

ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

Coventry Patmore
and the Aesthetics of Architecture

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How should we judge a building? As scenery, as structure, as ornament, or simply as the enclosure of space? Should we think of architecture as a form of social manipulation? As basically an art? Or simply as machinery? No doubt a building is all of these things. Architectural criticism is scarcely an exact science, and the nature of architectural judgement is notoriously elusive. Somebody once asked Lutyens, ‘what is the secret of good architecture?’ ‘Just remember,’ he replied, ‘that water runs down hill.’ What he meant—apart from the advisability of damp-proofing—was that all building necessarily obeys the law of gravity; all good building turns gravitational thrust to aesthetic advantage; and all great building converts the imperatives of gravity into soaring expressions of the human mind. In this, architecture is unique among the arts.

One man, alone among English critics, saw this truth, and explained it clearly. His name was Coventry Patmore.

In 1848 the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood decided to draw up a ‘list of immortals’, each with an appropriate number of stars. Jesus Christ received four stars and Shakespeare three; two each went to Browning, Keats and Shelley; and one apiece to Raphael, Tennyson and Coventry Patmore.¹ Since then, Patmore’s reputation has been rather less buoyant. Sometimes he is remembered as a precocious Pre-Raphaelite poet, as in John Brett’s

Read 24 October 1990. © The British Academy 1991.

¹ W. E. Fredeman, *The P.R.B. Journal* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 106–7, listing additional names.



Fig. 1 Coventry Patmore, from a drawing by J. Brett, RA (1855).

romantic portrait of 1855 (Fig. 1):² a friend of Rossetti, Ruskin, Browning and Tennyson; the author of one domestic masterpiece—*The Angel in the House*—plus a handful of obscure odes.³ Sometimes he is remembered in ‘apocalyptic old age’: an arrogant, thrice-married Catholic visionary; the metaphysician of wedlock, glaring out of Sargent’s portrait of 1895 ‘like a wild crane in the wilderness’ (Plate 1).⁴ (Sargent re-used that image for the Prophet Ezekiel in Boston Public Library).⁵ Rarely, alas, does the name Coventry Patmore ring bells in architectural circles today.

² B. Champneys, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore* (1900), vol. 1, p. 84: ill. ‘A man of dreams, a man of business, and a man of vehement physical determination’ (E. Gosse, *Coventry Patmore* [1905], p. 202). ‘We were little more than boys together’, Patmore recalled of the Pre-Raphaelites; ‘simple, pure-minded, ignorant and confident’ (Champneys *Patmore*, vol. 1, p. 83). Ruskin was godfather to one of Patmore’s sons, Tennyson to another. On at least one memorable occasion Browning, Ruskin, Tennyson and Patmore dined *à quatre* at Patmore’s table (J. Ruskin, *Works*, ed. Cook & Wedderburn, vol. 36, pp. xxxii, 305).

³ By his death, the *Angel* had sold 250,000 copies (Gosse, *Patmore*, p. 105).

⁴ Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 2, frontis: ill.; Gosse, *Patmore*, pp. 201–2.

⁵ Gosse, *Patmore*, p. 200; Champneys, *Patmore*, Book 2, p. 58: ill.

Yet Patmore was an architectural critic of extraordinary power. He had learning, fluency and perception; the mind of a mystic and the eye of a poet. He was perhaps our most eloquent expositor of architectural style. And it was he who first set out for English readers the secret of all great architecture, in all places, and at all times. That secret was—and is—not ornament but symbol; not structure but an image of structure: the expression of gravitational thrust.

Patmore's architectural criticism was never presented in a single, definitive publication. Over the years he tried several times to compress his thinking into book form. In 1847 he was reported to be doing so.⁶ In 1850 he was beginning to fear that he might be 'forestalled' by 'others' who were already thinking along similar lines.⁷ In 1852 he actually offered 'a small volume' to the publishers of his poems.⁸ Nothing came of it. Instead, between 1846 and 1858, he developed his ideas spasmodically, in fragments, in a dozen separate essays in eight different journals. All these were anonymous, as were further articles rehearsing similar themes, in 1872 and 1886–8. Not until he collected a few of these later, and slighter reviews in a slim volume entitled *Principle in Art* (1889) did the public discover—what the *cognoscenti* had known all along—that their author was none other than the author of *The Angel in the House*.⁹

Forty years of procrastination: partly due to a perfectionist temperament, partly to a radical change of circumstance. Patmore's father, P. G. Patmore, was a Grub Street *littérateur* with talent, good connections and the instincts of a gambler. Before fleeing to France to escape bankruptcy, he introduced his son to the world of journalism, then left him without a penny. Between 1846 and 1866, Coventry Patmore worked in the Department of Printed Books at the British Museum.¹⁰ During those years he married the daughter of Ruskin's tutor, the original Angel in the House; fathered six children, and supplemented his salary by acting as a reviewer

⁶ Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, p. 100: 22 March 1847.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92: 21 March 1850.

⁸ E. Moxon (Princeton University MSS, cited by J. C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* [1957], p. 204 n.)

⁹ A further selection appeared as *Courage in Politics and Other Essays, 1885–96*, ed. F. Page (1921). Page added an appendix containing a bibliography of Patmore's writings, as did J. C. Reid in *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (1957). Since then the *Wellesley Index of Victorian Periodicals*, ed. W. E. Houghton, 5 vols (1966–89), has added to the list.

¹⁰ He was recommended by Monckton Milnes, with whom he worked on Keats's letters (Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, pp. 64–5). He retired on 1 January 1866, with a pension of £126.18s.4d. p.a. (F. Boase, *Modern English Biography*, vol. 6 [1921], pp. 363–4). For Patmore's account of the library and its Round Reading Room—'one of the most marvellous triumphs ever attained by system and order'—see [Patmore], 'Library of the British Museum', *Edinburgh Review*, 109, (1859), 201–26.

and translator.¹¹ Her death in 1862 led to a drastic change of direction. In 1864 he became a Roman Catholic; married for the second time in 1865, retired and became a country gentleman, exchanging a world of North London lodgings¹² for Heron's Ghyll at Brixted, near Uckfield in Sussex, designed for him by J. F. Bentley in 1866–8.¹³ Thence he transferred in 1880 to the Manor House, Hastings, opposite which he commissioned a major church by his future biographer, Basil Champneys, Our Lady Star of the Sea (1882–3).¹⁴ His final home—with his third wife, whom he married in 1881 and by whom he had a seventh child—was The Lodge at Walhampton, near Lymington, Hampshire.¹⁵

These biographical details are important. Patmore's second marriage made him, for the first time, financially secure, and confirmed his allegiance to Catholicism.¹⁶ Before 1864 he had no time to finish his book; after 1865 he had no need to. Building activity at Heron's Ghyll and Hastings served perhaps as sublimation for that unwritten masterpiece of architectural criticism. We are left with *obiter scripta* from which to piece together his thinking. That is the purpose of this lecture.

When Patmore began to wrestle with architectural theory in the 1840s, he was faced with a choice between two perennial aesthetics: decoration as autonomous form, and decoration as structural expression. The first of

¹¹ Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, pp. 60, 62.

¹² eg. Percy Street, Tottenham Court Road; or Brecknock Crescent, Camden Town. In 1852 Ruskin was invited by Patmore to meet Browning at The Grove, Highgate. 'Patmore lives in a small enough house', he told his father, 'but in a pretty part of the world . . . I had no idea there were such nice, old-fashioned, quiet houses and avenues in that direction' (Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 35, p. 141).

¹³ Previously Old Lands, now Temple Grove Preparatory School; since altered. Patmore chose Bentley because he was 'the only architect who knew more of architecture than I did myself' (Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, pp. 226–8, 230). For ills see *Country Life*, 13 (1903), 638–42; *Architectural History*, 23, (1980), pp. 106–7, 115. 'His grass lawns were designed on principles taken from the Parthenon, for he had discovered that there are no true horizontals in architecture' (S. Leslie, *Studies in Sublime Failure*, 1932, p. 143). In 1874 Patmore first let, then sold it to the Duke of Norfolk for £27,000—a considerable profit, which he explained in *How I Managed and Improved my Estate* (1886). At his death, however, Patmore left only £9,861.16s.4d, minus debts of £1,084.8s.5d. (Inland Revenue, 59/175: *ex inf.* Dr C. Harvey).

¹⁴ Ills and plan: *Builder*, 53 (1887), p. 311. Patmore thought it 'the only Catholic church in England without any bad taste in it'. He contributed c.£5,300 to its cost (Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, p. 336).

¹⁵ 'A bluish building, standing coyly and askew among the trees, very retired and dowdy-looking, on a muddy point of land opposite the Isle of Wight . . . but with enchanting views of the bright, tidal expanses' (Gosse, *Patmore*, p. 173, ill.). See also *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 June 1932, p. 427. For Patmore's tomb, designed by Champneys, see Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, p. 348: ill.; *Athenaeum* 5 May 1897 and *Times Literary Supplement* 19 May 1932, p. 368.

¹⁶ See Gosse, *Patmore*, pp. 119–20.

these, basically the Renaissance tradition, made—to a rationalist—the mistake of regarding ornament as independent of construction. It was a tradition translated into very different Gothic terms by Ruskin. The second viewpoint—broadly speaking the Neo-Classical tradition, translated into Gothic by Pugin—made the equally fatal mistake of restricting ornamental validity to forms which were tectonically determined. Hence—to an anti-rationalist—the great error which has bedevilled modern criticism: ‘the notion . . . that, if the architect takes good care of the useful, the beautiful will take care of itself’.¹⁷

Both of these views Patmore rejected. Neither was entirely wrong; but neither could be more than a partial truth. Was the glory of antique building explicable only in terms of arbitrary mathematical proportion? Was the relationship of that harmony to human or natural form anything more than allegorical? Was our-understanding of the Orders increased in any way by the application of subjective terms like ‘simplicity’, ‘purity’, or ‘classicality’?¹⁸ Was a Gothic spire—to use Pugin’s notation—decorated construction or constructed decoration? Or was it something else? Clearly the conceptual vocabulary available to architectural critics was insufficient.

Steering his way between both fallacies—the arbitrary and the determinist—Patmore set out to demonstrate his own criterion of excellence: the quality of ‘architectural expression’¹⁹—that is, the expression of gravitational control. ‘Without forcible expression of security and permanence . . . in appearance as well as in reality’, he announced, ‘no building can rightly be called architectural’. And the ‘constant condition of good architectural expression’, is ‘that it should have some allusion to the law of gravitation’.²⁰ His sequence of priority in building was therefore as follows: first ‘constructive obligation’; second ‘appropriate expression’; third ‘symbolical value’.²¹

To Patmore there were only three architectural styles which embodied this ‘criterion of a true style’,²² this single controlling idea or ‘unifying principle’:²³ the Egyptian, the Greek and the Gothic. In each of these he

¹⁷ [Patmore], ‘Sources of Expression in Architecture’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), 367–8. Echoing Karl Schnaase: ‘Beauty in architecture lies not in function; it begins in the assertion of art over function’ (K. Schnaase, *Geschichte der bildenden Künste*, 7 vols [1843–64], introd.). See also Schnaase, *Über das Organische in der Baukunst* (1844), a reply to Franz Kugler’s notions of organic expression.

¹⁸ [Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 382.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

²² Patmore, ‘Architectural Styles’, in *Principle in Art* (1898), p. 194.

²³ [Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 390.

identified the operation of the idea within material boundaries dictated by the laws of physics. The resulting ethos he categorized in turn as Material, Rational and Spiritual. Thus—and this is a preliminary summary—the Egyptian style turned deadweight into a totem of material power; the Greek made equipoise a symbol of rational harmony; and in Gothic a system of vaulting became etherealized in pursuit of spiritual aspiration.

Patmore restricted serious consideration of architecture to those three styles. His reasoning ran along the following lines. Any good architect has his own manner, but style is integral not just to one building but to a whole culture: it is both an outward sign of inward strength and a symbol of collective ideals. Each of the great stylistic triad—Egyptian, Greek and Gothic—was both expressively and symbolically related to ‘the great law of gravitation’.²⁴ Most of the so-called styles—notably the whole Renaissance tradition—failed, in his eyes, either the test of expressional character and/or the test of ideological symbolism.

Roman architecture, he believed, failed on both accounts (see Plate 2). The Romans had abandoned Greek construction but retained its ornamental expression: hence that ‘revolting sense of anomaly and falsehood’ which—for Patmore at least—deprived Roman architecture of all aesthetic merit.²⁵ Engineering and art had moved in fatally different directions. ‘Vague and arbitrary notions of symmetry, simplicity, variety etc., took the place of a steady and intelligent reference to the powers of gravitation and support’.²⁶ Those much-vaunted systems of proportional harmony were based merely on codified preference and not on ‘the only right basis, namely the expression of the due proportion of power of support to power of gravitation’.²⁷ The result was a ‘hellish architecture’ worthy of Dante’s *Inferno*,²⁸ in which three great principles of construction were confused: the wall, the arch, and the beam.

Renaissance architecture, Patmore admitted, though ‘full of error and barbarism’ inherited from the Romans, ‘really was an art, having certain comprehensible and consistent artistic principles’ (see Plate 3).²⁹ Its details were often crude: he especially disliked Vignola’s Tuscan,³⁰ to say nothing

²⁴ [Patmore], ‘Character in Architecture’, *North British Review*, 15 (1851), p. 461.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 463, 467, 470.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 479.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 470, as illustrated by Flaxman.

²⁹ [Patmore], ‘Character’, *North British Review*, 15, (1851), p. 462.

³⁰ ‘A bald Doric, totally without distinctive character, save that of baldness. The omission of triglyphs makes the separation of architrave and frieze unnerving; the astragal, on the neck of the shaft, . . . suggests weakness; the fillet above the abacus and the filletless ovolo that crowns the cornice, are sheer nonsense, the fillet being a separate member where there is no separation operated, the ovolo being a supporting member when there is nothing to support’ (*ibid.*, p. 479).

of Giulio Romano's eccentricities. The 'itching' of Renaissance architects for 'inexpressive variety' produced rustication which was 'gross and tautological',³¹ and alarming confusions of voussoir, lintel and arch.³² London, he remarked, had miles of such 'unmitigated architectural nonsense'.³³ Burlington House, Piccadilly, for instance, where the entrance columns seemed to be festooned with rusticated sheep-skins.³⁴ But at least in Palladio, Patmore noted, 'there is not much utter nonsense'; his detail even had 'a faint reminiscence of constructive meaning'.³⁵ Indeed—looking at Barry's scholarly Reform Club—Patmore had to confess that 'the faults of [the Renaissance] style may almost be said to constitute its principles'.³⁶

There were two other styles that did merit consideration: the Romanesque (see Plate 4) and the Islamic (see Plate 5).

In the first of these—the Romano-Byzantine or Lombard', as Patmore called it—the semi-circular arch (which is not, of course, self-supporting) achieved at last its true expression by being wholly subordinate to the encompassing wall.³⁷ It was 'this power of the wall' which Patmore saw as 'the theme of the Lombard system of expression'³⁸—a power emphasized by panelling, plating and arcading; a power epitomized by the Lombardic circular window, its 'raditating ... spokes' and 'deep ... decorated chamfer' emphasizing the 'vast power' of the wall 'to which by its form, it expresses its infinite power of resistance'.³⁹ But, at least until it became Norman, this was all too much of 'a mongrel mode', 'an incongruous hybrid', stemming ultimately from the Roman mixed-marriage of arch and beam.⁴⁰ Such 'organized chaos' might be paralleled in the 'pseudo-architectures of India, Mexico, China etc.' but it could never rank as tectonic excellence.⁴¹ Indeed it was closer to sculpture.⁴² Its basis was less an expression of superincumbent weight, more a reference to the mass and modulation of masonry walling: 'thickness within thickness, arcade within

³¹ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, **94** (1851), p. 401.

³² e.g. Palazzo Thiene, Vicenza or Palazzo Renuccini, Florence (Patmore, 'Character', *North British Review*, **15** [1851], p. 476).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 478; [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, **94** (1851), p. 379.

³⁶ [Patmore], 'Character', *North British Review*, **15** (1851), p. 473.

³⁷ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, **94**, (1851), p. 385.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 388–9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁴⁰ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 161.

⁴¹ [Patmore], 'Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*', *North British Review*, **12** (1849–50), p. 324.

⁴² [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, **94** (1851), p. 373.

arcade', exploiting 'artistically' its thickness and might.⁴³ Its columnar formations—'twisted . . . contorted . . . knotted together'—seldom bore any valid proportional relationship to structural necessity.⁴⁴ The subordinate arcades were just 'Lilliputian mockeries of the Attic shaft'.⁴⁵ And minor ornaments—chamfer and panel, billet and chevron—were all designed to reveal the texture of the masonry rather than the dynamics of its construction. Romanesque, Patmore concludes, 'well conveys the solemn expression of a calm eternity . . .'; but for religious purposes it will not bear the least comparison with the flamelike Gothic.⁴⁶ In other words, whatever its plastic quality, it lacked the dynamic element—structurally and spiritually dynamic—of Gothic. The Norman arch, a 'cavernous gap in masses of . . . all-sufficient masonry',⁴⁷ awaited the arrival of its pointed successor.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the Byzantines had tried 'to create a style . . . in which the semicircular arch should afford, not only the main principle of construction, but also the theme of expression'. However, 'the object of the circular arch is the distributed weight of the wall; just as the object of the column is the entablature, or the wall concentrated upon its capital by means of the arch. The Byzantines . . . made the arch the chief object to the eye, setting little importance upon the chief object of the arch; and the consequence is . . . an unpleasant sense of imperfect purpose . . . A great resisting power [the arch] . . . is . . . ostentatiously displayed . . . and . . . given . . . little . . . to do.' Its surplus energy is vented in 'fantastical tricks' like the dome of Sta. Sophia. That dome's 'chief boast'—its apparently miraculous means of support—is in fact its chief artistic defect: 'the wonder is but a lying wonder; for that which the uninitiated spectator gapes at, as a vast mass of legitimate masonry, unaccountably suspended in air, is a structure of Rhodian bricks and pumice-stone, possessing only a small proportion of the supposed force of gravitation, and exerting a lateral thrust which is met by a vast and hidden buttress-sytem. This species of falsehood attained its climax in the dome of St. Vitale, Ravenna, which, while it claims credit for being constructed of stones, put together on the principle of the all

⁴³ Ibid., p. 369; [Patmore], 'London Street Architecture', *National Review*, 5, (1857), p. 61; [Patmore], 'Gothic Architecture—Present and Future', *North British Review*, 28, (1858), p. 350.

⁴⁴ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 391.

⁴⁵ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, pp. 194–6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴⁸ Like 'a spark of fire introduced into a pile of timber, converting it into a heaven-aspiring flame' (Patmore, 'Architecture and Architectural Criticism', in *Courage in Politics*, ed. F. Page [1921], p. 179).

prevalent arch, is, in reality, a kind of grotto, formed by a coil of empty earthen jars'.⁴⁹ Patmore eventually admitted that Sta. Sophia was 'perhaps the greatest triumph of architectural skill ever attained'.⁵⁰ But he continued to believe that falsified construction—as, later on, in Renaissance domes—could never rank highly as symbolic form: it was merely illegitimate expression.⁵¹

The 'aimlessness' of the Byzantine arch, Patmore thought, appealed powerfully to 'the vivid and excitable Arabian temperament'. In the resulting Islamic style—he called it Moresque or Saracenic—the mechanical properties of the arch are translated into a system of expression which surpassed even Gothic in transcending tectonic reality.⁵² The honeysuckle domes of the Alhambra seem to hang in the air on pendentives—almost with the ease of clouds. At Cordova the arcades are superflously multiplied in a way which confuses tectonic and atectonic in a veritable trellis of masonry. 'Gravitation', Patmore explains, 'consolidated by the Egyptian, adequately opposed by the Greek, and turned into aspiration by the Gothic architect, was by the Arabian boldly and simply negated. The form of the arch is repeated in his buildings without end; but it seldom . . . appears to have any work to do. And this ostentatious idleness in a powerful means of support, together with a most curious and elaborate system of real or apparent lateral thrusts, by which the idea of gravitation in all the masses is hidden or confused to the eye, is the grand source of the marvellous effects of the Alhambra and the Mosque of Cordova'.⁵³ An image of tectonic truth had been counterbalanced into nothingness; turned indeed into a 'fairytale'⁵⁴ from the *Arabian Nights*. For Patmore this conquest of gravity by sleight of hand posed an interpretive puzzle. He recognized its virtuosity, but he doubted its symbolic meaning. Here he saw no ultimate significance 'for the human race and its religions'.⁵⁵

Perhaps he preferred not to look too hard. His aesthetic perceptions were conditioned by his Christian perspective. But, given that conditioning, he found neither Romanesque nor Islamic could match the big three styles—Egyptian, Greek and Gothic—in terms of conceptual significance. Each of the three great styles achieved heights of structural and moral symbolism by exploiting in three dimensions 'the great natural law of

⁴⁹ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 385.

⁵⁰ Patmore, 'Criticism', *Courage in Politics*, p. 182.

⁵¹ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 197.

⁵² [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 369.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 386, 388.

⁵⁴ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 166.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

gravitation'.⁵⁶ And once those three great ideals—the Material, the Rational, the Spiritual—had found utterance in stone, what fourth abstraction remained to inspire a new art?⁵⁷ Gothic—‘the purest expression of sacramentalism’—would last as long as Christianity.⁵⁸

In other words, Patmore made no provision in his aesthetic for the emergence of a new style. New materials, new techniques—be they cantilevers of steel or vaults of glass—might well manifest new mannerism. They did not guarantee that elusive new style. Anyway, he believed, when ‘the Gothic style . . . was invented’—maximum strength, minimum material—‘all others became forever obsolete’.⁵⁹ No doubt, Patmore concluded, iron and glass would continue to be useful—each in its proper place—in suspension bridges and railway stations.⁶⁰ But if employed in the higher levels of building they would surely result in ‘the abolition of architecture as a fine art’⁶¹ . . . [Indeed] iron architecture is like the unmanageable mechanical man of Frankenstein . . . now that our architects have “developed” him, they are at a loss to know what to do with him, or rather how to prevent his destroying them!’⁶²

Such a gloomy prophecy was neither more nor less perceptive than that of many contemporary Victorians. Ruskin felt much the same.⁶³ But Patmore did foresee a little of the future, and in a more positive light. He realized that ‘the artistic law of architecture’ was not limited to style: it simply ‘adapts, perfects and displays with the utmost degree of ostentation the essential, but nothing else’.⁶⁴ ‘Iron and glass’, he suggested in 1857, ‘are the only materials in which [Gothic] can ever attain to the full development of the effects aimed at by the architects of Strasbourg and Cologne. The upward cataract of the Gothic spire, which in Strasbourg

⁵⁶ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, 12, (1849–50), p. 324.

⁵⁷ [Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 391; ‘Styles’, *Principles in Art*, p. 163.

⁵⁸ Patmore, ‘Churches and Preaching Halls’, in *Courage in Politics*, pp. 191–2.

⁵⁹ [Patmore], ‘Street Architecture’, *National Review*, 5, (1857), p. 62; [Patmore], ‘Present and Future’, *North British Review*, 28, (1858), p. 350.

⁶⁰ ‘Suspension bridges are generally pleasing objects, but their beauty is precisely that of a well proved geometrical theorem, and it is the very reverse of architecture as a *fine art*. All fine art appeals primarily to the imagination, but a suspension bridge . . . has [only the] low merit of mechanical beauty. Perhaps the ugliest thing in or out of nature is a great tubular bridge’ (ibid., pp. 367–8).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* (1987), pp. 111–12; M. Brooks, ‘John Ruskin, Coventry Patmore and the Nature of Gothic’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 12, (1979), 130–40.

⁶⁴ [Patmore], ‘American Poetry’, *North British Review*, 17, (1852), p. 24.

cathedral probably attains its utmost practicable limit in . . . stone, could easily be continued 500 ft. higher in iron . . . although the impressive element of handcarving would have to be sacrificed in the details'. Such a 'final adoption' of Gothic, 'with certain modifications', he added, 'we regard as inevitable'.⁶⁵ Metallic construction might well turn out to be the logical conclusion of the Gothic system. Patmore glimpsed, as it were, the skyline of Manhattan; but he preferred to look the other way—back to Egyptian, Greek and Gothic. It is time to piece together his analysis of those three styles.

Firstly, Egyptain (see Plate 6).⁶⁶ Architecture on a large scale is one of the prerogatives of power. It assumes control of an economy, control of a political culture. The architecture of the Pharaohs—that is, 'the ruling idea'⁶⁷ of the rulers of ancient Egypt—came to exhibit not only power but the permanence of power, a power exercised from beyond the grave. A pyramid—an 'organised cone'⁶⁸—is secure against the injuries of time. The pyramidal form—the shape of a mountain: 'nature's own architecture'⁶⁹—suggests a heap of masonry thrown down by the Almighty. Its shape, a passive symbol of gravity, indicates weight unrelieved by construction: 'the simplest architectural expression of mere ponderosity'.⁷⁰ The obelisk is 'a sort of shorthand expression of the same idea',⁷¹ that is the idea of 'weight in the abstract'.⁷² Similarly, concave cornices; twin towers tapering like decapitated pyramids; walls scored with hieroglyphs, and sliced into converging planes; a superabundance of columns, massed together like troops of masonic infantry; columns and capitals which themselves seem to bulge under an intolerable burden—all these subtleties of 'contrastive expression'⁷³ act as indicative images of unrelieved weight. There is no balance of support and superincumbent mass: somehow these buildings are all base. But their concatenation of planes—upright, angled, canted,

⁶⁵ [Patmore], 'Street Architecture', *National Review*, 5, (1857), pp. 71–2. Similarly, [Patmore], 'Character', *North British Review*, 15, (1851), p. 495.

⁶⁶ Patmore suggests Roberts's view of the temple of Dekkeh, in Nubia: [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 374; D. Roberts, *Egypt and Nubia*, 3 vols (1846–50); D. V. Baron Denon, *Voyage dans le basse et la haute Egypte* (Paris, 1802).

⁶⁷ [Patmore], 'Architects and Architecture', *Fraser's Magazine*, 46, (1852), p. 655.

⁶⁸ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 13, (1849–50), p. 324.

⁶⁹ [Patmore], 'Present and Future', *North British Review*, 28, (1858), p. 349.

⁷⁰ [Patmore], 'Street Architecture', *National Review*, 5, (1857), p. 50. Gwilt failed to 'enter into the spirit' of Egyptian architecture, complaining that 'solidity is abused . . . the means employed seem always greater than the ends' ([Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 [1851], p. 375).

⁷¹ B. Champneys, 'Architectural Styles: Old and New', *Building News*, 52 (1887), p. 110.

⁷² Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 164.

⁷³ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 377.

battered; their volume multiplied by pattern, groove and moulding—seemed to Patmore ‘one of mankind’s most remarkable efforts of architecture’.⁷⁴

No doubt such forms derived in practice from the imperatives of primitive technology: burrowing temples out of solid rock, or compensating for tectonic naïvety with a superfluity of stone. That, however, is only one level of explanation. All architecture makes virtue out of necessity; but it also transmits the instincts and values of its creators. What began as defective science was surely retained as emotive symbol.⁷⁵ In an age of ephemeral existence and crushing material might, these buildings defy eternity.

In Greek architecture Patmore also discerned an idea of permanence and a perpetual allusion to gravitational thrust (see Plate 7). But this time the symbolism goes beyond mere ponderosity. Away with the burdens of material power; these temples breathe a new-found tranquility, and their medium of expression is an overt equilibrium of force.

Doric columns, through multiple flutings, assume a form which—both mechanically and aesthetically—achieves a level of optimum function.⁷⁶ They impress Patmore’s eye as though by ‘a torrent of power rushing up to meet the [downwards] gravitating mass of the entablature. [That] mass, and its supporting power, [are] each expressed with elaborate artistic science, and [historically] the different ways in which this was done gave rise to the different “orders”’.⁷⁷ In the Doric order the deadweight of the entablature is triply expressed: *simple weight* in the architrave; *weight depending* in triglyph and hanging guttae; and *weight impending* in a cornice projecting and undercut. Again, the ‘vast active power which the eye at once recognises . . . in . . . the Doric shaft is shown to be fully competent for its task by being proved to be rather more than competent’;⁷⁸ at

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 374; [Patmore], ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12, (1849–50), p. 325. ‘All these are forms in which the simplest idea of power and duration is expressed either by passive ponderosity, or by slight contradictions and oppositions, juxtaposed, as foils, to its more direct and predominant expression’ ([Patmore]), ‘*Street Architecture*’, *National Review*, 5, [1857], p. 50).

⁷⁵ [Patmore], ‘*Expression*’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 373.

⁷⁶ [Patmore], ‘*Architects*’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 46, (1852), pp. 657–8. ‘This fact of mechanical science no doubt expresses itself to the eye, and is one of the reasons why the Doric shaft is such a noble object to look upon’ (ibid., p. 656). ‘A fact of which the eye probably becomes sensible before the principle is comprehended by the understanding’ ([Patmore] ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12 [1849–50], p. 331). Did Patmore know the Giant’s Causeway, Co. Antrim? Its primeval rocks—irregular hexagons of columnar basalt, formed under intense pressure—echo the shape of Doric drums.

⁷⁷ [Patmore], ‘*Present and Future*’, *North British Review*, 28 (1858), p. 349; Patmore, *Principle in Art*, p. 177.

⁷⁸ [Patmore], ‘*Street Architecture*’, *National Review*, 5, (1857), p. 51.

the weakest point of the column, just below the capital, there are three horizontal channels; the column thus throws away a token of its strength, while boasting of superincumbent power—performing its supporting role as nonchalantly as the caryatids of the Erechtheion. Similarly, the ‘quirked ovolo’ of the Doric capital, by flattening itself into parabolic curves, seems almost to invite the entablature’s superincumbent weight. Such parabolas, or conic sections, multiply through entasis the tensile effect of the entire fabric.⁷⁹ And at a key point of balance in the whole structured image, the abacus acts as a visual fulcrum: a neutral ‘point of rest and indifference between the opposing powers of [upward] support and [downward] gravitation’.⁸⁰

Such details create not structure but an image of the structural process—what Patmore vividly calls the ‘ostentation of active energy’.⁸¹ Thus the purpose of antifixae along the cornice is not stability (they bear no precise relation to the lines of the roof tiles), but simply an impression of stability.⁸² Again, ‘the business of the shaft is to support weight; the aim of the Greek architect was to make it express, as well as perform, that business.’ In the Doric order this expressional power breathes ‘from every curve and cut of shaft and capital’. In the Ionic order it is there too ‘in all the features of the entablature, in the dead unbroken mass of the architrave, in the frieze, with its hanging row of triglyphs and guttae, in the impending corona of the cornice, and, finally, in the low pyramidal pediment’.⁸³ As for the Ionic column itself, ‘instead of channels diminishing its power [at the neck], it was ornamented where it was weakest; and its power, on meeting the weight of the entablature, distributed itself into two streams, which rolled over in elastic curves’.⁸⁴ Throughout both orders codified patterns—egg and dart, fret etc.—play minor, but significant, roles in defining members or intensifying outlines, and in capturing through the eye that all-important sense of gravitational tension.⁸⁵ Finally, the semiotic import of all these forms is heightened by indicative polychromy.⁸⁶

Thus the Doric order, in Patmore’s eyes, had—strictly speaking—no decoration at all, only expressive form.⁸⁷ In the Ionic order decoration

⁷⁹ [Patmore], ‘Athenian Architecture’, *Edinburgh Review*, **95**, (1852), p. 397.

⁸⁰ [Patmore], ‘Present and Future’, *North British Review*, **28**, (1858), p. 347.

⁸¹ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, **12** (1849–50), p. 340.

⁸² ‘An additional expression of the general idea’ (*ibid.*, p. 338).

⁸³ [Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, **94** (1851), pp. 378, 380.

⁸⁴ [Patmore], ‘Present and Future’, *North British Review*, **28** (1858), p. 349.

⁸⁵ [Patmore], ‘Street Architecture’, *National Review*, **5**, (1857), p. 51.

⁸⁶ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, **12** (1849–50), p. 344: ‘to aid the expression of weight and of active supporting energy’.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

does occasionally appear. But it is ornament in harmony with ‘the leading sentiment’: in particular, in capital and base, it adds a key element of elasticity; in fasciaed architrave, it adds ‘impension and recession’. This makes ‘almost every member . . . at once agent and re-agent’, so maximizing that sense of harmonic energy in which Patmore devined the Attic balance between material and intellectual force.⁸⁸ These orders are thus allegories of mind: brute mass controlled by reason. The medium of the allegory is equipoise, not just of structure but of structural expression. ‘There is not a moulding in base, capital, or cornice, not an ornament of any sort whatever, but has for its chief object the intensification of this beautiful expression of weight competently supported.’⁸⁹ ‘It was not’, Patmore concludes, ‘until the Attic spirit was wholly quenched, that “decoration” proper made its appearance . . . This was the case with Roman architecture.’⁹⁰

Of course all these optical devices embody echoes of half-forgotten functions. In primitive timber structures, the shaft of a proto-Doric column was no doubt hung round with bark or spears and strengthened by a triple banding near the top. But in terms of aesthetic validity such hypotheses are irrelevant. The significance of these mouldings is not their origin but their meaning.⁹¹ Not how they were invented, but why they were retained. Whatever the style, Patmore points out, ‘all the most remarkable architectural effects can be traced to the *suggestion* of some accident or necessity’.⁹² The key point is that they survived, in terms of stylistic evolution, because of their contribution to some preponderant *idea*. In Greek architecture that idea—that instinct for form—was harmony through gravitational expression.⁹³ Omit any of the subsidiary details—a triglyph here, a set of guttae there; emasculate its ornament—as in Roman Doric—and the order loses much of its expressional power, and much more of its aesthetic impact.

And therein lay the rub. After 2,000 years perfection made a poor model. Smirke’s British Museum Patmore knew well. He admitted its grandeur, but pointed out that the omission of one or two crucial refinements—entasis in stylobate and terminal columns, for instance—meant ‘the omission of half the glory that ought to have sent its subtle

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 345–7; *Principle in Art*, pp. 178–9.

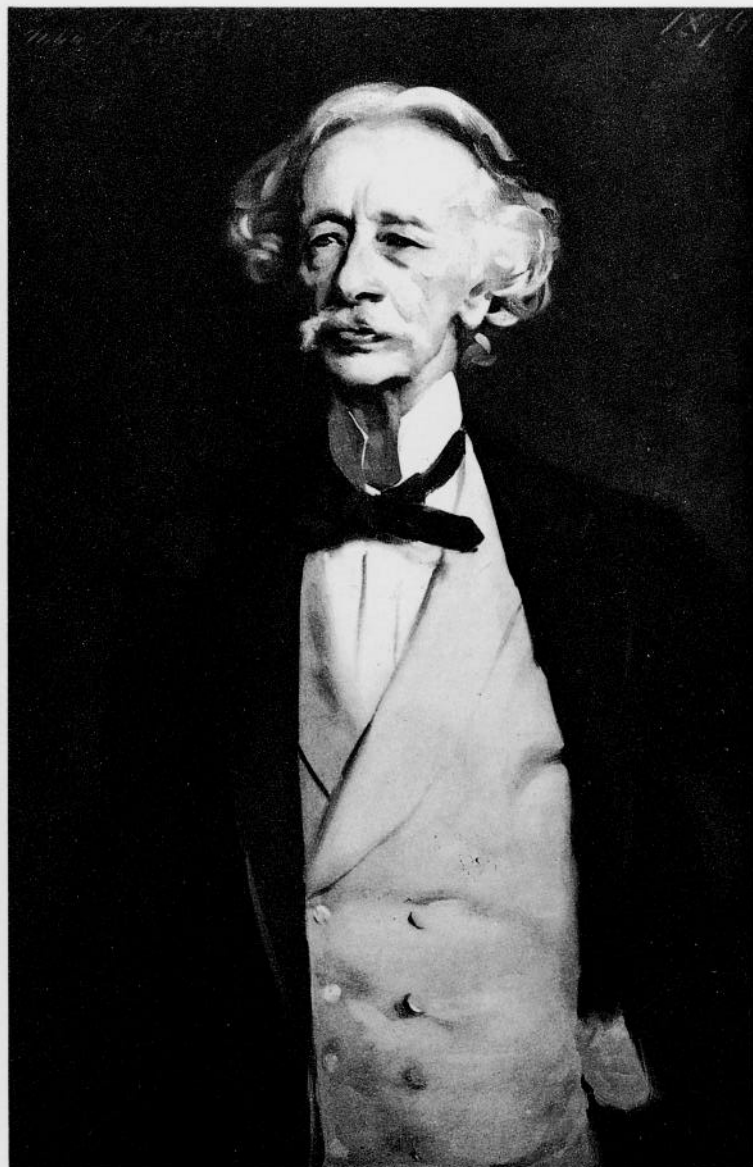
⁸⁹ [Patmore], ‘Street Architecture’, *National Review*, 5, (1857), p. 51.

⁹⁰ [Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94, (1851), p. 382.

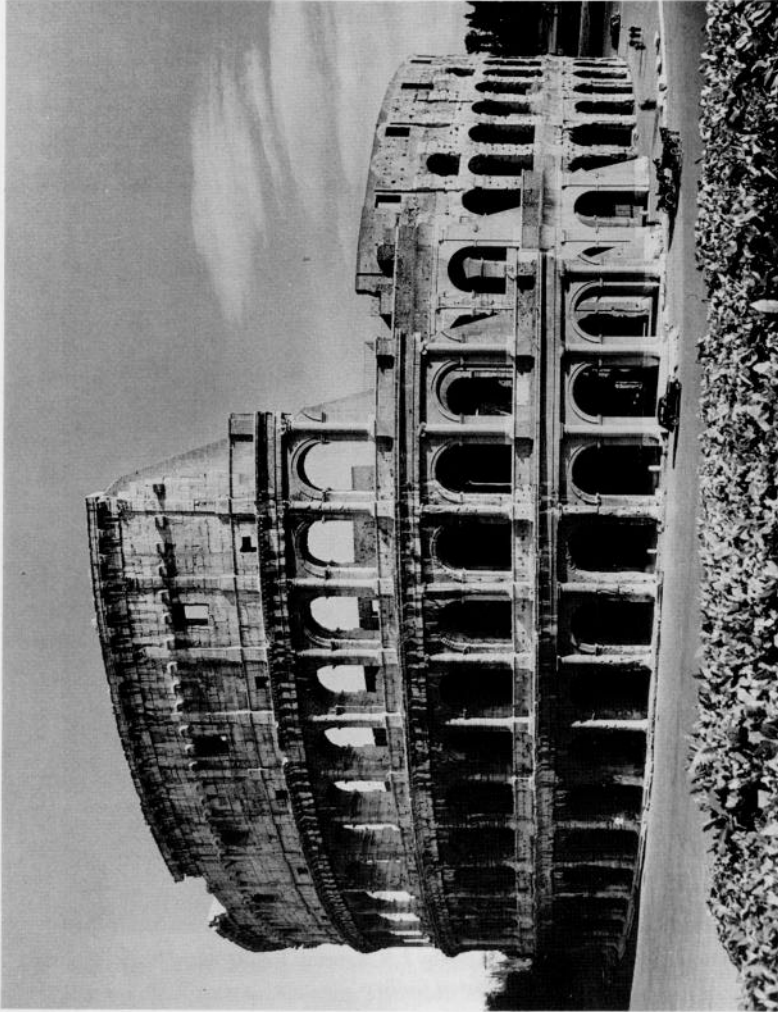
⁹¹ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 337.

⁹² [Patmore], ‘Architects’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, 46 (1852), p. 657.

⁹³ Hence ‘the hundred-times repeated, and never yet . . . comprehended, law of architectural unity, which, to use the words of Milizia “requires that all the parts of an edifice, and all its ornaments, should have reference to the principal object”’ ([Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, 12 [1849–50], p. 320).



Coventry Patmore in 1895, from a portrait by J. S. Sargent, RA. *Original in the National Portrait Gallery.*



False styles, Roman: the separation of engineering and art. The Colosseum, Rome (AD 70–82). *British Architectural Library/RIBA.*

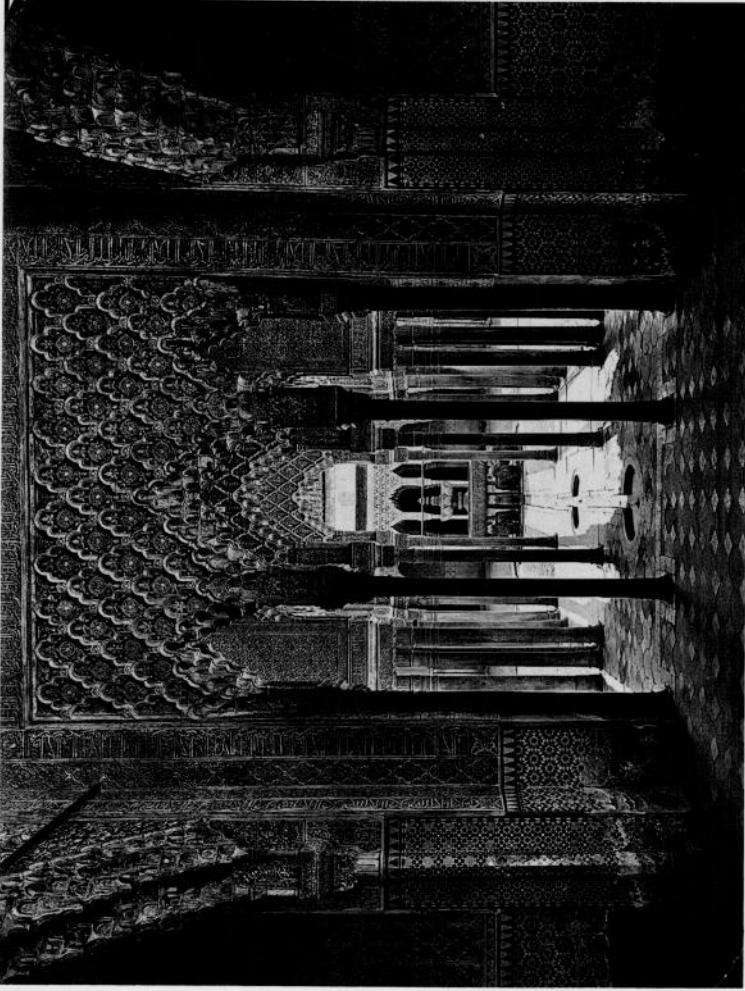


False styles. Renaissance: falsity codified as principle. The Palazzo Rucellai, Florence (1446–51).
British Architectural Library/RIBA.

PLATE 4

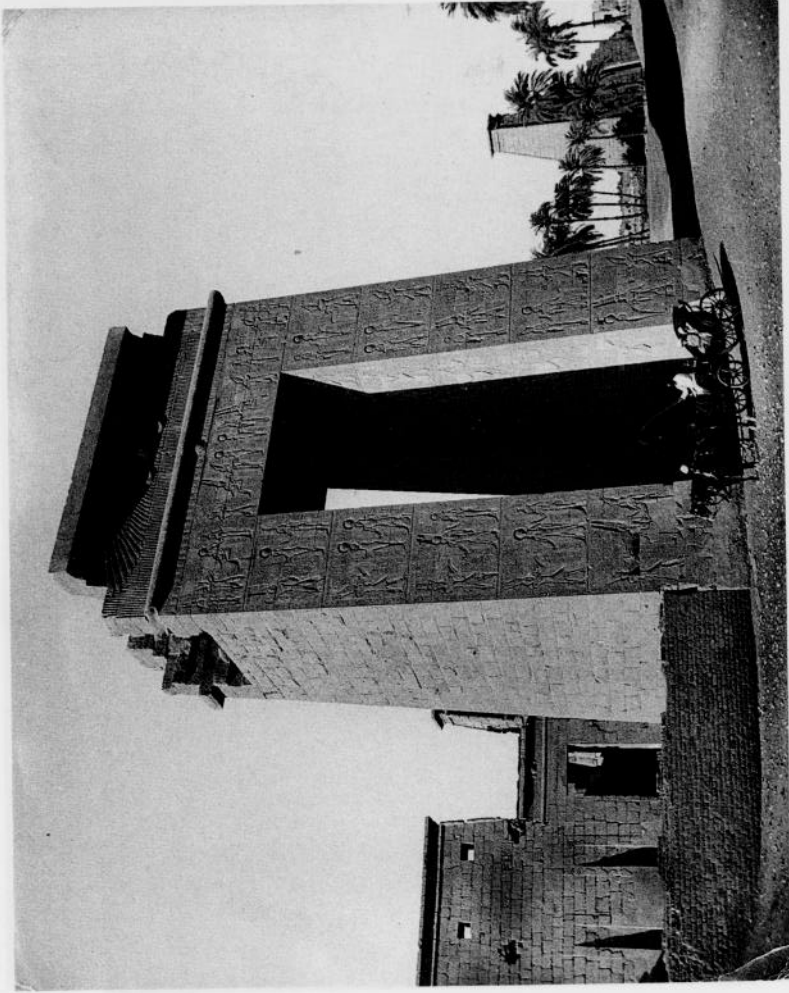


Lesser styles. Romanesque: structure as sculptural expression. Monreale Cathedral (1174-82). *British Architectural Library/RIBA.*

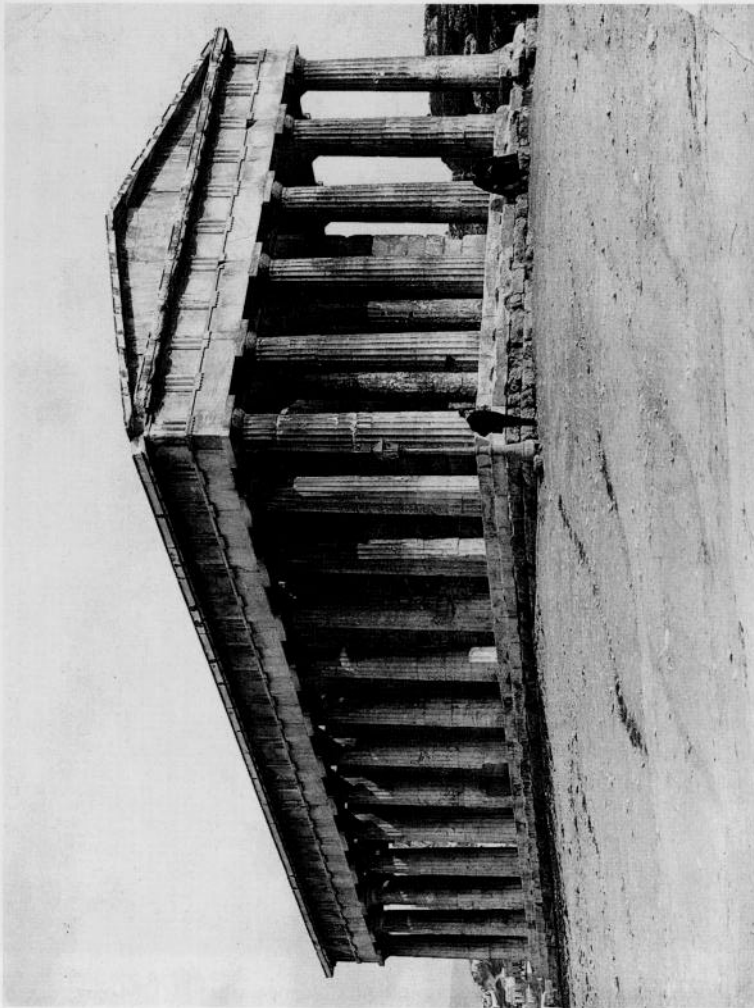


Lesser styles. Islamic: the conquest of gravity by stealth. The Alhambra, Granada (1338–90). *The Mansell Collection.*

PLATE 6



True styles. Egyptian: deadweight as a totem of power. The Great Temple of Amman, Karnak, Thebes (1530-323 BC). *The Mansell Collection.*



True styles. Greek: equipoise as a symbol of harmony. The Theseion, Athens (449-444 BC). *The Mansell Collection.*

¹ [Patmore], 'Architecture', *Practical Aesthetics*, 42 (1911), p. 100. In the other sense it is employed by Augustus Caeser, 'On the best construction of Greek architecture in the world' [Patmore], *Classical Lectures*, *Ninth Annual Lecture*, 12 (1897-98), p. 134. For a similar Augustus's use of beauty as symbol of equity, see the famous architectural theory by Vitruvius and 1914 (1902), p. 126-7.

² [Patmore], 'Architecture', *Edinburgh Review*, 34 (1911), p. 100.

³ [Patmore], 'Greek Architecture', *National Review*, 5 (1897), p. 85.

PLATE 8



True styles. Gothic: structure etherealized as aspiration. Cologne Cathedral (1284 onwards). *The Mansell Collection.*

beams from [that] still noble façade'.⁹⁴ In practice, all those subtleties of entasis—by which the apparent concavity and convexity of straight lines is optically adjusted⁹⁵—made impossible any apt translation from the antique. And literal replication was an aesthetic cul-de-sac. It is perhaps significant that the only Greek Revival monument in Britain which made full use of entasis—Cockerell and Playfair's National Monument in Edinburgh (1824–9)—remained unfinished. The very self-sufficiency of Greek architecture—perfection within strict limits—unfitted it for modern use. Like the perfect monotony of Greek music, its forms were not designed for export. More important, its central 'idea'—the balance of matter and mind—consorted ill with a Christian culture based on notions of an infinite deity and unfathomable mystery.⁹⁶ Coventry Patmore had to look elsewhere.

Greek architecture had been an expression of weight in equipoise: a static adjustment of burden and support. Gothic architecture (see Plate 8) was based on the principle of resisted thrust: a system not static but dynamic. The Lombardic column had been 'constructively superfluous'. The Gothic pier was both functionally and symbolically valid, a symbol first ascendant than transcendent. It had 'to bear burdens', Patmore explains, 'and yet appear to be doing nothing of the sort, the burden and bearing members being alike transformed into portions of the great vertical stream of piers, pointed arches, groined vaults and vaulting shafts'.⁹⁷ Unlike the round arch, the pointed arch is self-supporting: it does not have to be 'embedded in heavy masses of wall in order to make it constructively good and artistically beautiful'.⁹⁸ It was, therefore, adopted for constructive reasons. But it was retained, developed, cherished for reasons of symbolism: it embodied the principle of aspiration.

This central theme of aspiration—spirit triumphing over material weight—is expressed alike in pointed arches, clustered columns, groined

⁹⁴ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 349. Similarly, near Waterloo Station, Patmore noticed a Commissioners' Church (Francis Bedford's St. John, Waterloo Road) whose portico looked curiously 'light-headed': the details of the entablature were incomplete; 'there seems to be no meaning in the vast amount of upward force in the fluted shafts, if that is all they have to carry' (*ibid.*, p. 336 n.; *Principle in Art*, pp. 174–5). It no longer made sense to the eye.

⁹⁵ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50) p. 329.

⁹⁶ [Patmore], 'Architects', *Fraser's Magazine*, 46 (1852), p. 656. On the other hand, he considered St. Pancras Church 'the finest restoration of Greek architecture in the world' ([Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 [1849–50], p. 341 n.). He considered Schinkel's use, in Berlin, of angels in place of triglyphs, as 'the grossest architectural blunder we have ever met with' (*ibid.*, p. 336 n.).

⁹⁷ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 394.

⁹⁸ [Patmore], 'Street Architecture', *National review*, 5 (1857), p. 61.

ribs, pinnacles, crockets, pitched roofs and spires. The Egyptian column was expressively crushed, the Greek visually balanced; but the Gothic pier 'flies up like a shaft of arrows',⁹⁹ 'without the least diminution of its substance, and without swelling either under sufferance or gathering of strength by entasis . . . to the commencement of the arch; where [with no more than a token hesitation in the capital] it divides itself, sending up the streams of its clustered shafts, some into the lines of the arch and others to the top of the clerestory wall; then dividing again to follow the lines of the vaulting, there to meet like fingers in prayer, but still having no thought of the weight of the roof they really help to carry'.¹⁰⁰ Gothic forms, in short, resulted from their builders' desire to intensify 'the simple result of a peculiar constructive system'.¹⁰¹ Hence the transparency of Gothic, especially in Germany—to Patmore 'the country in which Gothic architecture attained its most ideal perfection'¹⁰². Cologne, for example, all glass, no wall; almost a cat's cradle of piers, mullions, tracery and light. 'The whole mass soars, the material itself becoming the simplest and most forcible expression of the spiritual by the entire reversal of the primary characteristic of matter'.¹⁰³ In other words, that primary characteristic—weight—is dissolved in 'a semblance of ascendant energy'.¹⁰⁴

But there was more to Gothic than simple perpendicularity. Horizontal forms have a part to play as well. String course, base or capital do not mark (as they might in the Greek system) a notional counter to overall verticality. They are moments of hesitation, brief gatherings of strength in a continuous and co-ordinated upward thrust. Hence the interrupted verticals in the towers of York or Canterbury. Compare those towers with the spires of Freiburg or Salisbury. A spire may be 'the finest spire in the world', but it 'evaporates as it soars'; in a tower the motion, 'the sense of ascension', does not diminish: 'the great steady, heavenward current', is strengthened rather than tempered by intermittent checks, to culminate via arch and battlement, in a 'solemn . . . heart-expanding sense of infinite aspiration'.¹⁰⁵ Spires, however prominent—as at Lichfield or Cologne—are but partial escape valves for that 'vast current of vertical force' bottled up in the mass of a great cathedral, then gloriously released in a veritable 'geyser of ascending life'.¹⁰⁶ Like 'jets of . . . flame' flickering above a

⁹⁹ Patmore, 'Architectural Criticism', *Courage in Politics*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁰ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 189.

¹⁰¹ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 396.

¹⁰² [Patmore], 'Street Architecture', *National Review*, 5 (1857), p. 53.

¹⁰³ Patmore, 'Architectural Criticism', *Courage in Politics*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁴ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 369.

¹⁰⁵ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 189.

furnace, spire, cresting and crocket act as points of release for the pressure accumulated below in 'thousands upon thousands of soaring lines'.¹⁰⁷ All that pent-up verticality is bounded, shaped, moulded to form one vast spiritual metaphor: 'the infinited bounded . . . by the finite [and thus] . . . the true character of the life and worship symbolized'.¹⁰⁸

To Patmore this theme of aspiration in Gothic is twice modified: by 'foliation' and by 'contented truncation'.¹⁰⁹ These neologisms he explains in terms of symbolic tension. Contented truncation meant interrupted ascension: vertical thrust, or perpendicularity,¹¹⁰ not impeded but controlled. Foliation—as in cusped and floral patterns—meant naturalistic detail shaped, not stifled, by geometrical form. The key factor—as in the Decorated Gothic of Lincoln—was the counterpoint of foliation and aspiration.¹¹¹ At last 'the enigma' of Gothic was becoming clear: its secret lay in 'the graceful union of a spontaneous energy and a restraining law'.¹¹² Without it, 'it is not Gothic'.¹¹³ The mystery is laid bare in the major metaphor of Gothic structure; in the minor metaphor of Gothic ornament. For example, 'the special aim of 14thc. ornamentation', Patmore explains, is to show vigorous life playing with perfect freedom in severely geometrical forms'.¹¹⁴ Hence the splendour of Decorated tracery—before it loosens into French Flamboyant or hardens into English Perpendicular: the sinewy patterns swirl outwards and upwards like bubbles of liquified light; like tongues of petrified flame. This reconciliation of life and law—mortal will and immortal destiny—is to Patmore 'the consummation of Christianity'.¹¹⁵ And its symbols—in structure, terrestrial limits bounding the 'potentiality of infinite ascension'; in ornament, nature perfected by constraint—these symbols are to him the essentials of Gothic.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁷ Patmore, 'Liverpool Cathedral', *Courage in Politics*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁸ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁹ [Patmore], 'The Aesthetics of Gothic Architecture', *British Quarterly Review*, 10 (1849), pp. 58–9.

¹¹⁰ [Patmore], 'Present and Future', *North British Review*, 28 (1858), p. 361.

¹¹¹ Contradicting John Freeman who held foliation to be of only secondary significance compared with verticality. See [Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, 10, 1849, pp. 62–3. 'The generally more beautiful forms of Decorated foliage show a considerably more subtle union of natural growth and superadded geometrical form, than is exhibited either in the rigid and stringy vegetation of the Early English, or the angularly-bounded foliage of the Perpendicular style' (*ibid.*, p. 65).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 66. There is a hint of this in Ruskin: 'truly fine Gothic work . . . unites fantasy and law' (*Stones of Venice, Works*, vol. 8, p. 89).

¹¹³ [Patmore], 'Present and Future', *North British Review*, 28 (1858), p. 361.

¹¹⁴ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, pp. 192–3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In short, Patmore here combines two traditions: Classical notions of order and law, plus Romantic ideas of expression and aspiration. The result is a vision of Gothic conceptually antiphonal: an endless dialogue of freedom and law, spirit and matter, energy and form, male and female, human and divine. In terms of Patmore's Catholicism this is not just symbolic, it is 'highly symbolic'.¹¹⁷ The Gothic system—gravity defied—becomes for him 'a symbol of the world overcome':¹¹⁸ a symbol first of Incarnation, then of Resurrection.¹¹⁹

Of course there will be those who doubt. Patmore refutes them thus: if a Gothic spire did not symbolize a sentiment, then what on earth was it for?¹²⁰ 'For us' he announces, 'seeing is believing'; all doubts dissolve before that 'upward cataract of shafts, and mouldings, and canopied figures which left us breathless when we first found ourselves before the piers of Cologne Cathedral'.¹²¹ Patmore had little time for 'the whole medieval system of *arbitrary* symbolisation'—the system of Durandus so beloved by 'Puseyite clergymen'; but he remained convinced that Gothic forms involved not only 'artistical effect' but 'an *artistic and essential symbolism*, which must retain its efficiency as long as the human mind retains its present constitution'.¹²²

So, to recapitulate. Weight of material is 'the great fact of building', and 'the primary source of architectural symbolism'.¹²³ The Egyptian style was an expression of unrelieved weight; the Greek of weight in equipoise. It was left to Gothic to complete the syllogism, to demonstrate in three dimensions the conquest of spirit over matter, that is '*weight annihilated*; spire and tower, buttress, clerestory and pinnacle [rising] to heaven, and [indicating] the spirituality of worship to which they are applied'.¹²⁴ 'Weight, support and ascension', Patmore concludes, 'are ideas which, in all times and languages, have been accepted as the most direct and forcible material images of the three great phases of sensuality, intellectuality and

¹¹⁷ [Patmore], 'Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*', *British Quarterly Review*, 13 (1851), p. 495.

¹¹⁸ [Patmore], 'Street Architecture', *National Review*, 5 (1857), p. 52.

¹¹⁹ For Patmore and 'the Christian celebration of the paradox of the Infinite enclosed', see Sister M. A. Weinig, *Coventry Patmore* (Boston, 1981). Reviewed by P. M. Ball in *Modern Language Review*, 80 (1985), p. 916. See also P. W. Platt, 'The Spiritual Vision of Coventry Patmore' (Ph.D., Toronto, 1976).

¹²⁰ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 198.

¹²¹ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 396.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 397; [Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, 10 (1849), pp. 49–50. Patmore also instances the sculptured screen at St. Albans: 'with magic vividness [it] represented the glorious ascension of a company of saints' (*ibid.*, p. 62).

¹²³ Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 184.

¹²⁴ [Patmore], '*Seven Lamps*', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 324.

spirituality; and those three phases are precisely those which it was desirable to express as adjuncts of the Egyptian, Greek and Christian worship'.¹²⁵

Well, how much of this is original, and how much derivative? Clearly the German Idealist tradition of aesthetics played a part. During the 1840s, English interest in the German school increased significantly.¹²⁶ G. H. Lewes noted in 1842: '*The Times* has quoted Hegel. *The Spectator* has had articles on *Aesthetical Economy*—and in the *Atlas* for 20th March, the question is asked: "Why is there no Professor of Aesthetics at Oxford?"'¹²⁷

For someone of Patmore's generation there would be two obvious routes for the transmission of German philosophy: Coleridge and Carlyle. Coleridge certainly ranked high in his calendar of saints, Carlyle rather less so.¹²⁸ But Patmore was unusual in also being equipped to go back to the original sources. We know he was a competent linguist, as well as an amateur scientist.¹²⁹ His father trained him in English literature; he trained himself in French theology and German philosophy. He read Lessing,¹³⁰ Goethe¹³¹ and Fichte¹³² in the original, as well as

¹²⁵ [Patmore], 'Character', *North British Review*, 15 (1851), p. 462.

¹²⁶ R. Willis, 'The Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain, 1830–1900', *Victorian Studies*, 32 (1988), pp. 87–111.

¹²⁷ [G. H. Lewes], 'Hegel's Aesthetics', *British and Foreign Review*, 13 (1842), p. 3 n.

¹²⁸ Carlyle admired Patmore's poetry, but felt unqualified to comment on his architectural criticism: 'To myself, as to everyone, the spiritual qualities manifest in what you say are very welcome. Unhappily, I have next to no knowledge of architecture; and in late years (must I blush to own?) absolutely no care whatever about it—except to keep well out of the way of it, and of the twaddle too commonly uttered upon it!' See (A. M[eynell] [ed.], *A Catalogue of the Library of Coventry Patmore*, published by E. Meynell, Serendipity Shop [1921], p. 44: 22 July 1860). Carlyle seems to have preferred Ruskin's moralistic approach: he called *Stones of Venice*, vol. 1, Ruskin's 'best piece of schoolmastering in Architectonics' (Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 9, p. xlvi: 1851).

¹²⁹ He studied French in Paris in 1839, but 'learned more German than French' (Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, p. 36). In youth he claimed credit for the invention of a new chloride of bromine (Gosse, *Patmore*, p. 9).

¹³⁰ G. E. Lessing, *Laocöon* (Berlin 1766), trans. W. Ross (1836); E. C. Beaseley (1853). Lessing's enthusiasm for Shakespeare—taken up by Herder—no doubt attracted Patmore: his own projected book on Shakespeare, however, was anticipated—and, according to Robert Browning, plagiarized—by H. Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art* (1846). See Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 33.

¹³¹ Patmore named Lessing, Goethe and Coleridge as supreme critics: they went beyond aesthetics ('a science deserving a better name') in pursuit of objective principle—'a science in which truth stands first and feeling second, and of which the conclusions are demonstrable and irreversible' (Patmore, *Principle in Art*, p. 4). His library included an annotated copy of Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann and Soret* (1875). In 1871 he presented Goethe's *Werke*, 4 vols (Leipzig, n.d.) to his future third wife (Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 17).

¹³² J. G. Fichte, *Characteristic of the Present Age* etc., trans. W. Smith (1848).

Schiller¹³³ and Schelling¹³⁴. He even tackled Hegel. 'The acquisition of great stores of the purest gold' in the works of that 'metaphysician', he noted, is well 'worth the trouble of [a little] quartz-crushing'.¹³⁵ Indeed he placed Hegel with Aristotle as 'the two great expositors of the relation of the emotions to art'.¹³⁶ Sitting at his desk in the British Museum, Patmore was indeed ideally placed. 'During my twenty years' service', he recalled, 'I read tens of thousands of books'.¹³⁷

From Coleridge he learned the aphoristic method, the holistic vision;¹³⁸ from Lindsay the progressive, dialectical triad of sense, intellect and spirit;¹³⁹ from Freeman the statical trinity of immobility, horizontality and verticality;¹⁴⁰ from Reichensperger the eternal relevance of Gothic;¹⁴¹ from Pennethorne and Penrose he derived his knowledge of entasis;¹⁴²

¹³³ F. Schiller, *Philosophical and Aesthetic Letters and Essays* (1795; trans. J. Weiss, 1845), reviewed by Patmore in *The Critic*, vol. 2 (n.s.) (1845), pp. 189–94, and in *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, vol. 2 (1845), pp. 277–9: 'Schiller ... perceived ... that aesthetics were a portion of morals, and that their foundation was consistent with nature and the human soul'. One of the *Essays* appeared in translation in *Monthly Chronicle*, February 1841. Patmore's library included a copy of Schiller's *Gedichte* (Stuttgart, 1859). See Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 33. He considered 'magnificent' Schiller's notion of the universe as 'a thought of the Deity ... [Each] new acquaintance in this kingdom of truth, gravitation [for instance enables me to] converse with the Infinite through the instrument of Nature' (*The Critic*, vol. 2 [n.s.] [1845], p. 189).

¹³⁴ F. W. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art* [lectures, 1802–3], trans. A. Johnson (1845). Patmore considered it 'admirable' ([Patmore], in *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, vol. 2 [1845], p. 278).

¹³⁵ Patmore, *Principle in Art*, p. 207; Patmore, *Courage in Politics*, pp. 105–6.

¹³⁶ Patmore, *Principle in Art*, p. 49. Patmore's library contained annotated copies of Aristotle's *Ethics, Rhetoric and Poetic*, 2 vols (1850–51), and of Hegel's *Cours d'Esthétique*, 5 vols (Paris, 1840–52), and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1878). See Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, pp. 5, 19.

¹³⁷ Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 1, pp. 68, 78.

¹³⁸ 'Coleridge's philosophical standpoint was ... entirely Hegelian' (Patmore, *Courage in Politics*, pp. 92, 106). Patmore was annotating Coleridge's *Table-Talk* (2nd edn, 1836) at the age of sixteen (Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 11). He admired A. Brandl's *Coleridge and the Romantic School*, trans. Lady Eastlake (1887).

¹³⁹ Lord Lindsay, *Progression by Antagonism* (1846); *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 3 vols (1847), reviewed by [Patmore] in *The Critic*, vol. 5 (n.s.) (1847), pp. 177–80. See J. Steegman, 'Lord Lindsay's *History of Christian Art*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10 (1947), 123–33; H. Brigstocke, 'Lord Lindsay and the *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 64 (1981), 27–60. Compare Schiller's sequence of physical, aesthetical and moral (*The Critic*, vol. 2 [n.s.] [1845], p. 189).

¹⁴⁰ J. Freeman, *History of Architecture* (1849), pp. xviii, 11: 'Where there is no strife there is no victory; the vertical line cannot be called predominant unless the horizontal exists in a visible condition of subjection and inferiority'. Freeman in turn admitted that Lindsay's views had anticipated his, though he had 'not as yet received them'.

¹⁴¹ A. Reichensperger, *Fingerzeige auf dem Gebiete der kirchlichen Baukunst* (1854). Reichensperger was editor of *Kölner Domblatt*. See L. Pastor, *A. Reichensperger*, 2 vols (Freiburg, 1899).

¹⁴² J. Pennethorne, *The Elements and Mathematical Principles of the Greek Architects and Artists* (1844); F. C. Penrose, *Two Letters from Athens* (1847) and *An Investigation of the Principles of Athenian Architecture* (1852; 1888).

from Aristotle and Aquinas came the ideal of encompassing law;¹⁴³ from Goethe Gothic's Teutonic soul;¹⁴⁴ from Hegel the dialectic of matter and spirit, as well as the trinity of true styles;¹⁴⁵ from Kant he learned the dialogue of freedom and constraint;¹⁴⁶ from Schlegel the idea of organic form;¹⁴⁷ from Hegel again—this time via Whewell and Pugin—the key notion of aspiration;¹⁴⁸ from Schopenhauer came a crucial insight, first suggested by Hegel: the aesthetic imperative of gravity;¹⁴⁹ in Kugler he

¹⁴³ See B. D. MacGregor, 'Victorian Concepts of Form' (D.Phil., Oxon, 1979). For the application of such ideas to Patmore's poetry, see F. W. Piderit, 'The Odes of Coventry Patmore; a Study of Architectural Criticism and Poetic Practice' (Ph.D., Fordham University, 1979).

¹⁴⁴ eg. Strasbourg and Cologne. See J. W. Goethe, *Literary Essays*, ed. J. E. Spingaen (1921; 1967). Patmore instanced a 'striking passage' on Strasbourg's 'intricate simplicity' in 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' ([Patmore]), 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, 10 [1849], pp. 51–2). Kugler similarly called Gothic the Germanic style (*ibid*).

¹⁴⁵ Patmore was familiar with Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* of 1817 ([Patmore], in *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, vol. 3 [1845], pp. 206–9). He recommended C. Bernard's French translation of Hegel's *Aesthetics* (Paris, 1840–52) and W. Hastie's English translation of its introduction (Edinburgh, 1886). H. G. Hotho's revised edition of the *Aesthetics* (1835) appeared in 1842 as vols 12–14 in H. Glockner's collected edition. This text became the basis of T. M. Knox's translation of 1975. See also P. M. Locke, 'Hegel on Architecture' (Ph.D., Boston, 1984).

¹⁴⁶ I. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (*Critique of Judgement*, pt 1) trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford, 1911). Kant, in fact, says little directly about architecture (eg. *Critique of Judgement*, vol. 1, p. 16).

¹⁴⁷ A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1817, trans. J. Black & A. J. W. Morrison, 1840; 1846). See D. Stempel, 'Coleridge and Organic Form; the English Tradition', *Studies in Literature*, 6 (1962), 93–104. F. Schlegel, *Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works*, trans. E. J. Millington (1849), was reviewed by [Patmore] in 'The Ethics of Art', *British Quarterly Review*, 10, (1849), 441–62; and he retained a copy in his library (Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 33).

¹⁴⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox, (Oxford, 1975), vol. 2, pt iii, pp. 689–90, 693: '... to the last detail ... aspiring sublimely and illimitably'; Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, vol. 1 (1920), pp. 112–13; W. Whewell, *Architectural Notes on German Churches* (Cambridge, 1842); A. W. N. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), p. 7, n.1: 'Height or the vertical principle, emblematic of the resurrection, is the very essence of Christian architecture'.

¹⁴⁹ Hegel's distinction between 'masses that support' and 'masses that are supported' formed the basis of Schopenhauer's architectural theory. Hegel noted that a Doric column has 'the look of being there for a purpose ... [it displays] firmness and solidity, dominated by the law of gravity ... its sole purpose is to serve as support ... the peculiarity of Greek architecture is ... that it gives shape to this supporting [role] ... art must ... give shape to ... the mechanical determinant of load-bearing' (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, vol. 2, pt iii, pp. 666–9 and vol. 14, pp. 310–12). Schopenhauer sees the aim of architecture as 'bringing to greater distinctness' the 'universal qualities of matter ... the bass notes of nature'—gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness. 'Properly speaking, the conflict between gravity and rigidity is the sole aesthetic material of architecture; its problem is to make this conflict appear with perfect distinction in a multitude of different ways ... Architecture does not affect us merely mathematically, but also dynamically, and ... what speaks to us through it, is not mere form

found that all-purpose explanatory device: expression;¹⁵⁰ in Brandon innumerable examples of foliation;¹⁵¹ in Willis the idea of Gothic as a structural image;¹⁵² in Pugin the law of constructive decoration—ornament's own verification principle.¹⁵³ It is a formidable list—enough to make an empiricist cry out for Occam's Razor.

Patmore never suffered from false modesty. He aimed to show the world 'the spirit . . . of architecture'; to supply 'the as yet unanswered demand for a system of architectural aesthetics'.¹⁵⁴ In other words, to explain the significance of tectonic form, to decode Hegel's tower of Babel.¹⁵⁵ In this enterprise he found his predecessors of little help. Vitruvius was a primer of prototypes, not a handbook of aesthetics. Renaissance theorists—Palladio, Scamozzi, Vignola—had merely codified falsity, turning tectonic truth into the mumbo-jumbo of proportion, symmetry, variety and harmony.¹⁵⁶ French critics, notably Quatremère de Quincy, had skirmished with the subject; but most of them—Batissier for example—were working from 'insufficient or inaccurate data'.¹⁵⁷ English scholars, chiefly those sponsored by the Dilettanti Society, had greatly increased our knowledge of antique detail; but that was 'all they seem to have attempted'.¹⁵⁸ Writers as diverse as Chambers,¹⁵⁹

and symmetry, but rather those fundamental forces of nature, those first Ideas, those lowest grades of the objectivity of will'. He saw all this in Greek architecture, but not in Gothic. See A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* (1819; 1844, trans. Haldane & Kemp [1888], vol. 1, pp. 277–9). Something of this can be seen in K. Schnaase, *Geschichte der bildenden Künste*, 7 vols (1843–64); 8 vols (1869–79).

¹⁵⁰ F. T. Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1842).

¹⁵¹ R. & J. A. Brandon, *An Analysis of Gothic Architecture* (1847).

¹⁵² Willis distinguished between 'mechanical' and 'decorative' structure (R. Willis, *Remarks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages, especially of Italy* [1835]).

¹⁵³ Popular taste was 'revolutionised . . . at a blow' when 'Strawberry Hill Gothic vanished like a nightmare' at the application of Pugin's principle: decorate your construction, do not construct your decoration (Patmore, *Principle in Art*, pp. 2–3).

¹⁵⁴ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), pp. 309, 311.

¹⁵⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, vol. 2, pt iii, p. 638.

¹⁵⁶ For a rather more sympathetic view, see J. Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (1963; 1980).

¹⁵⁷ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 314. Quatremère de Quincy, *Essays on the Nature, the End, and the Means of Imitation in the Fine Arts*, trans. J. C. Kent (1827) and *Essai sur l'Ideâl dans ses applications pratiques aux arts du Dessin* (Paris, 1837); L. Batissier, *Histoire de l'Art Monumental dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age* (1845). There was a marked copy of Batissier's *Elements d'Archéologie Nationale* (Paris, 1843) in Patmore's library (Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 7).

¹⁵⁸ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 314.

¹⁵⁹ See J. Harris, E. Harris & J. Mordaunt Crook, *Sir William Chambers* (1970).

Gwilt,¹⁶⁰ and Alison¹⁶¹ had all swallowed—in different degrees—Renaissance notions of proportional harmony. ‘This view’ Patmore noted curtly, ‘is now exploded’.¹⁶²

If there had been an explosion, it was due to the Germans. Patmore had no time for insular ‘English critics . . . impregnated with John Bullism’ who regard everything beyond ‘the finite-logical school of Locke’ as ‘a cloudy dream-land—a foggy region fit only for crazed idiots or frenzied madmen’. We are held back, he explained in 1845, ‘not by the ignorant vulgar, but by the ignorant learned’, who dismiss German philosophy as ‘rubbish’ merely because it is ‘abstruse’.¹⁶³ Even so, he was suspicious of too much Teutonic ‘science and system’.¹⁶⁴ He preferred to make use of Germanic insights—especially those of Hegel, Kugler and Schopenhauer—without pursuing too far the metaphysics of aesthetic psychology. ‘Truths which are *combinations* of instinctive convictions’, he concluded in 1852, are ultimately inexplicable. ‘These convictions are the postulates of life, and the data of action and art. The grand error of . . . Germanising critics, has been that of demanding data for the data’.¹⁶⁵

It was Kugler¹⁶⁶—Burckhardt’s teacher and Semper’s mortal enemy¹⁶⁷—who, in Patmore’s eyes, ‘first glimpsed the secret’ of Greek building: ‘the aesthetical development’ of the principle of *trabeation*.¹⁶⁸ His *Handbuch*

¹⁶⁰ Gwilt, ‘though by no means a clever man’, recognized in his *Encyclopaedia* the significance of formal ‘fitness’ in heightening effect; then contradicted himself by categorizing ‘mouldings’ as stemming from ‘the love of variety’ ([Patmore], ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12 [1849–50], pp. 322, 338n.).

¹⁶¹ Alison correctly ascribed our perception of beauty in architectural proportion to a sense of fitness hallowed by association; but he failed to follow this insight with any explanation of ornamental expression: ‘What constitutes an Order is its Proportions, not its ornaments’ (A. Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, vol. 2 [1825], pp. 141, 167–8).

¹⁶² [Patmore], ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), pp. 312, 345.

¹⁶³ [Patmore], ‘Letters and Essays of Schiller’, *Douglas Jerrold’s Shilling Magazine*, vol. 2 (1845), pp. 277–9. Patmore could be a merciless reviewer of philosophical pretension: he found Prof. J. S. Blackie’s *On Beauty* ‘as arrant nonsense as was ever drivelled in a lunatic asylum’ ([Patmore], ‘*On Beauty: Three Discourses by John Stuart Blackie*’, *Literary Gazette* 20 March 1858, pp. 274–5).

¹⁶⁴ Patmore, ‘Coleridge’, *Courage in Politics*, pp. 92, 106.

¹⁶⁵ [Patmore], ‘Athenian Architecture’, *Edinburgh Review*, 95 (1852), p. 404. There are echoes here of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), bk 4, chap. i, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ In reviewing the 1842 edition of the *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, Patmore called him ‘the highest German authority on architectural aesthetics’ ([Patmore], ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12 [1849–50], p. 310).

¹⁶⁷ Kugler thought Semper a ‘red’ revolutionary; Semper called Kugler a ‘German *hofrat*’ (G. Semper, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst* [1851]). For further criticisms of Kugler, see Semper, *Über Baustile* (1869).

¹⁶⁸ [Patmore], ‘*Seven Lamps*’, *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), pp. 314–15.

der Kunstgeschichte (Stuttgart, 1842; 1848; 1856)¹⁶⁹ owed much to Hegel, and was in any case too wide-ranging to deal with architectural theory in any detail; but at least it gave ‘a vivid glimpse or two’ of ‘the elements of architectural character’. These glimpses had been shaded into ‘a dim glimmering’ by John Freeman,¹⁷⁰ but otherwise ignored in England. Meanwhile, Patmore had sailed beyond Kugler, beyond Müller,¹⁷¹ beyond Hübsch,¹⁷² beyond ‘the high-watermark of German architectural aesthetics’.¹⁷³ Studying Hegel—the root of all these thinkers—he had located the secret for himself: Greek ornamental forms were neither an allegory of nature nor a proportional code (as Renaissance theorists presumed); still less were they dependent for their aesthetic value on some antecedent constructive validity (as maintained by the Neo-Classicists).¹⁷⁴ The architectural mouldings of the ancients were sign-manuals of gravitational force; each element played its part in expressing the stational harmony of dependent pressure and ascendant thrust. Here—not in the formulae of associational aesthetics¹⁷⁵—

¹⁶⁹ ‘A book which ought to be translated into English’ ([Patmore], ‘Expression’, *Edinburgh Review*, 94 [1851], p. 372). This work, as Kugler explained, was quite ‘distinct’ from his better known *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei* (Berlin, 1837 and 1847; trans. [M. Hutton], ed. C. L. Eastlake, 1842 and 1851; revised by Lady Eastlake 1874; 5th ed., revised by A. H. Layard, 1887). Kugler’s *Geschichte der Baukunst*, 3 vols (Stuttgart, 1856–9), continued by J. Burckhardt & W. Lübke, was translated into Spanish by J. Caveda (1858), but not into English.

¹⁷⁰ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), pp. 314–15. Patmore praised him for one sentence: ‘Though Grecian is by no means the only style constructed on the mechanical principle of the entablature, it is the only one which thoroughly carries out the aesthetical notion suggested by the principle’ (Freeman, *History of Architecture*, 1849)

¹⁷¹ K. O. Müller was Semper’s teacher at Göttingen. His principal works were available in English, eg. *Introduction to a scientific system of Mythology*, trans. J. Leitch (1830); *Ancient Art and its remains; or a Manual of the Archaeology of Art*, trans. J. Leitch (1847), ed. F. G. Welcker (1850).

¹⁷² Patmore doubtless knew H. Hübsch’s *In Welchem Style Sollen Wier Bauen?* (Karlsruhe, 1828), which anticipates his own view of Roman architecture. But he found more to interest him in the Hegelian sections of Hübsch’s *Die Architektuur und Ihr Verhältnis zur heutigen Malerie und Skulptur* (Stuttgart, 1857): he translates a brief section—‘the essence of Greek art is a serene rest’ etc.—in *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 320. Hübsch was a pupil of F. Wienbrenner.

¹⁷³ [Patmore], ‘Seven Lamps’, *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 315.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Kugler rejects this plausible absurdity, without . . . proving the justice of that rejection, as he might easily have done, by instancing the Ionic details, and Corinthian *modillions*, or consoles, as examples of members which *force* the attention upon the construction, and ought, therefore, according to the “Hut theory”, to be the most conspicuous beauties, instead of being eye-sores . . . They are . . . essentially constructive features, and, in this, differ from the triglyphs, mutules, and other members, which, though no doubt they had an equally constructive origin, do not refer to that origin for their only or chief significance. . . . Every member . . . ought to have a strict constructive propriety: but this constitutes not the artistical significance, but only its condition’ (*ibid.*, p. 320).

¹⁷⁵ ‘Alison and Lord Aberdeen . . . have attributed all the vast surplus beauty for which they could not account [in constructional terms] to the force of “classical associations”’ (*ibid.*, pp. 322–3).

lay the key to the beauties of Greek architecture. And not just Greek. All the buildings of the world could now be judged by the same yardstick: their aesthetic relation to Newton's 'paramount and universal . . . law'.¹⁷⁶ The riddle had been unravelled. From Hegel's hint, from Kugler's glimpse, from Schopenhauer's gloss, came Patmore's general theory of tectonics. 'They are the first discoverers of truths', he announced triumphantly, 'who first understand their general extent and importance'.¹⁷⁷

Much of this thinking was developed in a series of reviews, purportedly of Ruskin's *Seven Lamps* and *Stones of Venice*. Patmore's relationship with Ruskin was never easy. They agreed in their contempt for the Renaissance, though for rather different reasons. They respected each other's genius, they admired each other's style;¹⁷⁸ but they disagreed fundamentally in matters of aesthetics¹⁷⁹ and theology.¹⁸⁰ When Ruskin told an Edinburgh audience that cast iron in building should be outlawed on biblical grounds, Patmore thought it 'the most imbecile kind of argument that ever came out of a sane man's mouth'.¹⁸¹ And there were other disagreements more crucial still. Ruskin was cut off, by language and by temperament, from the whole school of German aesthetics. His forte was description, Patmore's was analysis.

When in the late 1840s Patmore began to review Ruskin he had, first of all, to explain the 'enigma' of Gothic. He found the way to the secret lay not in archaeology (despite Grose,¹⁸² Milner¹⁸³ and Carter)¹⁸⁴, nor in

¹⁷⁶ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 372.

¹⁷⁷ [Patmore], 'Seven Lamps', *North British Review*, 12 (1849–50), p. 323.

¹⁷⁸ Ruskin called Patmore 'one of my severest models and tutors in use of English' (Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 34, pp. 488–90: 27 October 1860). Patmore ranked Ruskin with Jeremy Taylor for the glory of his prose ([Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, 10 [1849], p. 75).

¹⁷⁹ Not initially: it was Patmore who persuaded Ruskin to write his famous letter to *The Times* in 1851 in defence of the Pre-Raphaelites (Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 12, p. xlvi). And not finally: Patmore's initial optimism as regards cast iron soon gave way to Ruskinian pessimism (see note 63).

¹⁸⁰ When Patmore went over to Rome, Ruskin told him: 'It is a great nuisance that you have turned Roman Catholic, for it makes all your fine thinking so ineffectual to us English' (Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 36, pp. 478–9: 24 December 1864). Patmore—at Aubrey de Vere's suggestion—tried to persuade Ruskin to follow him (Champneys, *Patmore*, vol. 2, p. 342).

¹⁸¹ [Patmore], 'Ruskin's Lectures', *The Critic* (n.s.), vol. 13 (1854), p. 288.

¹⁸² F. Grose, *Antiquities of England and Wales*, 8 vols (1783–97); *Scotland*, 2 vols (1789–91); *Ireland*, 2 vols (1791–5).

¹⁸³ J. Milner, *A Dissertation on the Modern Style of Altering Ancient Cathedrals* (1798); *A Treatise on the ecclesiastical architecture of England during the Middle Ages* (1811).

¹⁸⁴ J. Carter, *Ancient Architecture of England*, 2 vols (1795–1814; 1837); *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting*, 2 vols (1780–94).

engineering (despite Willis), nor in truth (despite Pugin);¹⁸⁵ still less did it lie in classification (despite Rickman),¹⁸⁶ nor in profile and section (despite Brandon,¹⁸⁷ Bloxham¹⁸⁸ and Paley)¹⁸⁹; the answer to the enigma did not lie in perspectival harmony (despite Schnaase),¹⁹⁰ nor yet in optical device (despite Semper);¹⁹¹ it did not even reside in symbolism (despite Boisserée,¹⁹² Michelet¹⁹³ and Neale¹⁹⁴). All those routes to understanding were plausible enough; but each was applicable to any style—as indeed were all seven of Ruskin's *Lamps*. 'There are other lamps', noted Patmore, 'and of these Mr. Ruskin tells us nothing'.¹⁹⁵

It was Professor Whewell of Cambridge, in his account of German churches, who—thinking along Hegelian lines¹⁹⁶—gave Patmore the clue: 'the whole secret of the expression of Gothic architecture is to be found in its aspiration'.¹⁹⁷ But how? Whewell stopped short of an answer, so did John Freeman. Patmore went back to Kugler. There—as in Kugler's analysis of Greek architecture—he discovered the germ of an explanation: *emporstreben* (the expression of vertical effect). So Ruskin, Patmore concluded—unblessed by the Hegelian tradition¹⁹⁸—had missed

¹⁸⁵ Of Pugin's *True Principles* (1841) he noted: 'We believe there is some peculiar propriety in Gothic decoration which lies far deeper than Mr. Pugin supposes and is of far more substantial significance than could result from any such negative virtue as that of never getting in the way of constructive necessities' ([Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, **10** [1849], p. 51).

¹⁸⁶ T. Rickman, *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture* (1819; 5th edn 1848).

¹⁸⁷ R. & J. A. Brandon, *An Analysis of Gothic Architecture* (1849).

¹⁸⁸ M. H. Bloxam, *Principles of Gothic Architecture* (11 edns 1829–82).

¹⁸⁹ F. A. Paley, *A Manual of Gothic Mouldings* (1845; 1877 etc.).

¹⁹⁰ For Schnaase on harmonic integration, see M. Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (1982), pp. 35–41.

¹⁹¹ For Semper on optical effect, see *ibid.*, pp. 47–52.

¹⁹² S. Boisserée, *Histoire et Description de la Cathédrale de Cologne* (Munich, 1843).

¹⁹³ J. Michelet, *Histoire de France* (1833–65), pt ii.

¹⁹⁴ *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, by W. Durandus; trans. & ed. J. M. Neale & B. Webb (Oxford, 1845).

¹⁹⁵ [Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, **10** (1849), p. 52.

¹⁹⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, vol. 2, pt iii, pp. 674, 687.

¹⁹⁷ [Patmore], 'Aesthetics', *British Quarterly Review*, **10** (1849), p. 52, citing W. Whewell, *Architectural Notes on German Churches* (1842). E. A. Freeman—like Pugin before him—had been an enthusiast for the inspirational qualities of altitude in churches (*Ecclesiologist* **5** [n.s. 3] [1846], p. 181). But that is not quite the same thing as aspiration in the form of counterpoint to gravitational thrust. Freeman lectured 'On the Constructive Principles of the Principal Styles of Architecture' at the Royal Institution in 1853.

¹⁹⁸ eg. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, vol. 2, pt iii, pp. 687–9: 'romantic architecture constructs a building which exists as an enclosure for the spirit, and ... so far as is architecturally possible [makes] spiritual convictions shine through the shape and arrangement of the building and so determines the form of its interior and exterior ... from the

the essence of 'the Gothic idea':¹⁹⁹ the transcendent symbolic potential of the pointed arch. And that omission made Ruskin's notion of Gothic rather like *Hamlet* without the Prince.²⁰⁰ Hence Ruskin's enthusiasm for North Italian Gothic, a useful urban synthesis but a synthesis which turned the sublime principle of pointed vaulting into just another system of secular decoration.²⁰¹ As for Patmore's theory of foliation, here he did succeed in converting Ruskin.²⁰² But at bottom Patmore's whole approach to ornament was quite different: its significance in his view was not decorative at all but operatively expressive.²⁰³ In Patmore's opinion, ornament in building—that is, 'artistical expression': vernacular or polite—was only a means in the creative process, not an end.²⁰⁴ Ruskin's writing provided the occasion for Patmore's pyrotechnics, but Hegel supplied the combustible materials; from Kugler sprang the necessary spark, and from Schopenhauer came much of the cosmic conspectus.

terrestrial to the infinite . . . [it is as if] the strict difference between load and support has disappeared . . . [Indeed] the way the building strives upwards . . . converts load carrying to free ascending . . . [and in] the eye . . . the worshipping heart . . . rises above the territory of finitude and finds rest in God alone'.

¹⁹⁹ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), p. 395.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 392–3, 398; [Patmore], 'Character', *North British Review*, 15 (1851), pp. 481 *et seq.* See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. Knox, vol. 2, pt iii, p. 698: 'In secular architecture . . . there is no room for beauty except as decoration'. Hence Patmore's comparative contempt for Italian Gothic. It is 'not a real style at all', he contended, 'but the wreck of several preceding and imperfect styles, grown over with a mass of parasitical and incidental decoration' (Patmore, 'Architectural Criticism', *Courage in Politics*, p. 179). Indeed it 'has about as much relation to a true style as a curiosity shop has to a well-ordered living room' (Patmore, 'Styles', *Principle in Art*, p. 160). 'Shafts and mouldings . . . maimed in their upward flight by horizontal bands of colour'; arch mouldings interrupted by voussoirs carved, jointed and separately marked; pointed arches deprived of their 'natural expression' by enclosure within a semi-circle; decoration through rich materials rather than 'pure-form'—all these were essentially 'anti-Gothic' devices which, by comparison with classicism, deprived Gothic of its 'expressional powers' (Patmore, 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 [1851], p. 398). This 'secularisation' of the style, however, made it eminently suitable for Italian *palazzi* and modern civic buildings (Patmore, 'Character', *North British Review*, 15 [1851], pp. 482, 484–5).

²⁰² [Patmore], 'Stones of Venice', *British Quarterly Review*, 12 (1851), p. 490.

²⁰³ [Patmore], 'Expression', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (1851), pp. 397, 400. Ruskin seemed to Patmore to think of Gothic details 'as if they might be plucked from the building, like flowers from the stalk, without any loss of significance' (*ibid.*, p. 379).

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390. Patmore approved of Tudor building as vernacularized Gothic: 'The broad window, divided vertically into equal compartments by mullions, and horizontally into unequal portions by transomes, and surmounted by a dripstone . . . is the only window that ought to be seen in a northern house. [Unlike the Georgian sash: a mere hole in the wall], it is unsurpassable in the expression as well as in the reality of convenience and safe construction; and upon the display of those qualities the beauties of private house architecture must always depend' ([Patmore], 'Character', *North British Review*, 15 [1851], p. 486). Perhaps one day, 'by a combination of . . . Italian Gothic decoration [and] . . . Tudor masses, we shall be able to

How then can we sum up his achievement? Patmore's position among the immortals is likely to rest on the metaphysical poetry of his later years—those mystical works which led Gerard Manley Hopkins to remark: 'for insight he beats all our living poets'.²⁰⁵ This lecture reclaims only one portion of his lifework—but one that has been very largely ignored—his architectural criticism. In a waspish article in the *D.N.B.*, Richard Garnett claimed that Patmore's 'attitude to other men's ideas was that of Omar towards the Alexandrian library'.²⁰⁶ In fact his intellectual methods were closer to the Jackdaw of Rheims than to Attila the Hun. 'Genius', he decided, lies in 'the synthetic eye', 'the unitive vision', which draws together all the strands of knowledge in pursuit of a deeper understanding.²⁰⁷ Undeterred by accusations of amateurism—after all one scarcely needs to be a cobbler to know when the shoe pinches—Patmore set out to establish principles of architectural criticism. That meant tackling the hardest questions of all: the nature of aesthetic judgement, the origins of style. He did not expect an easy ride. 'English readers', he noted, tend to react to such 'transcendental' notions with 'repugnance and suspicion'.²⁰⁸ 'Let no one', he added ruefully, 'who is afraid to be laughed at by fools and knaves undertake to define the relationships of art and religion'.²⁰⁹

boast of a domestic architecture surpassing any that has yet existed' (ibid., p. 488). Meanwhile, let buildings grow organically: 'the most beautiful examples of British and foreign house architecture—not public or palatial—are those in which all care of . . . symmetry and order is cast away . . . [so that] the house seems to grow . . . from its root in the hearth, as wildly as the trees that surround it' (ibid., p. 493). In all building, the best effect comes from a 'modest ostentation of . . . extreme substantiality'. The 15th-century inn at Aldfriston, Sussex, for example. Patmore admired its rustic grandeur: 'a fit abode for a duke in difficulties' (Patmore, 'Ideal and Material Greatness in Art', *Principle in Art*, pp. 149–53). 'If the devil were an architect, his 'favourite sin' would be [a sham Picturesque] . . . "cottage of gentility"' (Patmore, 'Old English Architecture, Ancient and Modern', *Principle in Art*, p. 157).

²⁰⁵ See *Times Literary Supplement* 24 May 1957, p. 320; J. C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (1957). 'The most devout, subtle, and sublimated love-poetry of our century' (A. Symons, *New Review*, 16 [1897], pp. 71–7). 'A fund of inspired poetry' worth 'the whole baggage of the Victorian legacy in general' (H. Read, 'Coventry Patmore', in *The Great Victorians*, ed. H. J. & H. Massingham [1952], pp. 394–410). Gosse compared the odes of *The Unknown Eros* (1877–8) to 'Rosicrucian symbols, wholly unintelligible to the multitude, but discovered with a panic of delight by a few elect souls in every generation' (Gosse, *Patmore*, p. 151). They certainly confirm Patmore's enthusiasm for the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg. See Meynell, *Library of Coventry Patmore*, p. 35. For a critical view, see J. J. Dunn, 'Love and Eroticism: Coventry Patmore's Mystical Imagery', *Victorian Poetry*, 7 (1969), pp. 203–19.

²⁰⁶ *Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 (supp. 1901), p. 1124.

²⁰⁷ Patmore, *Religio Poetae* (1898 ed.), pp. 66–7.

²⁰⁸ [Patmore], 'Athenian Architecture', *Edinburgh Review*, 95 (1852), p. 402.

²⁰⁹ [Patmore], 'Ethics', *British Quarterly Review*, 10 (1849), p. 441. 'Who but a "scientist" values greatly or is greatly moved by anything he can understand?' (Patmore, *Religio Poetae*, p. 140).

As regards the architectural world, Patmore was never an influential critic: epigrams seldom persuade. But he must be the only poet whose obituary was written by the President of the R.I.B.A. He left behind no volumes of aesthetic theory, just a random scatter of notices. 'But those pages', noted Paul Waterhouse, 'are so replete with . . . thought . . . that one is forced to realise in him one of the very few minds who, without any professional connection with [architecture], yet see and can express something more than the surface of its mysteries'—in particular the mystery of 'that eternal theme of all legitimate structural design—gravitation and its counteraction'.²¹⁰ Patmore was never cut out to be a popular pundit. In fact the very idea of popularity would have appalled him. He deserves his own epitaph: 'I have written little, but it is all my best; I have never spoken when I had nothing to say, nor spared time or labour to make my words true.'²¹¹

Writings by Coventry Patmore on Art, Architecture and Aesthetics²¹²

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'Sources of Expression in Architecture', *Edinburgh Review*, 94 (October 1851), 365–403.

'Athenian Architecture', *Edinburgh Review*, 95 (April 1852), 395–405.

²¹⁰ *R.I.B.A. Journal*, 3rd series, 8 (1901), pp. 49–51.

²¹¹ Gosse, *Patmore*, pp. 217–18: 1886. Or, as he wrote on one occasion to Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'I have written all that I had to say, and as well as I could; and I must rest content' (C. C. Abbott, ed., *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* [1938], p. 214).

²¹² Based—with emendations and additions—on complementary lists in *Courage in Politics*, ed. F. Page (1921); J. C. Reid, *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (1957); and the *Wellesley Index of Victorian Periodicals*, ed. W. E. Houghton, 5 vols (1966–89).

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- 'Architects and Architecture', *Fraser's Magazine*, **46** (December 1852), 653–9.
- 'Ruskin's Lectures on Architecture and Painting', *The Critic* (n.s.), vol. 13 (June 1854), pp. 283–9.
- 'London Street Architecture', *National Review*, **5** (July 1857), 42–72.
- 'A Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition', *Saturday Review*, **4** (4 July 1857), 11–12.
- 'Walls and Wall Paintings at Oxford', *Saturday Review*, **4** (26 December 1857), 583–4.
- 'Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture, by G. G. Scott', *Literary Gazette* (9 January 1858), 32–4.
- 'On Beauty: Three Discourses, by J. S. Blackie', *Literary Gazette* (20 March 1858), 274–5.
- 'Gothic Architecture: Present and Future', *North British Review*, **28** (May 1858), 346–75.
- 'Library of the British Museum', *Edinburgh Review*, **109** (January 1859), 201–26.
- 'The Gothic Revival', *Pall Mall Gazette* (14 March 1872).
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- 'Goethe', *St. James's Gazette* (20 March 1886). reprinted in *Courage in Politics* (1921), pp. 74–9.
- 'Hegel', *St. James's Gazette* (22 March 1886). Reprinted in *Courage in Politics* (1921), pp. 105–9.
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- 'Old English Architecture, Ancient and Modern', *St. James's Gazette* (12 October 1886). Reprinted in *Principle in Art* (1889), 154–9.
- 'Ideal and Material Greatness in Architecture', *St. James's Gazette* (16 October 1886). Reprinted in *Principle in Art* (1889), pp. 146–53.
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