CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND COVENTRY PATMORE

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ABBREVIATIONS USED


Basil Champneys, Memoirs. Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore by Basil Champneys. George Bell and Sons, 1900.

The correspondence between Gerard Manley Hopkins and Coventry Patmore began as a result of their first meeting, (though they actually met only twice in their life) on the occasion that Patmore attended the Speech Day or 'Great Academy' at Stonyhurst on 1 August 1883. He stayed there for three days, and during his stay, the Rector entrusted him to the care of Hopkins, so that, as Hopkins himself wrote to Robert Bridges on 5 August 1883, he "saw a good deal of" Patmore.¹

¹ L.B., p. 185.
According to the same letter to Bridges, during Patmore's stay, they talked about Bridges' poetry, and Hopkins showed Patmore all his manuscripts of Richard Watson Dixon, whom Patmore had never heard of, and eventually Patmore was made "an enthusiastic convert of him." This is how Patmore came to read their work, and thus they became the subjects of the critical issues discussed in the correspondence. On this occasion, asked by Patmore, Hopkins agreed to make some corrections of Patmore's poems for a new edition which was going to be brought out that autumn. Thus it was that their correspondence began on 12 August 1883. According to Basil Champneys, Patmore, who was himself prepared to bestow infinite pains upon the work of others even when he did not take great interest in it, frequently consulted his friends, among whom was Hopkins, when any of his writings were under revision. With regard to Hopkins' admiration for Patmore, as a note in The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins tells us, "there is no real clue in GMH's letters either to Bridges or to Patmore himself as to when his enthusiasm for Patmore's poetry began or which poem he read first," but from the following entry in Hopkins' journal dated 9 May 1866, we can infer that Hopkins had been an admirer of Patmore's poems since his years at Oxford: "May 9. Fair with clouds. Walking down towards Sandford with Coventry Patmore in hand." Furthermore, he told Patmore that when he had re-read The Angel in the House on receiving the volumes of Patmore's poems in September 1883, he had remembered much of it and that there had been little of the rest which he had "not at least remembered to have read..." The correspondence between the two poets belongs to the last six years of Hopkins' life, namely the years from 1883 to 1889. When the correspondence began, Hopkins was teaching classics at Stonyhurst. He taught there in the years 1882-4, and during those years he composed the poems, "Ribblesdale" (1882), "The Leaden Echo

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1 L.B., p. 185.
2 Ibid., p. 185.
3 Basil Champneys, Memoirs. I, 175.
4 J.P., p. 548.
5 Ibid., p. 135.
7 G.M.H. Poems, pp. 90-1.
and the Golden Echo” (October 1882)\(^1\) and “The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe” (May 1883).\(^2\) In February 1884, he was transferred from Stonyhurst to University College, Dublin, and taught there as Professor of Greek until his death in 1889. During these years he composed a group of sonnets called the “terrible” sonnets or the sonnets of desolation and other works. As his poems such as “(Carrion Comfort)” (probably 1885),\(^3\) “No worst” (probably 1885)\(^4\) and “I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day” (probably 1885)\(^5\) typically illustrate, and also as is most explicitly and strongly expressed in his letters written to Baillie\(^6\) and Bridges\(^7\) in April and May 1885, Hopkins’ sense of desolation and sadness was deepest at that time. In those letters Hopkins related that when he was at worst, it was even like madness, though his judgment had never been affected. In the letter to Bridges he mentioned two sonnets, about one of which he said, “if ever anything was written in blood one of these was,”\(^8\) and Bridges suggested that it was “(Carrion Comfort)”.\(^9\) In the letter to Baillie, he analysed his state of desolation:

The melancholy I have all my life been subject to has become of late years not indeed more intense in its fits but rather more distributed, constant, and crippling. One, the lightest but a very inconvenient form of it, is daily anxiety about work to be done, which makes me break off or never finish all that lies outside that work.\(^10\)

This state of mind, caused by a loss of all life, joy and comfort, inevitably brought about deep and acute feelings of futility and depression. In his last years in Dublin, Hopkins must have suffered from these persistent painful feelings of incapability and worries about his “work to be done.” “I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day”,

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1 G.M.H. Poems, pp. 91–3.
2 Ibid., pp. 93–97.
3 Ibid., pp. 99–100.
4 Ibid., p. 100.
5 Ibid., p. 101.
6 F.L., p. 256.
7 L.B., p. 216.
8 Ibid., p. 219.
9 Ibid., p. 219.
10 F.L., p. 256.
the darkest of the "terrible" sonnets, concentrates on this theme of anguish, of utter incompetence and spiritual desolation. Because of his inability, he described himself as "gall" or "heartburn," and calls bitterness his taste of himself. This state of loss of life and joy more or less remained with him in his Dublin years, and it was in this state of mind that all his letters to Patmore were written.

In respect to Coventry Patmore, no sign of the revival of his poems was visible until 1884. In that year, according to Edmund Gosse, several of the leading critics of the time wrote articles in which the excellence of Patmore's work was intelligently considered and "in which the importance of The Unknown Eros was emphasized." Such being the case, when Patmore first met Hopkins at Stonyhurst and asked him to suggest corrections of his poems for a new edition, he was still not highly considered as a poet. Gosse writes:

In 1881 the very name of Patmore was still ridiculous. The Unknown Eros was absolutely ignored; The Angel in the House, after its great, rustic success, was wholly rejected by those who were the tyrants of criticism.

C. C. Abbott, the editor of Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, however, criticizes Gosse's remark quoted above in his introduction to the First Edition of the Further Letters:

There is a little truth and much exaggeration in this statement. The undated four-volume edition of his poems, issued in 1879, must have responded to some demand, and certainly slowly roused interest again. Yet his reputation had definitely languished.

It was under such circumstances that Hopkins received the four volumes of Patmore's poems issued in 1879 to find and correct faults in them. The amazing feature of the correspondence between Hopkins and Patmore included in the Further Letters seems to be the extreme care and scrupulosity with which Hopkins criticizes Patmore's works. In the case of The Angel in the House, for example, he begins

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2 Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore, p. 140.
3 Ibid., p. 134.
4 F.L., p. xxviii.
5 L.B., p. 185.
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to criticize by finding that the poem is without a title either in the headlines or on a flyleaf or in a table of contents or anywhere else. He also notes the omission of "the" in the title of the general title-page, and then goes on to indicate the omission of stops by the printer at the end of several stanzas.¹ Not only these cases but also all the other corrections suggested by Hopkins, whether they are textual or not, show his extreme carefulness; he seems to be striving most strenuously not to overlook any minute error in any aspect of Patmore's works, and to bring them to perfection. This extremely careful and conscientious, or even scrupulous attitude of Hopkins' can be assumed to be due mainly to the following reasons: Hopkins' great admiration of and sympathy with Patmore's poetry and his sincere wish that Patmore's poems, which were "not only ideal in form but deal with high matter as well,"² might be widely read and recognized, as they were instructive in the highest degree and could be "a great power in the world, an element of strength even to an empire."³ We can find Hopkins' own words expressing his admiration in his letters dated 14 Sept. 1883, 7 Oct. 1883, 3 Jan. 1884, 4 April 1885, 14 May 1885 and 4 June 1886, where, commenting on The Victories of Love, he states, "There is such a world of wisdom and wit in this Wedding Sermon that I wish it to be as perfect and as lucid as it can be."⁴ Of these reasons, the first is essentially personal, while the second has to do with a wider public opinion. When Hopkins received the 6th edition of The Angel in the House, he wrote to Patmore:

I see that this is the 6th edition, which shews a steady popularity or a steadily reading public. But it is a popularity and a public rather below the surface. This may content you, in itself it is not satisfactory. A good book is to educate the world at large. The Angel in the House is in the highest degrees instructive, it is a book of morals and in a field not before treated and yet loudly crying to be treated. It cannot indeed ever be popular quite with the general, but I want it to be popular as a classic is, read by many, recognised by all.⁵

¹ F.L., p. 301.
² Ibid., p. 368.
³ Ibid., p. 368.
⁴ Ibid., p. 318.
⁵ Ibid., p. 362.
Next year he wrote to Patmore about the value of fine works of art like Patmore's:

Your poems are a good deed done for the Catholic Church and another for England, for the British Empire, which now trembles in the balance held in the hand of unwisdom. . . . The greater the scale of politics the weightier the influence of a great name and a high ideal. . . . Then there is civilisation. It shd. have been Catholic truth. That is the great end of Empires before God, to be Catholic and draw nations into their Catholicism. But our Empire is less and less Christian as it grows . . . but there must be more of that literature, a continued supply and in quality excellent. This is why I hold that fine works of art, and especially if, like yours, that are not only ideal in form but deal with high matter as well, are really a great power in the world, an element of strength even to an empire.¹

Thus, on reflection upon these remarks by Hopkins, we see that for him the task of criticizing Patmore's poems must have been a part of his mission or duty both as a Catholic priest and a fellow-poet. We can also assume that Hopkins took such great interest in Patmore because Patmore was not only a Catholic poet but also a Catholic convert. Patmore became a Catholic in 1862, just four years before Hopkins' own conversion. In this light, his enthusiasm for this task seems to be fully understandable. In spite of being at his lowest ebb both physically and spiritually, which is given poetic expression in the "terrible" sonnets and of which he frequently complains in his letters, he seems to be striving to fulfil his mission with great enthusiasm. Furthermore, later on, in 1888, when he was asked to write a paper for a review,² he said he would write on Patmore's poems, intending to deal especially with Patmore's simple treatment of the "truths that form the granite foundations of life"³ and avoidance of a mere pretence of profundity which both he and Patmore were afraid would be a reason for non-acceptance by critics.⁴

What I have so far investigated is the context in which the correspondence between the two poets ought to be read and considered.

² Ibid., p. 389.  
³ Ibid., p. 391.  
⁴ Ibid., pp. 391-2.
A large part of the correspondence may be too technical for the general reader, as Basil Champneys criticizes,¹ or it may appear to some readers to be “taken up by suggested corrections of small moment,”² but, in my view, reading and considering the correspondence carefully bearing in mind the context in which it was exchanged will help us to understand fully the critical issues discussed.

The critical issues and suggestions offered in the correspondence between the two poets consist mostly of Hopkins’ criticism of Patmore’s works, and in the reverse, Patmore’s criticism of Hopkins’ poetry, but of the latter there are only a few. For this reason, “Hopkins, as a critic of Patmore’s poetry, may be seen, then, at full length,”³ while the latter can hardly be judged as a critic of the former. This arises from Patmore’s prejudice against Hopkins’ poetry or even, to some extent, from his unwillingness to respond to its originality and freshness. Afterwards Patmore wrote to Bridges, “To me his poetry has the effect of veins of pure gold imbedded in masses of unpracticable quartz....”⁴ However, he was greatly attracted by Hopkins’ character, as his letters to Bridges also reveal:

I have seldom felt so much attracted towards any man as I have been towards him, and I shall be more sorry than I can say if my criticisms have hurt him.⁵

Gerard Hopkins was the only orthodox, and as far as I could see, saintly man in whom religion had absolutely no narrowing effect upon his general opinions and sympathies. A Catholic of the most scrupulous strictness, he could nevertheless see the Holy Spirit in all goodness, truth and beauty: and there was something in all his words and manners which were at once a rebuke and an attraction to all who could only aspire to be like him.⁶

His interest in Hopkins’ poems having been aroused through Robert Bridges and Edmund Gosse, Patmore made a formal request to

¹ Basil Champneys, Memoirs, II, 345.
² *F.L.*, p. xxviii.
⁴ Basil Champneys, Memoirs, II, 247.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249. For the continuation of this passage, see Footnote 47 on p. 27.
Hopkins to allow him to read his poems. Thus Hopkins sent him
the manuscripts. In his letter written to Hopkins after a couple of
weeks, Patmore confessed his difficulty in understanding them, and
later he admitted his slowness in his appreciation of a work of art new
to him; he considered that it was because he had “followed a single
line of” his own, by which he meant that since he had his own artistic
principle, and had been strictly holding to it, his critical capability
was rather partial and limited. In his essays on poetry and art, we
frequently come across this principle or his fundamental conception
of poetry and the poet. In one of these essays, he compares Aquinas
with Dante:

Aquinas is to Dante as the Tableland of Thibet is to the Peak of Teneriffe;
and the first is not less essentially a poet, in the sense of a Seer ... than
that of the latter. It is true that the outward form of poetry is an in-
estimable 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 ... 

In the same essay, he proclaims that the “Poet is, par excellence, the
perceiver.” Thus it is that the Poet strives to find in the external
world of nature the analogies or correspondence by which alone the
unseen ultimate realities he has perceived can be made “more or less
apparent” for, or communicable to, those of inferior insight, and that
these analogies or “echoes” chosen by the Poet are “real” words.
Therefore, in Patmore it is obvious that the matter of a poem or what
to say in a poem is far more essential than the form or how to express
it, although by its very nature the latter must also be considered.
He suggests that the “predominance of form over formative energy,”
or of “language and imagery” (namely the technical elements of
poetry), over the subject matter, is the clear sign of the shallowness
or inner corruption of the poet. In his own words,

1 F.L., p. 351.
2 Ibid., pp. 352-4.
3 Coventry Patmore, Religio Poetae, Etc., p. 7.
4 Ibid., p. 2.
5 Ibid., p. 5.
The Poet alone has the power of so saying the truth ‘which it is not lawful to utter’, that the disc with its withering heat and blinding brilliance remains wholly invisible, while enough warmth and light are allowed to pass through the clouds of his speech to diffuse daylight and genial warmth.¹

For Patmore, who had been holding to this fixed artistic principle, Hopkins’ poetry must no doubt have been extremely difficult to appreciate. For Hopkins, “poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape’s sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on...”² Hence, Hopkins aimed at ‘inscape’ in his poetry. As he wrote to Bridges: “But as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling ‘inscape’ is what I above all aim at in poetry....”³ By ‘inscape’, Hopkins means a pattern or design of a thing or an individual being. A poem is a set of words by which alone a particular experience can be expressed. Hence Hopkins admired Henry Purcell:

The poet wishes well to the divine genius of Purcell and praises him that, whereas other musicians have given utterance to the moods of man’s mind, he has, beyond that, uttered in notes the very make and species of man as created both in him and in all men generally.⁴

After reading most of Hopkins’ poems several times, Patmore writes:

But to the already sufficiently arduous character of such poetry you seem to me to have added the difficulty of following several entirely novel and simultaneous experiments in versification and construction, together with an altogether unprecedented system of alliteration and compound words;—any one of which novelties would be startling and productive of distraction from the poetic matter to be expressed.⁵

He pointed out especially the “strangeness” of The Wreck of the Deutschland. In Hopkins’ poetry, however, unlike Patmore’s, the

¹ Coventry Patmore, The Rod, the Root and the Flower, p. 45.
² J.P., p. 289.
³ L.B., p. 66.
⁴ G.M.H. Poems, p. 80.
⁵ F.L., p. 352.
technical innovations and the matter of his poetry are inseparable; being reciprocal to each other, they express the inscape of each individual experience of the poet. As a natural result, Patmore failed completely to understand Hopkins’ poetry.

In making critical suggestions about Patmore’s work, Hopkins indicates more often than not his logical imprecision and the obscurity in his expression. Hopkins’ corrections of *The Angel in the House*, (11), (15) and (19),¹ those of *The Victories of Love*, (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (11), (13) and (15)² and his criticism of the last sentence of “The Dream” in *Amelia*³ are examples of such suggestions. In his remarks on the *Study on English Metrical Law*, he also points out a loose way of using the words “several centuries” in connection with the Anglo-Saxon language on p. 56. of that work.⁴ Regarding the correction (3) of *The Victories of Love*, which refers to the following lines of the poem,

Yet blame not beauty, which beguiles,  
With lovely motions and sweet smiles,  
Which while they please us pass away,  
The spirit to lofty thoughts that stay  
And lift the whole of after-life,  
Unless you take the vision to wife,  
Which then seems lost, or serves to slake  
Desire, as when a lovely lake  
Far off scarce fills the exulting eye  
Of one athirst, who comes thereby,  
And inappreciably sips  
The deep, with disappointed lips.⁵

Hopkins states that what the image of the lake suggests is obscure. The meaning of this image can be inferred from the context of the poem, but by following the actual words of the text it is difficult to understand the meaning. Men sometimes marry for beauty, but as time goes on, as a result of getting used to the beauty, it ceases to be

¹ *F.L.*, pp. 303-4.  
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their concern, and they care only to satisfy their bodily cravings. In order to elucidate their state, the poet employed the image of a lake. From the context, Hopkins assumes that a thirsty traveller is enraptured to see a beautiful lake in the distance, but that when he comes to it, he is concerned only about quenching his thirst at it. Hopkins then examines the imagery closely by various questions; he asks, for example, "Why does 'a lovely lake far off' not fill the eye?", "If he is thirsty, why does he only sip?" and "How can he drink from 'the deep of a lake, whose bank would be sheer if the lake is deep?" He says that in the end he has lost the clue to the meaning.1 In relation to another line in The Victories of Love, "He suckles, with the hissing fly, The spider ..."2 he comments that the commas should be left out, and goes on to explain the reason. The line with the commas has led him to think God feeds both the spider and the fly at one time, which should not have been meant by the poet; he should have meant that God feeds the spider with the fly. In both of these cases, then, Hopkins criticizes Patmore's way of expression as imprecise or obscure.3

In reading Patmore's articles published in St. James's Gazette, Hopkins found the same kind of faults. In the case of "Love and Poetry", Hopkins considered that from the point of view of the writer, to whom the subject had long been familiar, no lengthy explanation was needed, while for the reader, to whom the subject was unfamiliar, it would have been better if the writer could have given him a clear and patient explanation.4 Another similar case is "Real Apprehension", another article published in the same periodical. Its whole argument is built upon this text from Newman: "Man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal."5 Hopkins argued that, as the text was a paradox, and "the use of a paradox is to awaken the hearer's attention," in most cases, properly speaking, it was untrue and ought not to have been taken seriously. Patmore, however, took it seriously, and based his article on it. Furthermore, in this article Patmore made

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2 Coventry Patmore, Poems, p. 232.
3 F.L., p. 315.
4 Ibd., p. 376.
5 Coventry Patmore, Principle in Art Etc., p. 6.
another grossly illogical comment. He referred to General Gordon and Sir Thomas More, and said, “persons like General Gordon and Sir Thomas More would stare if you called anything they did or suffered by the name of sacrifice.” However modest their responses might have been, what they did and suffered was a sacrifice in the same sense as Christ’s sacrifice. On these grounds Hopkins severely criticizes the article.

From this, I assume that Patmore’s obscure expressions, the logical imprecision in his thoughts and the “partiality and limitation of” his appreciation of art all originated in his extremely subjective cast of mind which tended to “follow a single line of” his own. He seems to be a poet endowed with a highly perceptive insight into unseen spiritual realities and truths, but to be too subjective to make his visions sufficiently communicable to others. It may be conjectured in addition that in him, this subjective tendency was developed by his attitude towards “thought” because apparently he did not set so much value on it, as can be seen in the lines from The Angel in the House, “But blindest love is sweet and warm, / And full of truth not shaped by thought...” and a passage from his essay entitled “Religio Poetae”:

He [i.e. The Poet] is the very reverse of a “scientist”. He is all vision and no thought, whereas the other is all thought and no vision. But “Where there is no vision the People perish”...

In February 1888 Patmore wrote to Hopkins and informed him that on Christmas Day in the previous year he had burnt the M.S. ‘Sponsa Dei’ “without reserve of a single paragraph.” As regards this prose work, Edmund Gosse, who read it all, writes in his biography of Patmore:

The Sponsa Dei, this vanished masterpiece, was not very long, but polished and modulated to the highest degree of perfection... The subject of it was certainly audacious. It was not more nor less than an interpretation of the love between the soul and God by an analogy of the love between

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2 Coventry Patmore, Poems, p. 90.
3 Coventry Patmore, Religio Poetae, Etc., p. 5.
4 F.L., p. 385.
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a woman and a man; it was, indeed, a transcendental treatise on Divine desire seen through the veil of human desire.¹

Thus the subject of the work is "the relation of the soul to Christ as his betrothed wife,"² which later Patmore calls "the burning heart of the Universe."³ In his letter written to Bridges some time after Hopkins' death, he gives an account of why he burnt the manuscript:

The authority of his [i.e. Hopkins'] goodness was so great with me that I threw the manuscript of a little book—a sort of "Religio Poetae"—into the fire, simply because, when he had read it, he said with a grave look, "That's telling secrets." This little book had been the work of ten years' continual meditations, and could not but have made a greater effect than all the rest I have ever written; but his doubt was final with me.⁴

Patmore says, "his doubt was final with me." The subject of the work itself is age-old, and has been part of the tradition of the Church and of Christian literature. Why did Hopkins then feel misgivings about this work? The same kind of symbol or analogy expressing the relationship of the soul with God can be found in Patmore's later odes, namely "Eros and Psyche", "Psyche's Discontent" and "De Natura Deorum", in which pagan mythology is used as a symbol of the love between the soul and God; but this involves risks. For one thing, to some the sexual symbol or the expression of Divine in terms of human love can be distasteful and unpleasant. Secondly, especially when carried beyond due scope, it is open to the dangers of misunderstanding and abuses, since what is most sacred and innocent can be turned into something most blasphemous and degrading, just as the Mass can be changed into a black mass celebrated by the devil. Probably Hopkins became aware of these dangers when he read the M.S. 'Sponsa Dei' during his stay with Patmore in the summer of 1885. On his return to Dublin he wrote to Patmore pointing out the danger of sensual abuses concurring with high religious contemplations: "After all, anything however high and innocent may happen to suggest something low and loathsome." He concluded the letter, writing:

¹ Edmund Gosse, Coventry Patmore, pp. 143-4.
² Basil Champneys, Memoirs, I, 146.
³ Basil Champneys, Memoirs, II, 67.
⁴ Ibid., p. 249.
"I am sorry to disgust you with these horrors; but such is man and such is Satanic craft . . ." Being highly subjective in his outlook, Patmore probably had not been much concerned about the dangers involved in his use of the analogy between human and Divine love until they were brought to his attention by Hopkins. Basil Champneys comments:

To Patmore however this symbol was not only of vital moment but had, as he believed, the full endorsement of the Church,—a view which the natural tendency to assimilate what was most consonant to his own intuitions would necessarily confirm.²

Hopkins nevertheless expressed regret about his own remarks which had eventually led Patmore to such an extreme decision, and explained to Patmore the right step he ought to have taken, that is, to consult his spiritual director about the book.³ In criticizing The Unknown Eros, however, Hopkins refrained from commenting on the three Eros-Psyche odes whose symbol, although perhaps being less audacious, involves the same kind of dangers as the destroyed work, 'Sponsa Dei'. In this case, he compared the odes with the Canticles, and guarded against passing a hasty, but inappropriate judgment upon them.⁴

Patmore described Hopkins as "a Catholic of the most scrupulous strictness."⁵ In treating sacred or doctrinal subjects, Hopkins was always sensitive, scrupulous and rigorous. His reaction towards 'Sponsa Dei', as we have seen, reveals this. Another instance of this same aspect is to be found in his criticism of Patmore's poem, "The Scorched Fly".

Who sins in hope; who, sinning, says,
'Sorrow for sin God's judgment stays'.
Against God's Spirit he lies . . .⁶

¹ F.L., p. 365.
² Basil Champneys, Memoirs, I, 317.
⁴ Ibid., p. 347.
⁵ Basil Champneys, Memoirs, II, 249.
⁶ Coventry Patmore, Amelia, Tamerton Church-Tower, Etc., p. 222.
Hopkins interpreted this poem as presumption, not hope, and judged Patmoe's use of the word "hope" misleading as it should have meant either false hope or presumption, and not true hope. Hopkins wished that the expression in this poem should be improved, as "being so vital a point of morality," it "should have nothing misleading in it."¹ (In the revised edition of 1885, for which Hopkins had made the suggestion, the poem was omitted by Patmoe.)

The difference between Hopkins and Patmoe on the question of morality is to be found also in Hopkins' criticism of The Angel in the House. He was dissatisfied with Patmoe's treatment of beauty in the poem,² although he considered that the principle stated there was noble and true, and explained "beautiful evil" and "ugly good" in his own terms. In the world of nature, "outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty, outward good of inward good..."³ Beauty comes from a moulding force or life which is strong or vital enough to "succeed in asserting itself over the resistance of" matter, while when the moulding force is not vital enough or limited, and fails in moulding the matter, "ugly good" results. Thus it is found in nature. However, "beautiful evil" is entirely different from "ugly good," as it has nothing to do with nature; it is produced by "wicked will," which abuses beauty.⁴ Another interesting instance which reveals their difference in relation to moral subjects is to be found in Hopkins' criticism of the same poem. Here it is the question of vanity. In this case, Patmoe used the word, "vain", in a very idiosyncratic and personal way.

You said to Mary once—I hope
'In jest—that women should be vain...

If oft'nest she is anything,
'Be it careless, talkative, and vain...

Patmoe conceived of "vanity" as "the very daintiest beatitude and last beauty of the soul." It was to him a sort of pure rapture and

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¹ F.L., pp. 322-3.
² Coventry Patmoe, Poems, p. 149.
³ F.L., p. 306.
⁴ Ibid., pp. 306-7.
⁵ Coventry Patmoe, Poems, p. 174.
⁶ Ibid., p. 183.
“abandonment of soul towards one person.” He supported his view by a rather vague reference to St. Augustine (or some other saint), whom he believed to have said “that there was a little vanity in the Blessed Virgin. . . .” He also seemed to think that St. Teresa had shared this conception.\(^1\) However, Hopkins took the word, “vain”, in its usual sense, and therefore, for him it could be nothing but vice. Of course, as a Jesuit, he was strongly against the word’s implication, and made a long and severe criticism of this point.\(^2\) It may be conjectured that this reaction of Hopkins was caused by his extreme sensitivity on any subject of morality and sin.

This scrupulous or even excessively serious attitude of Hopkins towards moral and doctrinal subjects is reflected in his criticism of “Tristitia”, a poem in The Unknown Eros. His objection was that this poem troubled him because it was “pervasive” and “founded on an unreality”.

If thou alone should’st win
God’s perfect bliss,
And I, beguiled by gracious-seeming sin,
Say, loving too much thee,
Love’s last goal miss . . .\(^3\)

He felt strongly that the poem contained a contradiction and a case which could not actually arise. Thus, he could not take the whole of it seriously, but saw it rather as “the lovely expression of an overstrained mood.”\(^4\) This objection seems to be due to the fact that in this poem heaven and hell are conceived in terms of the judgment dependent on the lover’s purely subjective point of view, but not on any right doctrinal basis.\(^5\) A highly similar case is to be found in Hopkins’ disappointment in Bridges’ Ulysses. The reason for his objection was that since he could not take heathen gods seriously, it was impossible for him to take Ulysses seriously. As his letter to Patmore tells us, in his

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\(^1\) F.L., p. 311.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 307-10.
\(^3\) Coventry Patmore, Poems, p. 359.
\(^4\) F.L., p. 342.
\(^5\) Patricia M. Ball, The Heart’s Events, pp. 65-8. (She also indicates that the poem is “fraught with contradictory values,” but goes on to examine it to the full within its dramatic context.)
view, the want of seriousness was the greatest fault in a work of art.

I cannot take heathen gods in earnest; and want of earnest I take to be the deepest fault a work of art can have. It does not strike at first, but it withers them in the end. Goethe’s Faust has this fault: it is really farce.¹

Hence, what Hopkins primarily and essentially required of art and religion was a seriousness of idea or teaching (in the most strict sense of the word) accompanied by perfection in form or technique. This is also precisely the point of “On the Signs of Health and Decay in Arts”, one of his essays written in his Oxford days. Truth and beauty are the objects art aims at, and art decays when truth in it is lost. The recovery of art must be by a violent breaking with conventionalism such as was aimed at by the Pre-Rephaelite school.²

Urged by his serious concern in religion and art, he wrote to Patmore to spur him on with his projected, but unwritten poem, “The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin”. His advice was earnest:

You will never be younger; if not done soon it will never be done, to the end of eternity . . . this poem was to be an act of devotion, of religion . . .³

It was by providence designed for the education of the human race that great artists should leave works not only of great excellence but also in very considerable bulk. Moreover you say in one of your odes that the Blessed Virgin seems to relent and promise her help to you to write in her honour. If this is not to be followed it is but a foolish scandalous saying.⁴

However, against Hopkins’ advice Patmore abandoned the idea of completing the poem, and the copious notes he made are all that is left for us to study. One of the notes conveys to us how he gave up the project. In this case, the reason was his fear of profanation of the sacred Divinity.

The more I look at the subject the more I see that it would be impossible to treat it directly without profanation. It may be approached from various directions . . . but it could not be directly handled with any degree of

¹ F.L., p. 360.
⁴ Ibid., p. 359.
fullness, without breaking in upon the Divine Silence which hangs over the subject like the speckless sky over a landscape . . .

Patmore replied to Hopkins:

What you say about bulk in poetry being a good thing is quite true, I think; & I wish that I had had force enough in me to make mine more bulky. But I have written all that I had to say, and as well as I could; and I must rest content.

In October 1887 Hopkins wrote to Patmore about his review of Sydney Colvin’s book on Keats published in St. James’s Gazette, and in the following year he wrote again to Patmore about Keats. Hopkins rejected Patmore’s view that Keats was a feminine genius on the ground that “the beauty and sweetness, is the essential, the truth and power of intellect and passion the accident.” He offered a contrary view: “His poems, I know, are very sensuous and indeed they are sensual. This sensuality is their fault, but I do not see that it makes them feminine.” He then went on to argue that Keats’ mind was masculine like Shakespeare’s and that if only he could have survived the years of his maturity, he would have grown to be a poet of a masculine frame of mind. In his letter written in the following year, he analysed Lamia and some reflective passages in Keats’ poems, and pointed out the moral element there and the deliberate change in style from that of Endymions which showed “the masculine fibre of Keats’ mind”; he concluded; “He was, in my opinion, made to be a thinker, a critic, as much as a singer or artist of words.”

As referred to in Hopkins’ letter, Matthew Arnold wrote an article on Keats (1880) reprinted in Essays in Criticism, Second Series, in 1888. Like Hopkins, Arnold regarded Keats’ works as Shakespearean, and stated that “Keats was a great spirit.” By quoting the lines, “Beauty

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1 Frederick Page, Patmore: A Study in Poetry, p. 144.
3 Coventry Patmore, Principle in Art, Etc., p. 82.
4 F.L., p. 381.
5 Ibid., p. 386.
6 Ibid., p. 387.
7 Ibid., p. 382.
8 Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p. 117.
is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know," he showed what he most admired in Keats: "It is no small thing to have so loved the principle of beauty as to perceive the necessary relation of beauty with truth, and of both with joy."

Hopkins and Patmore never agreed on this issue; Patmore maintained his original view. It may be conjectured that, preoccupied with his fixed conception about Keats' sensuality, he failed to see Keats' poems objectively and clearly enough, and overlooked the depth and strength of the poet's mind and his essential moral concern.

Hopkins also made critical remarks on Patmore's *Study on English Metrical Law*. Hopkins himself was deeply interested in metrics, which enabled him to discover and revive "Sprung Rhythm" in his poetry. One of his main objections to Patmore's *Study on English metrics* concerned the latter's treatment of the English spoken accent; Hopkins considered this to be unsatisfactory because Patmore had not made clear what the English spoken accent was. He was also dissatisfied with Patmore's argument on alliteration in vowels, and suggested a reconsideration of the matter. A satisfactory study of the question of English metrics in the two poets, which, in my view, is important, requires a detailed analysis and full discussion of their works from this standpoint, and I would like to carry it out in due course of time.

In this correspondence Hopkins and Patmore exchanged views of the works by Robert Bridges, Richard Watson Dixon, William Barnes and R. D. Blackmore; and except for Bridges' *Ulysses*, which Patmore had not read, they agreed with each other's views.

Thus, as we have seen, Hopkins and Patmore shared the religion of Catholicism, and had a common interest in literature generally, and in poetry above all else; and these grounds provided the very basis on which their relationship was founded. On the other hand, however, in spite of these common foundations, they were greatly different from each other, for example, in their religious attitudes and views of poetry.

As I have already pointed out, the correspondence comprises a great deal of small corrections suggested by Hopkins, and what I have so far chosen and discussed are some main issues which reveal the

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individual features of the two poets. With regard to a number of small critical points raised by Hopkins, they as a whole indicate Hopkins’ enthusiasm for Patmore’s poetry and his sense of fulfilling his mission as a “priest-poet,” which I have examined in relation to the context of the correspondence at the outset of this work.

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