theory as a body of principles or unit of thought which allows for a better appreciation of the full depth and extension of his approach to the art of poetry.