Sexualities in Victorian Britain

Adams, James, Miller, Andrew

Published by Indiana University Press

Adams, James and Andrew Miller.
Sexualities in Victorian Britain.
Indiana University Press, 1996.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/113354.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/113354
I

“Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman’s pleasure.” So begins “The Wife’s Tragedy” in the first edition of Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (1854: 125). Here, only too clearly, is the expression of just the kind of masculinist sentiment for which Patmore has over time become notorious, and which twentieth-century feminism has done its utmost to subvert. “Killing the Angel in the House,” as Virginia Woolf memorably put it, “was part of the occupation of the woman writer” struggling to find her own distinctive identity in Victorian and Edwardian England (286). More recently, feminist criticism has drawn on Hélène Cixous’s influential “Sorties” to illustrate how Patmore’s poem demonstrates the punishing logic of the “Empire of the Selfsame” (79); the Angel, seen from the perspective of Cixous’s powerful optic, emerges for Bina Freiwald as a “textual magnifying glass . . . through which the male poet-narrator’s plenitude of self is magnificently redoubled” at the expense of obliterating the woman who enchants his gaze (542). Rarely, we might think, has a poem so brazenly celebrated masculine self-aggrandizement.

The received wisdom about the *Angel*, therefore, suggests that it is a work so quintessentially Victorian in its pious and distinctly male espousals of spiritual and amatory purity that it need only be cited to exemplify dominant beliefs from which we have safely extricated ourselves. Indeed, those who praise and those who blame the *Angel* so zealously have based their positions on a shared set of assumptions about Patmore’s central concern: sexual inequality in marriage. Yet the difference between the sexes in Patmore’s writing is far from clear-cut. Rather than presenting a fixed hierarchy where men are dominant and women subordinate, Patmore’s poems present masculinity and femininity as such tightly interlocked structures
that it proves hard to keep them entirely distinct. The intellectual difficulties into which Patmore continually ran no doubt account for both the inordinate discursiveness of the *Angel* and the exhaustive lengths he went to revise the poem between 1854 and 1886. In the *Angel*, as well as in his reviews, essays, and later odes, Patmore took the unusual move of making femininity a constitutive element of the male poet’s identity. He did so, in part, so that this idealized figure of genius could maintain his artistic and intellectual—not to say sexual—prowess at a time when “woman’s mission” and feminism were asserting forms of female authority as never before. But it was not “woman’s mission” alone that confronted Patmore with doubts about the gendering of the male poet’s vocation. The divergent critical responses to his work clearly indicate that perceptions of the gendered qualities of poetry were shifting profoundly at mid-century. The *Angel’s* highly feminine style and subject matter threatened to render this male poet altogether too womanly—to the point that his masculinity could not always be defended even by his most generous advocates.

Enshrining what appear to be the least palatable of mid-Victorian bourgeois sexual orthodoxies—where the self-abnegating wife’s sole mission in life is to tend to her husband’s each and every whim—Patmore’s poetic celebration of domestic wedded bliss has become a touchstone in discussions of the far-reaching influence enjoyed by those ideologies of “separate spheres” for men and women propounded in the conduct manuals that proved especially fashionable during the late 1830s and 1840s. Such, indeed, was the success of Patmore’s poem (the *Angel* passed into numerous editions, including “cheap” ones for an expanding popular market) that John Ruskin was compelled to cite a short passage from it in his equally notorious “Of Queens’ Gardens” (published in 1865), his lecture that sketched an ideal of the complementary but opposed destinies of the sexes. There Ruskin memorably insisted that the “man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error.” The woman, meanwhile, governs the home: “the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division” (*Works* XVIII: 122). This account, on the face of it, provides a neat summary of how womanly virtue ministered to the wounds of the male provider continually beaten and buffeted by the public world of work. Not surprisingly, then, no sooner had Ruskin received his copy of the first edition of the *Angel* than he made his appreciation known to Patmore. “It has,” he wrote, “purpose and plain meaning in every line, it is fit for the age—and for all ages, and it will get its place.” Ruskin’s only reservation about the *Angel* was that its resemblance to Alfred Tennyson’s well-established canon might prove to be a “retarding element” that could prevent the poem from achieving the celebrity it deserved (Champneys II: 278).

The poem won a host of admirers. In his review of 1858, Patmore’s close Roman Catholic associate, Aubrey De Vere, claimed that the *Angel* appealed to the “fashion or taste of the present time,” which valued “more calm and subdued expression of poetic feeling” than “the sublimer inspiration of Shelley and Keats” from a generation ago. “The delineation of home scenery, the reproduction of
familiar emotions, the drama of domestic life,” writes De Vere in Patmore’s defense, “requires a more delicate sense of art, more finished execution, and more careful treatment than the poems which appeal violently to the emotions” (122). This attention to technical “finish”—a stylistic smoothness that would provide a pleasant surface to this most polite and affecting poem—was a quality that Patmore himself esteemed in the writings of Tennyson, and this particular preference ensured that he roundly condemned the Spasmodic poets—such as Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith—for their convulsive outbursts in much the same manner as Matthew Arnold had done in the Preface to his Poems (1853; see “New Poets” 342-43). Of a similar cast of mind was William Barnes, whose lyrics in Dorsetshire dialect Patmore had praised in “New Poems” (North British Review [1859]). Barnes in turn commended the Angel as “a good wedding gift to a bridegroom from his friends” (Fraser’s 131). For this poem, Barnes believed, offers “to woman herself a high pattern of gentle purity” in marriage while “helping man to a knowledge and feeling of the excellent in the true woman’s mind” (133). For such readers, Patmore’s morality was unquestionably an ideal entirely suited to the era.

Yet many Victorians found Patmore’s work uninspiring; it seemed just as familiar, slight, unambitious—in a word, domestic—as the moral universe it sought to extol. In 1854, for example, having received the first part of the Angel, the Literary Gazette demeaningly remarked that “[w]ere it not for the seriousness of the poem, and the respectability of the publisher, we should regard the whole book as a burlesque, or a mischievous piece of waggery perpetrated on worthy people at Salisbury” where the hero’s courtship and eventual marriage take place. Henry Chorley, with characteristic independent-mindedness, chose to parody Patmore’s tripping Hudibrastic rhythms in a manner that Algernon Charles Swinburne would take to much more extreme lengths in “The Person in the House,” contained in his Heptalogy (1880). In one uproarious line after another Swinburne exposes the preciousness of Patmore’s style. “Idyl CCCLXVI” (the numerals reminding us of the Patmore’s garrulity, entitled “The Kid,” begins: “My spirit, in the doorway’s pause, / Fluttered with fancies in my breast; / Obsequious to all decent laws, / I felt exceedingly distressed” (V: 403). Swinburne’s parody captures perfectly the frequent incongruity between Patmore’s slight vocabulary and his dignified sentiment. But these lines also respond to the pervasive unease of Patmore’s poem. Throughout the Angel, the mind of the wealthy country gentleman, Felix Vaughan, the protagonist who subscribes to the highest Tory principles and the most “decent laws” of the land, is troubled by more than a little “distress.”

That “distress,” this essay argues, found its way into the stylistic idiosyncrasy of the poem, which worried even sympathetic reviewers. Welcoming the early Victorians’ poetic treatment of “married life . . . as one of the most powerful influences at work upon the character and happiness of individuals and nations,” George Brimley was struck by the “logical puzzles” of the Angel (234, 243). Richard Holt Hutton, casting a critical eye across the collected and revised first two parts of the Angel in 1858, opens his review with a survey of “Pre-Raphaelite” poetry characterized by “microscopic or telescopic vision”
(529), and a new attention to detail clearly exemplified in the Angel, which Hutton regards as a distinctly feminine poem. Having praised Patmore’s “instinctive knowledge of the feminine cast of mind,” however, Hutton suggests that this sign of poetic “genius” may well be inhibiting the poet’s art. “His only fault,” remarks Hutton, “is . . . that he has a tendency, not to make women too feminine, which is impossible, but a little too small” (537). Although denying that femininity in itself can be emphasized too much, this remark does hint at a lack of substance in the lady of Felix Vaughan’s dreams. “We must,” Hutton adds, “think poorly of Honoria. We should object to her for a wife. She is prudish, and her nature is on a petty scale.” Ultimately, she strikes him as “altogether limited” (538).

To be sure, this “limited” femininity was regarded by some reviewers as a mark of distinction. It was in the home, the Eclectic Review declared, that “poetry comes into the face that is furrowed with the hieroglyphs of business, and the shut-up heart opens in the warmth of affection” (551)—a sentiment anticipating Ruskin’s “Of Queens’ Gardens.” Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund observe that such commentary “suggests the marginality of home, poetry, and women to the world of men and business” (17). Yet, time and again, this apparently safe preoccupation with the domestic world made it difficult for contemporaries to take Angel seriously. Indignant at the harsh treatment Patmore received in the Critic in 1860, Ruskin remonstrated in a letter that the “entire familiarity and simplicity of portions of [this] great work” had been read too “hastily” (Champneys II: 280). But even Patmore’s friend and associate, Edmund Gosse, remarked of the 1886 “fourth collective edition” that the poet was “the laureate of tea-table, with his hum-drum stories of girls that smell of bread and butter” (Champneys II: 256).

Moreover, the Angel clearly failed to meet with Patmore’s own satisfaction. The four serially published parts of the poem—The Betrothal (1854), The Espousals (1856), Faithful for Ever (1860), and The Victories of Love (1861)—were drastically and persistently reorganized, structurally and verbally, in four editions during the course of three decades. There is probably no Victorian poem that underwent such rapid and drastic revisionary labor, and the very thought of a variorum edition of Patmore’s poetical works must surely invoke dread in the ablest of textual editors. My concern is with how and why a poem that has been typecast as exemplary of its age remained so unsettled, so much at odds with the state of domestic contentedness toward which its multiplicity of cantos and letters are making their respectable way. Biographical information, particularly the Memoirs and Correspondence compiled by Basil Champneys, provides one commonsensical approach explaining Patmore’s many revisions: his exchanges with Richard Garnett and Gerard Manley Hopkins clearly indicate that Patmore was highly responsive to sympathetic criticisms of his work. Patmore’s changing marital circumstances also may have altered his perspective on the figure who inspired the Angel, his first wife, Emily: after she died in 1862, he converted to Roman Catholicism, shortly thereafter married the chaste and pious Marianne Byles, and after her death remarried again in 1890. But the Angel was transforming in scope and shape while Emily Patmore was still very much alive. Indeed, the uneasiness of Patmore’s engagement with
sexual difference emerged at the very moment he first turned his gaze upon his exemplary angel.

II

While the most obvious aim of Patmore’s writing was to protect the angel-wife from the world outside the home, the Angel also served, in no small measure, to domesticate Victorian masculinity. Throughout his writing, his ideal of masculine desire can never separate itself from a femininity that proves to be a constant disappointment to him. Whenever he praises feminine sweetness and purity, Felix Vaughan articulates ambivalent feelings toward an angelic being who is, persistently and problematically, spiritual and debased at the same time. In “The Wife’s Tragedy,” for example, the title alone stresses that the angel is far from adequate to the husband’s needs. “[D]own the gulf / Of his consoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself: / How often flings for nought” (1854: 125). No matter how much she tries to comfort the husband—to soothe, in Patmore’s characteristically odd idiom, his “consoled necessities”—she is in danger of failing, even if, as we are told several lines later, “She loves with love that cannot tire” (1854: 126). This whole section catches our attention in its rapid shift to a scene where the wife—in her unending tragedy—weeps at the husband’s graveside. There, [t]hrough passionate duty,” her “love flames higher.” Somewhat in spite of itself, this line suggests that her sense of wifely duty is greater when her husband is dead than it had been when she flung herself “for nought.”

It may not appear peculiar that Patmore found tragedy in the institution he sought to praise. Such, we might think, are the vicissitudes of all human relationships. Yet there is surely something highly conflicted in the work of a poet who devoted much of his life to celebrating a man’s need to be pleased by a woman who could never, under any circumstances, be his equal. It is an unbending inequality: as Patmore remarked in an undated and unpublished note, “The worst men respect woman more than the best women respect themselves.” From this premise, Patmore infers that a loveless marriage is less sinful than an adulterous relationship. In a pitiable situation such as this, he argues, the “blame is chiefly man’s, for woman learns herself from him, and she will only begin to respect herself when she is made to feel that all available men reverence her person as something inviolable and divine” (Reid 163). This is a persistent sentiment in Patmore’s prose: the object of the man’s praise can only become divine at his command. The woman’s failure to become angelic, then, stems from the man’s inability to improve her abased condition. As Patmore puts it in “The Weaker Vessel” (1893), “The true happiness and dignity of woman are to be sought, not in her exaltation to the level of man, but in a full appreciation of her inferiority and in the voluntary honour which every manly nature instinctively pays to the weaker vessel” (Principle in Art 347). Of course, this sexism was shared by many Victorian patriarchs. But Pat-
more undertook to explore this commonplace view in more elaborate, even obsessive, detail than any of his male peers.

One frequently revised poem in *The Betrothal*, entitled "The Daughter of Eve," vividly exemplifies Patmore's hierarchy of masculine and feminine attributes. Presented, in Patmore's rather rococo scheme, as an "accompaniment"—or, in later editions, a "prelude"—to a Tennysonian "idyl," "The Daughter of Eve" attempts to demonstrate that women must travel one of two paths—either to virtue or to vice (1854: 155-58). But the movement of this poem from the generous appraisal of the angel to the severe condemnation of the whore is far more opaque than this seemingly clear antithesis suggests. The specific textual problem is a striking confusion of agency. At several points, it remains difficult to infer whether it is Vaughan or Honoria who is taking up an active or a passive role in the intricate transaction of looks, smiles, and—notably—valuations that comprise their glorious love for one another. But the limber movement of the first sixteen lines does its utmost to mask the complex logic through which the man estimates the relative "worth" of the angel he desires:

Though woman be the Child of Eve,
   Death—wounded to the dear heart's core;
Shall man for her sad lineage grieve,
   Man, suffering less and sinning more?
No: he whose praises do not pile
   The measure of her just desert,
Impugns the logic of her smile,
   Which gives the balm and takes the hurt.
For my part, when, rejoiced, I trace
   Her various worth, and how she is
My most effectual means of grace,
   And casket of my worldly bliss,
I, looking round, do nowhere see
   That second good which doth afford
The like compulsion, urging me
   With a pure mind to praise the Lord.

Here Vaughan is claiming that a woman will be unable to recognize her "various worth" unless a man applies his "just desert" to her "smile." Rightly praised by him, this woman will come to embody his "grace" and his "bliss." He, therefore, may judge, read, and thereby estimate what she should mean to him as a perfect woman. Put another way, she becomes what he deems she should be; she is the tabula rasa upon which he impresses his character. She, then, enshrines properties that he cherishes because they are redoubtably external and alien to his manhood. But—and this proves to be a sticking-point in the passage—since he attributes these qualities to her in the first place, they must, at some level, form a part of himself. This arrangement, at first glance, looks like a blatant case of male narcissism—the "Empire of the Selfsame" in its most alarming form. For the labor of
the male lover is such that the woman can only be raised to her angelic status with his help because she is, ab initio, a daughter of Eve—"Death-wounded to the dear heart's core." Yet the lines following this indictment of woman's fallen state reveal that it is man who is "suffering less and sinning more." So who, to begin with, is more at fault? The answer, unfortunately, becomes more—not less—opaque. Just at the moment when Vaughan seizes on the opportunity to contemplate why the sins of the fathers are visited upon the angel, it remains unclear why it is not his duty to "grieve." Leaving this matter unresolved, Vaughan's thoughts promptly adopt a new direction, indicating that the woman is his "effectual means" of happiness, his "casket" laden with treasure, now so full that he must praise the Lord.

More complications ensue, as the woman's predicament goes from bad to worse. The second section of the poem becomes conspicuously more troubled and evasive when Patmore's speaker seeks to make distinctions between the angel's innate imperfections and her completeness as a woman:

> Her meek and gentle mood o'erstept<br>Withers my love, that lightly scans<br>The rest, and does in her accept<br>All her own faults, but none of man's.<br>I have no heart to judge her ill,<br>Or honour her fair station less,<br>Who, with a woman's errors, still<br>Preserves a woman's gentleness.<br>Or fails she, though from blemish clear,<br>To charm to the full, 'tis my defect;<br>And so my thought, with reverent fear<br>To err by doltish disrespect,<br>Imputes love's great regard, and says,<br>"Though unapparent 'tis to me,<br>Be sure this Queen some other sways<br>With well perceiv'd supremacy."

Although she is eternally scarred with "a woman's errors," such faults "still" preserve her "gentleness"—a quality that ultimately makes her into a "Queen." It is, however, worth hesitating over the adverb "still." Does it mean that her "gentleness" remains because of her errors? Or is her charming disposition maintained in spite of them? Similarly ambiguous is the quatrain which declares that her "meek and gentle mood" enables her to "accept All her own faults, but none of man's." These lines would appear to contradict the sentiments expressed in the previous section, where she dutifully "gives the balm and takes the hurt." Most striking, however, is Vaughan's puzzled attitude to those women in whom he fails to see the angelic potential. Why is it that each and every daughter of Eve cannot serve as his "most effectual means of grace"? Eager to explain that his sexual desire is not in any respect promiscuous or random, Vaughan is also obliged to admit that his power over women is to some degree limited.

Yet the issue that needs to be addressed here does not simply concern the all too
evident contradictions that emerge in the superficially lucid grammar of the *Angel*. The poem is irresolute to a degree that often verges on incoherence—or "logical puzzles," in Brimley's phrase. Perhaps the most emphatic disjunction in "The Daughter of Eve" occurs in the drastic shift between the second and third subsections where he quickly turns his attention to the fallen women of Victorian England:

```
Behold the worst! Light from above
On the blank ruin writes "Forebear:
Her first crime was unguarded love,
And all the rest was mere despair."
```

The "blemish," it would seem, may manifest itself so dangerously that it results in "crime" and "despair." At this point, therefore, the woman has become an agent of desire, not its recipient. Earlier, though, it was man who was "sinning more" than woman, and woman's "various worth" that was wholly dependent on his "just desert." The fourth section elaborates her plight. Having fallen, now neither "maiden" nor "matron," the woman's only comfort is in grieving for her piteous state. Yet it is still not evident how and why a woman's "unguarded love" could of itself give rise to "crime." Instead, she remains vulnerable to being led morally astray. The male enables her to rise, it seems, while she has a tendency to fall. But if she has no innate will to be an angel, does not that make her always already—and forevermore—fallen?

By placing so much emphasis on the woman's "blemish," the *Angel* credits women with far less dignity than do the female ideologues of "woman's mission." The writers of advice manuals for women, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis and Sarah Lewis, celebrate womanly influence within the domestic sphere in a way that is, in many respects, radically different from Patmore's agonized, violent hierarchy of male over female. Far from propagating the notion that the domestic wife and daughter was a direct descendant of Eve, Lewis laid her emphasis on the "regenerating principle" that lay in the hands of women. If removed from the political sphere, argues Lewis, women are none the less the primary and most significant influences on their male charges, and since femininity is in its domestic confinement closest to moral purity, it is essential that society revere the maternal authority that is instrumental to "forming character" (19) in a patriarchal world that is terrifyingly corrupt. Ellis, too, while putting her own distinctive stress on the virtues of the middle-class—rather than aristocratic or working—woman, claims that the female rulers of the domestic realm are "distinguished by [a] strict regard to the properties of life [which] extends to every sphere of action in which they move, discountenancing vice in every form" (35). The "united maintenance of [the] social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace, which constitute the foundation of all that is most valuable in the society of our native land," according to Ellis, lies in the hands of her "countrywomen" (36). The kinds of claim that Ellis and her peers were staking on the moral, domestic, and—noticeably—national importance of the middle-class woman were thrown into relief by contemporary
criticism, not only from radicals such as the Owenite feminists, but also from the
avant-garde utilitarians connected with the Monthly Repository, and women writers
such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose poet-narrator in Aurora Leigh deplots the
“score of books on womanhood” duly given to her by her prudish maiden aunt
(I: 427). A conservative writer such as A. W. Kinglake also looked with suspicion
on the moral high ground taken up by Ellis in The Women of England. Although
Kinglake can see how “Mrs Ellis carefully disclaims the idea of giving her sex the
slightest assistance in any attempts to ‘manage’ their lords,” he promptly notes
how such “works written by women upon the science of domestic government . . .
makes us remember that treatise on horsemanship which the tailor detected as hav-
ing decidedly come from the pen of a chestnut mare” (112).

The claims of Ellis and Lewis embody a conflict stressed by feminist historians,
such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall: “[t]he tension between subordi-
tion and influence, between moral power and political silence, was one which pre-
occupied all the protagonists of ‘woman’s mission.’” “If the moral world was
theirs,” they remark, “who needed the public world of business and politics?”
(183). Judith Newton extends this idea by observing how the “writers of women’s
manuals, in their tendency to place men at the bottom of industrial, capitalist, and
domestic ills and in their tendency to isolate women like themselves as social he-
rones, challenged the power relations of their world and in the process entertained
a view of mid-nineteenth-century society which middle-class men, by and large,
did not share” (131). This persistent stress on women’s morality, issuing from the
middle-class woman’s influential heart, was taken up, as the joint authors of The
Woman Question remind us, by “Victorian feminists . . . to gain specific reforms
especially in the area of education” (Helsinger et al. I: 20). It should come as no
surprise, then, that the Saturday Review felt that the discourse of “woman’s mis-
sion” was “by its vast grandiloquence” attempting to create “the notion that
women have something sublime and mysterious to do which, until lately, no one
ever heard” (377). Even Ruskin’s angels were not destined for the type of sub-
ordination that Patmore had in mind. In “Of Queens’ Gardens,” he desired that
young girls would be “let loose in the library” to obtain a broader knowledge of
the world (Works XVIII: 131). The more we examine the moral impetus guiding
“woman’s mission” toward increasingly vocal forms of feminist campaigning, the
stranger it seems that it is Patmore’s Angel which modern readers so frequently
invoke to exemplify the mid-Victorian doctrine of “separate spheres.”

The expressly female moral “influence” praised by Lewis would surely not have
become so prominent were it not for the fact that, as Patmore notes, male sexuality
was seen at this time to be “suffering less and sinning more.” One only has to
remember W. R. Greg’s classic statement, dating from 1850, on the cardinal dis-
tinction between male and female sexuality. “In men, in general,” writes Greg,
“the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous, and belongs to the condition of
puberty. In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent, till excited;
always till excited by undue familiarities” (457). This account of how men com-
prise the “coarser sex” (457) would shape and guide the pernicious Contagious
Diseases Acts imposed in the 1860s to eradicate prostitution in garrison towns. Male sexual coarseness was viewed by the authors of that legislation as an uncontrollable force that required a proper outlet in marriage. If, with this larger context in mind, we return to the anguished deliberations through which Felix Vaughan puts himself in the Angel, we can begin to see more clearly how Patmore’s fixation on the domestic sphere might well be viewed as symptomatic of a desire to wrest moral power away from the proponents of “woman’s mission,” and to make man the sole arbiter of domestic management. But in making himself the exclusive index of a woman’s “worth,” Patmore’s high-minded persona keeps coming up against the intractable problem that has already been identified in “The Daughter of Eve.” The male sexuality that is supposed to discover its joyous and rightful expression in marriage is not only devoted to an object marred by a fundamental “blemish,” it also stems from a source that Victorian commentators generally regarded as impure. No wonder the Angel strives to identify purity in the masculine authority of its protagonist, from which all evaluations of pure femininity proceed. But in espousing this view, the poem is obliged—given the binary logic that rationalized Victorian notions of sexual difference—to make femininity a constitutive element of the man. In other words, the pure man, since he is altogether superior to the blemished woman, must partake of his own type of womanly mission. This, in essence, is the project of Patmore’s Angel: to construct a good woman out of a man. His aim is not simply to make the woman angelic. He must also ensure that her queenly status is the direct result of what Hutton called the man’s “instinctive knowledge of the feminine cast of mind.”

This ambiguous feature of the poem—one that is far more eccentric than received wisdom about the Angel would lead us to believe—has not gone entirely unnoticed. Carol Christ quotes at length from Patmore’s tribute to angelic femininity to make incisive points about the conflicted relations between the seemingly active male and the supposedly passive female represented in the poem, emphasizing how Felix Vaughan’s admiration for his beloved Honoria creates a realm of freedom “from impulses that man finds . . . difficult to accept in himself” (149). Yet that realm is not one where he can remain entirely liberated. For in locating in the house an angel whose worth depends on his own valuation, he must reside in very close proximity to her and her innate “blemish,” an ineradicable stain from which the Tory man of principle can only recoil. The extensive revisions to “The Daughter of Eve” suggest as much: they try to iron out some of the extraordinary inconsistencies that suggest that his “sinning” is perhaps as dangerous as the inherent “blemish” that threatens to make any woman into a whore. In the second edition of 1857, “The Daughter of Eve” has become a single poem; there are no subsections, and a substantial proportion of the lines has been removed. The transition from the angel to the fallen woman therefore appears all the more seamless. In this instance, Patmore removes a previous accusation against the woman’s “sad lineage.” Having excised the reference to man’s “sinning more,” Felix Vaughan now more temperately admits that he, as a man, is “Godward erring” (1857: 131). Her “various worth” changes in its estimation to “her worth to
me.” So, all in all, the earlier implication that her value was inherently variable is altered to suggest that he is the stable measure against which her value may be gauged. It might be said, then, that this passage begins on a more positive note than before. Instead of starting ruefully with the “Death-wounded” condition of Eve’s daughter, he begins this time with his prized image of her as his “casket” of “worldly bliss.” There is an altogether clearer movement from the rise of the angel to the ruinously “unguarded love” of the fallen woman.

By the third edition of 1860, however, the poem is taking a somewhat different turn. This time “The Daughter of Eve” has been contracted even further by losing a substantial proportion of lines. References to the angel as a “casket of worldly bliss” and an “effectual means of grace” have disappeared. The poem now opens by referring to “The woman’s gentle mood,” and then makes a brisk transition to her “errors,” which although preserving her “gentleness,” forces him to consider those daughters of Eve who “disappoint” his high desire (1860: 135–37). The poem continues, as in previous versions, to his contempt and pity for the fallen woman. By way of these revisions, the 1860 edition places much greater emphasis than previously on the angel’s potential defects. This is the version that Patmore would retain for the 1886 “fourth collective edition” which, once more, would reorder the contents of several of the twelve cantos.

In its transmogrification from 1854 to 1886, then, “The Daughter of Eve” has moved stage by stage to a more compact form, shifting attention from any contemplation of man’s “errings” to a wholesale condemnation of “woman’s errors.” So the angel, in one edition after another, had to take more and more of the “hurt” for her always potentially fallen condition. Patmore, to be sure, never ceased to try to redeem his lady. But still his attempts to accentuate what attracted Felix Vaughan to Honoria—indeed, to make her far less dull than Hutton originally found her—had a tendency to undercut her angelic status. In 1883, when Patmore was undertaking his final redrafting of the poem for the “fourth collective edition,” Honoria’s presence in the poem was still proving to be a problem. Questioning the shape and direction of one canto, “The Koh-i-Noor” (1890: II: 123–29), Hopkins puzzles over the female subjectivity that uncomfortably blurs the distinction between sexual vice and domestic virtue in so many of the fancily arranged “accompaniments” and “preludes”:

In particular how can anyone admire or (except in charity, as the greatest of sins, but in judgement and approval) tolerate vanity in women? Is it not the beginning of their saddest and most characteristic fall? What but vanity makes them first publish, then prostitute their charms? In Leonardo’s famous picture “Modesty and Vanity” is it not almost taken for granted that the one figure is that of a virgin, the other that of a courtesan? If modesty in women means two things at once, purity and humility, must not the pair of opposites be no great way apart, vanity from impurity? Who can think of the Blessed Virgin and of vanity? (308)

Patmore, quite understandably, responded with an elaborate defense of Felix Vaughan’s attraction to all that is “careless, talkative, and vain” in Honoria’s man-
ner, and categorized these qualities as virtues. And Hopkins retracted his criticism. But their exchange indicates only too clearly how the qualities that are supposed to enhance the angel reside in unsettling proximity to those which degrade her. It is at moments such as this in “The Koh-i-Noor” that the woman’s sexual “blemish” clearly attracts rather than repels her male suitor. What Felix Vaughan seeks to condemn at one moment, elicits his praise at another.

III

Patmore is hardly unique among mid-Victorians in his enduring fascination—if not bafflement—with the demonic and angelic attributes so contradictorily ascribed to femininity. He is also among a host of male poets who were at this time attempting to come to terms with both “woman’s mission” and women writers who appropriated its powerful moral claims to feminist ends. This phenomenon is so evident in the 1850s and 1860s that it cannot help but force us to think why it was that male poets—rather than novelists and dramatists—were persistently focusing their attention on feminine subjects. In her essay on this topic, Christ concludes that it was the fear of the “feminization of culture” that encouraged “the poet of the period . . . to make the female subject bear his name” (400). This view is borne out by the very titles of poems in the period. From Tennyson’s much-criticized “Mariana” and “Claribel” (dating from 1832) to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sensual “Jenny” (published in 1870), middle-class Victorian poetry by men gave a new centrality to femininity at a time when the woman poet was also coming into prominence as never before. Chorley, after all, championed *Aurora Leigh* by stating that Barrett Browning was “our best living poetess,” her name enjoying “a higher renown than any woman has heretofore gained” (1425). The *Literary Gazette* was even more exuberant: “In it [Aurora Leigh] Mrs. Browning has thrown the whole strength of her most noble nature; and she has attained to such a mastery of expression, that she is able to make palpable to others the subllest as well as deepest emotion of her heart, the finest perceptions of her eye, the farthest sweep of her imaginative intellect” (917).

So troubled was Patmore by Barrett Browning’s rising fame—*Aurora Leigh*, he confessed to William Allingham, made him “inexpressibly sick”—that he could only remain perplexed that such a “modest sensible little woman” could have produced this “strange book” (Champneys II: 185). The *Angel*, as De Vere’s review implies, expressed exactly the limited ambition “to illustrate ordinary, not exceptional, modern life” that Patmore expected of a woman poet such as Barrett Browning (123–24). In December 1856, Patmore asked Allingham if he had read Barrett Browning’s magnum opus: “Is it not strange that writers, and still more strange that readers—should prefer shrieking G or F to singing E or D? But the book abounds with ‘fine things’ and will be a ‘tremendous success.’ ” Resentful of being pushed out of the limelight by a woman writer, Patmore adds: “We linnets must abide with time” (Champneys II: 183)—recalling Tennyson’s memorable
lines: “I do but sing because I must, / And pipe but as the linnets sing” (In Memoriam [1850] XXI: 23–24). This is one of several places where Patmore remonstrates that he can sing more sweetly that any woman poet can, while admitting that the voice of Aurora Leigh is commanding greater attention than his own.

Yet for all his rhetorical confidence, Patmore experienced great anxiety about the proper gendering of his art, as several of his periodical reviews of contemporary poetry make patently clear. For to be a poet, in Patmore’s mind, is to ensure that one’s own femininity—one’s male femininity, as it were—is far sweeter and more resplendent in its technical “finish” than anything a mere woman might care to write. But this was not an idea easy to establish in the Victorian age. Such a view, admittedly, is not so extraordinary, since it conforms with the widespread belief that the highest poetry employed an expressive aesthetic: one that was lyrical, direct, and sweet. Between 1830 and 1870, as Isobel Armstrong observes, reviewers’ “demands for clarity and simplicity of style, for ‘distinct’ language, are associated with demands for what is common and familiar”—and, in Patmore’s hands, with what is feminine and domestic (26). Yet the gradual shift toward feminine styles and subject-matter occurred in a period when doctrines of manliness were also on the ascend, and the clash of interests between the increasingly womanly mission of Victorian poetry and ideologies of a highly physicalized and hardened masculinity came to a head in the reviews of poetry written by Charles Kingsley. Discussing the Spasmodics, Kingsley believed that their rather jerkily organized “conceits” were symptomatic of “effeminate Nature-worship, without self-respect, without true manhood.” In this dispiriting climate, such poets had become “puppets to their momentary sensations” (462). His demand was similar to Patmore’s: to ensure that poetry retained its masculine strength.

But Patmore’s method for converting the feminine sweetness of the expressive lyric into a distinctly masculine characteristic took a quite ingenious and complex form. It involved, to begin with, ensuring that a particular kind of lyric poetry by women could be praised—paradoxically—for its very inferiority. In his expansive review of Barrett Browning’s poetry, he found space to champion her early narrative of female self-sacrifice, “Bertha in the Lane” (from Poems [1844]). But those works of hers that failed to conform to the strictly gendered confines of his world, such as “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” (also 1844) portrayed the ultimate “mésalliance.” The chief problem he identified in that poem was Barrett Browning’s depiction of the poet-figure (Bertram) as one in the service of the daughter of an Earl (Lady Geraldine): “It seems to us, that Mrs Browning has not consulted the poet’s true dignity” (444). In making his indignation known, Patmore is certainly more alert than most of his peers to the hegemonic fantasy embedded in Barrett Browning’s ambitious explorations of female authority. Surveying her canon, he damns Aurora Leigh with faint praise, pointing to the “vital continuity” of the imagery, and yet concluding that the style is prosaic and full of “artistic defects” (462). Altogether more to his taste are Adelaide Anne Procter’s Legends and Lyrics (which he reviewed in 1858), a collection that includes several poems that had attracted considerable attention in the pages of Household Words. In her “verses”—
lesser things than poetry, so he argues—Procter can be admired for representing the “feminine character” with a “power and simplicity of language rarely to be found, except in the pages of the standard artistic writers” (406)—by which, of course, he means men. For art, he believes, is an exclusively male province, and it is there that the “feminine character” has its most distinguished place—in the voice of the man who is also a poetic “linnet.”

The tension between female femininity (appropriate for “verses”) and the stronger male femininity (emanating from the “standard artistic writers”) comes most intriguingly into focus in Patmore’s 1855 review of Tennyson’s Maud and Other Poems. He prefaces his commentary on Tennyson’s achievements to date with a cautious defense of the implicit homoeroticism of In Memoriam, a poem whose sexual interests had outraged a reviewer in the columns of the London Times, and which subsequently elicited a spirited defense of male homosocial bonds—bonds biblically declaring a “depth and vehemence of affection ‘passing the love of woman’”—from none other than Kingsley (252). Reading the poem as more an intellectual than a sexual work, Patmore rebukes the suggestion that Tennyson has indulged in immoral sentiments: “On the majority of those readers who do not read ‘In Memoriam’ as an ordinary ‘love poem’ (and, incredible as this may seem, it was in more than one place reviewed as such on its first appearance), this work must necessarily appear as the superlative of love and grief in the wrong place.” Yet he is none the less disconcerted that in portraying such a “passionate and absorbing personal affection” Tennyson regards “first love, first friendship” as “equal powers” between men. Patmore finds that he can excise these seemingly aberrant affectional attachments by assuming that Tennyson “has as yet failed to find an equal partner for his heart among women” (503). Here, in other words, Patmore is trying to normalize as much as possible the decisive lack of contrast between masculinity and femininity that afflicted some of the earliest criticism of Tennyson’s elegy to Arthur Hallam. Yet, in doing so he is also desiring an equality between the sexes that the Angel denies.

Patmore strengthens this criticism of In Memoriam by arguing that the monodramatic Maud illustrates Tennyson’s welcome change of heart, which has now found a true source of love in a proper female object. But—in an unexpected move—Patmore goes on to argue that, in singing the praises of the elusive Maud, the suicidal protagonist of this poem has discovered, not so much the sweetness of her sex, but the beauty of the feminine within himself. Having quoted from section I: 18 of the poem, Patmore rapturously declares:

A sustained passage of this sort is perhaps one of the rarest if not highest triumphs of poetry, “that sweeter and weaker sex of truth.” It is only after a very complete mastery has been obtained in the lower excellences of his art, that the poet can trust himself thus completely to the direction of his feelings and his instinct of rhythm. It is no argument against the high value of such results that “feminine grace and tenderness” is the fullest commendation which a single phrase can give them. Such qualities are utterly opposed to and incompatible with the “effeminate,” and they as nobly and rarely distinguish the strongest manhood as do the eminently “manly art”
of poetry,—an art in which no woman can be shown to have attained more than a second-rate rank. (512)

The passage is structured by the contrast of effeminacy and manliness, yet these seemingly opposing terms are brought into such close proximity that they almost collapse into each other. For while fervently praising the feminine "grace" of Tennyson's lyricism, Patmore struggles to defend the Laureate against the taint of being "effeminate." The boundary between the differentially gendered qualities that Patmore wishes to praise is, at best, a precarious one. In the contorted reasoning of Patmore's review, *Maud* stands out as a truly remarkable achievement because Tennyson, in his manliness, has attained the "feminine" that crowns the glory of all great poetry. A privileged form of femininity consequently becomes the distinctive feature of the male poet—since he alone has the capability to be more womanly than a woman herself. This distinction was one which Patmore claimed right to the end of his life. In his essay on Keats, for example, he once again seeks to defend the feminine basis of male poetic identity:

The femininity of poets such as these [Keats and Shelley] is a glorious and immortal gift, such as no mortal lady has ever attained or ever will attain. It has been proved to us how well a mortal lady may be able to read the classics; but, humbled as some of us may feel by her having headed the Tripos, it is still some compensation for those of our sex to remember that we alone can write "classics," even of the feminine order. (*Principle in Art* 64)

This statement underlines Patmore's belief that the creative femininity of great male poets constitutes a sovereign subjectivity to which no "mortal lady" may ever accede. More embattled than ever in the late 1880s, Patmore was driven to mark out poetry as a distinguished area of male genius that had the power to outfeminize those fallen angels who were acquiring masculine skills in the recently opened Cambridge colleges for women.

The logic of these excerpts is continuous with the sexual hierarchy governing the *Angel*: in all of Patmore's writings, the woman's divinity emanates from the male subject. But this leaves a somewhat vexatious problem for Patmore. For it is not so much that the "Empire of the Selfsame" has in this instance bolstered a punishing masculinity by denying the autonomy of its female object. Instead, the point would seem to be that the masculine subject can only retain his poetic identity by grounding it upon a principle of feminine grace. Yet the outcome of this analysis points to two conflicting conclusions. On the one hand, we might regard this structure as the appalling absorption of femininity into a masculinist fantasy of mastery. But, on the other, since Patmore's ideal of the feminine remains one of the highest virtues of the "standard artistic writers," and since it also operates as the principle that prevents angels from turning into whores, we might view his life's work as going against its better nature by acknowledging that the "feminine" stands supreme—in its sensitivity, sweetness, and divinity—above the man who must at times admit that he is "suffering less and sinning more." All of this would imply that if a narcissistic circuit of the "Selfsame" is present in his writing, it is
of a perversely "feminine" kind, one that tries to spiritualize the hydraulic erotic impulses naturally stirring in those men whom Greg has no hesitation in calling the "coarser sex."

IV

If the Angel can be viewed as a unique mid-Victorian attempt by a male poet to be more feminine than any woman, it may well be thought that the "feminine grace" that Patmore arrogated to himself proved to be highly empowering. But the poetry that he produced after the Angel complicates rather than resolves the questions of sexual difference that energized such laborious revisions of his work. The odes that first appeared in the privately circulated edition of 1868, and which would be augmented to comprise The Unknown Eros the following year, place a special emphasis, as John Maynard remarks, on how one might "represent sexual union with God" (265). Apart from blazoning Patmore's ultra-Tory distaste for democracy—"1867," which rails against the Second Reform Bill and deplores the "orgies of the multitude" (1890 II: 31)—the odes largely concentrate on mystical experiences where relations between masculinity and femininity become more blurred than ever. And this coalescence of the sexes occurs largely because of the structural shifts achieved by the startling formal irregularity that characterizes the Pindaric ode. The pulsating style of Patmore's odes ensures that the connections forged between each idea are far from self-evident. "Sponsa Dei," for example, is a signally difficult poem in this respect. It is, to all intents and purposes, an eminently Roman Catholic ode in its sensuous celebration of erotic intercourse between the human and the divine (1890 II: 66-67). This strange poem pictures a mysterious "Maiden fair" whose enchanting "laughing" manner promises the male speaker the "marriage which exceeds / The inventive guess of Love to satisfy." She is, indeed, just the kind of "feminine grace" that "opens the heaven of heavens to more than her." Yet no sooner has her status as an angelic spirit been confirmed than the speaker raises questions about her true identity:

Who is this only happy She,
Whom, by a frantic flight of courtesy,
Born of despair
Of better lodging for his Spirit fair,
He adores as Margaret, Maude, or Cecily?

Maynard—who holds this and many of Patmore's other odes in very high regard—paraphrases these syntactically ornate lines by suggesting that the "Maiden fair" alerts the speaker to the fact that the man's desires belong to "a larger affair than that of some mere individual in love" (253). To "adore" such relative creatures as Margaret, Maude, or Cecily is, we are encouraged to believe, far lesser thing than expressing one's altogether more substantial love for the Almighty. Only out of "despair" do men find this barely adequate "lodging" for their soul. Now it goes without saying that, even if we choose to read this poem
in the spirit of the Church Fathers, we are nonetheless left with the view that
domestic angels are little more than temporary residences for the yearning eros of
man. But what is curious to observe is how, in the course of this ode, Augustinian
teaching figures the speaker as a Bride, like Christ ascending the Cross, who wit-
tingly produces a "sick fire[,] / A female vanity" that serves as "A reflex heat /
Flash'd on thy [i.e., the man's] cheek from His immense desire." In other words,
the speaker locates this "Maiden fair" in the soul of man, whose feminine "vanity"
is both given and received by God as He sensually interacts with the wonders of
His creation. In every respect, the spiritual, the sexual, and the male are in this
context feminized. This bride-like subservience to the Almighty suggests that
Patmore's idealized male poetic subject identifies so strongly and conflictually
with the feminine that he seeks to appropriate it only for spiritually ennobling ends. But
his feminine disposition in the eyes of God prompts a rather different thought:
that the very division of the sexes may well be troublingly enfolded by the femi-
nine itself. Here, after all, the feminine defines the man's subordination to the
Creator so that he can become a figure whose "vanity" attracts His sexually
charged "heat." So the poet, in finding a proper outlet for his erotic longings,
becomes the "weaker vessel," conceding to God the very potency that he himself
would physically impose on "Margaret, Maude, or Cecily."

It is worth bearing in mind at this point the moral conundrum that would be
posed by Patmore suggesting that he could be loved by God as a man. For it is
plainly the case that, in this Augustinian figuration, the sexual connection be-
tween God and man explored in "Sponsa Dei" avoids any homoerotic implications
by feminizing the male poetic subject. Such, we might think, are the lengths to
which Patmore would go to maintain his hierarchical understanding of sexual dif-
ference. Yet he could not consistently imagine placing his male subject in a com-
pletely subordinate role for the sake of preserving what might be called a "hetero"
ideal. At times, we see how this vision of sexual difference is haunted by a dream
of sameness that differs from the colonizing impulse implicit in the "Empire of the
Selfsame." The thought of an erotic spirituality based on relations that were
utopianly "homo"—that is, in a state of similitude—emerges in several of his later writings. In the essay, "The Bow Set in the Cloud" (1893), Patmore remarks
that "some knowledge of Christian mysteries has been enjoyed in individuals at all
times and place," and that one pre-Christian example of the "mystery of triple
Personality in one Being" appears in the works of Plato. Seeing "triplicity" in
every aspect of creation, Patmore remarks: "Nothing whatever exists in a single
entity but in virtue of its being thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and in humanity
and natural life this takes the form of sex, the masculine, the feminine, and the
neuter, or third, forgotten sex spoken of by Plato." It is this third sex that acts as
an "electric" current that charges the "fulfilment and power" of the male and fe-
male in their "embrace" (Principle in Art 263). This "third" sexual disposition—
one which mediates the perfect integration of the two sexes—was enshrined for
Patmore in the Christian conception of Man outlined in Genesis. And he reveal-
ingly calls this prelapsarian Man the "homo"—a concept that emphasizes same-
ness. "Man," he writes, "originally contained the woman, and was in his individual
self the synthesis; and the separation into distinct bodies has been regarded by some theologians as a consequence of the fall" (263–64). The “homo,” then, is at one level the ontological form that precedes difference, and whose splendor can be imagined in both the Augustinian vision of Christ as “the Bride as well as the Bridgroom” and the classical figure of Teiresias. But even if this account of the “homo” may once again be viewed as a sign of Patmore’s desperate masculinism attempting to fashion woman into nothing other than a disposable spare rib (the “homo,” if primordial, is nonetheless male), the “feminine” is necessarily an indivisible component of this “triplicate” Man. She is, once again, both Man’s pride and downfall. Here he remarks that in the “homo” “the feminine nature, which is passive, humble, receptive, and responsive” does not “increase . . . at the expense of the masculine character,” for “this latter is exalted into fuller strength, invincible courage, and greater wisdom to command all that is below him, especially his own feminine nature—whose rebellions, in his natural condition, are the cause of all his disasters” (264). The circular logic of this statement should be fairly clear: where the feminine is praised it is also blamed, since it simultaneously supports and undermines masculine authority. It is femininity—rather than the barely elaborated masculinity—that continues to trouble this account of the “homo,” because here he places more pressure than ever on the idea that woman might in some way be sexually the same as man, for she has always inhabited his sexual identity.

This conversion of sexual difference into a model of sameness is very much of its time. There is historically some congruence between Patmore’s own idealization of the “homo” and the gradual categorization of distinct sexualities on the basis of their “homo-” or “hetero-” object-choice in the 1890s. It is, furthermore, curious to think that a writer renowned for his emphasis on “separate spheres” for men and women should increasingly seek to integrate masculinity and femininity in a manner that bears more than a passing resemblance to the works of writers who were self-consciously fashioning a modern homosexual identity. His ode “The Three Witnesses” brings his speaker face-to-face in a dream with an angel who is clearly the threefold figure of the “homo”—“God, Youth, and Goddess, one twain, trine, / In altering wedlock flamed benign” (1890 II: 198). This “glorious” angel is sexually indeterminate—“With Man and Woman’s beauties join’d.” Such a vision not only blends the sexes, it also merges heaven and earth. This effusive ode strikes me as having a rather similar impetus to the works of those writers—such as Walter Pater, Simeon Solomon, and Oscar Wilde—who were developing counter-cultural images of subversively gendered males in order to produce a canon of work that celebrated same-sex desire. In making this point, I would not want to suggest that Patmore’s project is an as yet unrecognized part of a by now well-researched pattern of late Victorian homoerotic representation. But I would argue that his contemplation of the “homo” springs from a similar dissatisfaction with what could reasonably be called the heterosexual emphasis he himself placed on the primary distinction between the sexes. For the “homo” assuredly gives the lie to the notion that woman was intrinsically unequal to man because, as the triune angel demonstrates, she was always already a part of him. Yet, even more than
that, Patmore's late fascination with an androgynous spirit hints that a desire that is structured on a hierarchical conception of heterosexuality may well exceed, and deviate from, the forms in which it seeks to express itself.

In Patmore's eccentric body of work, then, we witness some unexpected consequences of what I have called the womanly mission of mid-Victorian poetry. The patriarch who adored the domestic "angel" as a "weaker vessel" finally had to come to terms with the idea that the gendered attributes he despised in women to some degree made him into the man he was. This revelation hardly transforms Patmore into a progressive or radical figure. But it should at least clarify how the dynamics operating within the embattled "Empire of the Selfsame" may well be motivated by identifications that are so strongly marked in relation to the feminine that the poet will make himself womanly in order to retain some vestige of power. At the same time, it is worth considering that nineteenth-century misogyny sometimes has at its heart a male desire not to have, but to be a woman. For, as "Sponsa Dei" indicates, the patriarch occasionally expresses a desire for his soul to be like an angel, one that would at last be kissed by a god. In Patmore's startling conclusion, the Almighty could not help but be attracted to the alluring "heart" of a female "vanity" that dwelt deep within every Victorian patriarch's soul.

NOTES

Three people, in particular, have offered special help with this essay. John Maynard drew my attention to the significance of "Sponsa Dei," Druuske Hawkridge kindly gave me a copy of the two-volume set of the 1890 Bell edition of Patmore's poems, and James Eli Adams offered painstaking editorial advice. My thanks to them.

1. Since my essay draws on several of the numerous editions of Patmore's much-revised poem, for the sake of clarity I have prefaced all page references to the various poems comprising The Angel in the House, as well as the later odes, with the relevant date of publication.

2. Maynard remarks that the Angel is "the chauvinist work chosen by feminist critics of all persuasions for a ritual jet-plane humiliation" (162).

3. For a complete listing of the confusingly large number of editions of Patmore's poetry, see Maynard: 359–64. One indication of the popularity of the Angel is given in De Vere's review: "Its [the poem's] merit is more than sufficient to account for its success, both among ourselves and in America, where, if we are rightly informed, twenty thousand copies of it are already in circulation" (123).

4. The lines that Ruskin slightly misquoted from the Angel were originally part of a "prelude" (entitled "The Prodigal") to canto VII, "Aetna and the Moon": 1857: 81–82. The passage in question—which scorns the "wasteful woman . . . who may/ On her sweet self set her own price"—is omitted from the "fourth collective edition."

5. Patmore's distaste for Dobell, Smith, and others writing in a similar vein is made equally clear in "Poetry—the Spasmodists."

6. In her imposing edition of Aurora Leigh, Margaret Reynolds suggests that "it would appear that EBB had works of a female author in mind, and the most likely candidate is Sarah Stickney Ellis (1812–72)" (594). Paul Turner rallies a good deal of textual evidence from the Angel to substantiate the idea that it is Patmore's poem that is the cause of Aurora Leigh's indignation. Barrett Browning's poem could, indeed, have both works in mind. Yet it is important to note that the resistance to patriarchal authority articulated by Aurora
Leigh at this point has, in many respects, cultural sources similar to those defining the doctrine of "woman's mission" enshrined in the "score of books on womanhood."

7. For a complementary account of domestic ideology, see Hall.

8. The similarities between Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens" and Patmore's Angel should not obscure the distinctions between their conception of "separate spheres." In revising Kate Millett's influential claim that Ruskin's lecture "recommend[es] itself as one of the most complete insights obtainable into that compulsive masculine fantasy one might call the official Victorian attitude" (89), Dinah Birch reminds us that Ruskin was "keenly interested in the foundation of the first women's colleges in Oxford," and that he sponsored the careers of women artists, including Kate Greenaway (309-10).

9. In "Entombing the Angel," Hughes helpfully draws attention to the poem entitled "Rachel," one of the letters written by Horaria in the 1860 edition of the epistolary collection, Faithful for Ever (1860:195-99). Since this letter to her father, Dean Churchill of Salisbury, caused such a furor among Patmore's readers, it was removed from all subsequent editions. For here Horaria comes to life, in Hughes's words, as "an ordinary, nonsymbolic woman rather than a symbolic angel who inspires men" (157). Commenting on her husband's parliamentary career, Horaria somewhat patronizingly remarks that "if Felix chose to stir, / I am sure he might Minister," and she adds how she had advised him that after members of Parliament have "flung their strength from last and worst," then it is time for a "gentleman" to "stay at home / And let his rulers sometimes come / And blush at his high privacy"—suggesting, indeed, that the domestic realm, from this womanly point of view, is superior to the public world of politics. Horaria remarks that Felix was so teased by her comments that he scolded her for being a "Fierce white cat!" Garnett, somewhat taken aback, found such cattiness "quite failing to confirm the idea of the lady we have been led to form from the enthusiastic idea of love" (Champneys II: 344). This letter, as Hughes observes, was one of several poems that Patmore dutifully excised so that Horaria would eventually be more seen than heard.

10. Tennyson's poetry, of course, featured at the center of a significant debate about male writing and "sensation": see the early Victorian reviews collected in "Tennyson Controversy to 1842," in Armstrong: 71-150.

11. Maynard remarks: "Though some individual odes are abysmal, The Unknown Eros as a whole is a stunning, resplendent work, certainly the most important group of odes by an English writer after Keats" (161). Similar adulatory attention to the odes has recently been given by Wheeler (163-74). I feel that the high value that Maynard places on these poems is misjudged. The Angel and the odes strike me as technically and intellectually inept, as well as politically repugnant. Their value surely lies in how they manage to disclose some of the contradictions central to the gendering of mid-Victorian poetry, especially as they provide insights into the tortuous psychology of Victorian patriarchal rule.

12. The most developed study of male homoerotic representation in the period immediately antecedent to the epoch-making trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 is Dellamora.

13. Although a vast amount of research has been conducted on the categorization of homosexuality in the late-Victorian period, the historical emergence of the presumed non-nativity enshrined in heterosexualty has until recently been neglected. On this point, see Katz's "exploratory first pass at an historically-specific heterosexual history—a call for a complete rethinking and total historicization of heterosexuality, and for new research on that radical reviewing" (9).

WORKS CITED


Joseph Bristow

“...‘A Woman’s Thoughts about Women.’ Saturday Review 5 (1858): 377.


Patmore & the Womanly Mission of the Poet


