Patmore was a conscious craftsman and he believed that the function of art is to elevate man. He did not approve of an overt didacticism and stood for classical restraint, which is reflected in his insistence on the quality of “peace” in art. His essay on Thompson\(^1\) indicates his distrust of romantic excess and his concern for “decorum” in the use of poetic language. However, as we shall see, this sense of restraint does not come in the way of his modulating the norms to achieve his effects. The maturer poetry in his odes confirms this. In form and structure, each of these “irregular” odes, while conforming to the traditional pattern, follows its own laws of growth as an organic whole. The flexibility achieved within the traditional forms reflects Patmore’s fidelity to the creative impulse. The same flexibility is manifest in his exploitation of language: he makes an organic use of words in that he does not restrict himself to the conventions of vocabulary, syntax and grammar but moulds his medium to convey his meaning accurately. In handling his materials, he maintains a delicate balance between freedom and conformity.

Patmore’s poetic practice was guided by a principle he consistently upheld, though he did not formulate it into a system. He had a clear idea of the poet’s task and province: the poet should observe things around him and gain in perception from his experience of love. This idea always motivated
and guided him in composing verse; we have a confirmation of it in these lines of the Prelude entitled ‘The Revelation’:

   An idle poet, here and there,
   Looks round him; but for the rest,
   The world, unfathomably fair,
   Is duller than a witling’s jest.
   Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
   They lift their heavy lids, and look;
   And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
   They read with joy, then shut the book.


To Patmore what is vital to poetic experience is a sensitive response to beauty and the love it evokes. However, he is concerned here with the sources of poetic inspiration rather than the actual process of poetic composition. An elaboration of his principle, bearing particularly on what is involved in poetic creation, is available in the analogy he presents in the Prelude entitled ‘The Joyful Wisdom’:

   They live by law, not like the fool,
   But like the bard, who freely sings
   In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,
   And finds in them, not bonds, but wings.

(Ibid., p. 119.)
The poetic principle implicit here is that artistic ‘freedom’ and ‘control’ are not incompatible. This is germane to Patmore’s professed view that “the language should always seem to feel, thought not to suffer from the bonds of verse.” The view derives from an organic conception of language that Patmore’s practice in the odes exemplifies.

Patmore observes that a line in English verse can be a dimeter, a trimeter or a tetrameter, taking the ‘dipode’ as a unit. Correspondingly, the line will have 8 & 12 or 16 syllables—all multiples of 4. However, in actual practice, if a line has 6 syllables, it will be a dimeter, the time equal to two syllables being taken up by the pause. Likewise, a line consisting of 10 syllables will be a trimeter, the time corresponding to two syllables being absorbed by the pause. Similarly, a line of 14 syllables will be a tetrameter, the pause being equivalent to two syllables.

Patmore’s explication of the metrical principle is noteworthy for the extraordinary weightage given to the pause: measured in terms of the time absorbed by silence in the midst of sounds. In our own day, David Abercrombie has drawn attention to the same phenomenon. He talks of the pause in terms of “silent stress” which, in his opinion, is “an integral part of the structure of English verse.” He observes:

I must make an important point; that a stress pulse can occur without sound accompanying it.... One must not suppose that because a silent stress is silent, it therefore does not exist for the hearer. There is a stress, even if not a
stressed syllable; and stress is felt by the speaker (because he would do the same if he were speaking) ‘empathized’ by the hearer.³

This is a modern phonetician’s confirmation of what Patmore had realized as a metrician. In manipulating the rhythm of his lines in the odes, Patmore exploited the pause with a telling effect. C.C. Abbott observes that “the basis of ‘sprung rhythm’ and Patmore’s theory of pause and stress are one in essence.”⁴ A.C. Partridge remarks about Hopkins that he “writes what Patmore characterized as dipodic verse, resembling the strongly stressed metre of Piers Plowman in which the unit of rhythm covers two adjacent feet.”⁵ D.S. Mac Coll, in his comparative estimate of Patmore and Hopkins as prosodists, acknowledges Patmore’s sound mastery of the metrical principle and is critical of Hopkins, metrical theory and practice.⁶ Whether it was Patmore or Hopkins who was more original in his theory may be difficult to decide, the fact remains that both deviated from the contemporary practice of metre and looked back to the Anglo-Saxon poets for the confirmation of their metrical principles.

Patmore confined his metrical choice as a poet to the measures he used in The Angel, The Victories of Love and The Unknown Eros. He did not experiment with difficult forms; the sonnet and blank verse, for example, he avoided. The restriction he imposed on him self could be explained in terms of the suitability of the metres chosen to the specific kind of experience his verse is concerned with: mystical love comprehending both human and divine love. The relative simplicity of the measure used in The Angel and its
sequel is compensated for by the variations introduced thereon. This enables the poet to make his rhythm correspond to the fluctuations of the human soul as it goes through the adventure of love. The octosyllabic verse adopted for *The Angel* is smooth, regular and swift, aptly described by Patmore himself as “a measure particularly recommended by the early critics... chosen by poets in all times for erotic poetry, on account of its joyous air.” The quality attributed to the octosyllabic verse can be perceived in the long poem wheresoever we pick out lines. The absence of metrical pauses, even at the terminations of lines, also contributes to the rapid movement of the lines. These lines would serve for illustration:

*Her soft voice, singularly heard*

*Besides me, in her chant, withstood*

*The roar of voices, like a bird*

*Sole warbling in a windy wood;*

*And, when we knelt, she seem’d to be*

*An angel teaching me to pray;*

(Ibid., p. 122.)

Patmore, however, did not restrict his usage to the vocabulary. In his search for an appropriate idiom for his theme, he did not ignore the poetic tradition (though he drew largely on simple and direct language). Reid, drawing attention to the occurrence in *The Angel* of such adjectives as “sweet,” “bright,” etc., and nouns such as “joy,” “grace,” “pride,” seems to overlook this fact when he says that the diction is not “sufficiently purified of
conventional epithets.” Actually, the words carrying poetical association are meant to give the language the elevation that is traditionally associated with erotic verse. Both in *The Angel* and its sequel, even when the words chosen are obviously poetic, they add to the meaning and do not give rise to any vagueness or diffuseness. Thus several words in the following lines, such as "sweet," "gay," "halo," and "bright," which we could label ‘poetic,’ are by no means vague but quite appropriate in their contexts:

*How sweet a tongue the music had!*

‘*Beautiful Girl,’ it seem’d to say,*

‘*Though all the word were vile and sad,*

‘*Dance on ; let innocence be gay’.*

*Ah, none but I discern’d her looks,*

*When in the throng she pass’d me by,*

*For love is like a ghost, and brooks*

*Only the chosen seer’s eye;*

*And who but she could e’er divine*

*The halo and the happy trance,*

*When her bright arm reposed on mine,*

*In all the pauses of the dance!*

(Ibid., p. 157.)

Recapitulating the thrilling experience of a coveted dance with his beloved, the lover can’t help letting his fantasy colour the various details of the experience. With his worshipful attitude towards love, it is only natural that
he should give an account of the dance in ‘poetic’ terms connected with the sacred. That is what leads Patmore, understandably, to the choice of the words listed. No other word than “halo,” for example, would exactly suggest the divine significance the poet attached to the womanly form (as perceived by the devoted lover). The other words mentioned (“gay,” “bright.” etc,) cohere with “halo” and have a similar significance.

Patmore’s lexical choices in the two poems confirm his regard for “decorum” and distrust of novelty for its own sake. He draws upon words of every day use and on a relatively small proportion of the poet’s conventional vocabulary. This enables him to render faithfully the delights of wedded love against the background of concrete facts and situations. Words with poetical association, as chosen by him, are invariably appropriate to the celebration, are invariably of love in spiritual terms and those from ordinary language lend an air of familiarity to the experience of love described. The stanza from *The Angel*, cited below, illustrates the point:

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How changed! In shape no slender Grace,
But Venus; milder than the dove;
Her mother’s air; her Norman face;
Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love.
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(Ibid., p. 68.)

Patmore’s command of concrete detail, based on direct and close observation, may also be seen in the following lines. (Plain words are employed in achieving an accurate description; there is no trace of decorativeness in the language):
Watch how a bird, that captived sings,
The cage set open, first looks out,
Yet fears the freedom of his wings
And now withdraws, and flits about,
And now looks forth again; until,
Grown bold, he hops on stool and chair,
And now attaids the window-sill,
And now confides himself to air.

(Ibid., p. 146.)

The diction is simple and clear, appropriate to what is described. No word is superfluous or drawn from the poet’s conventional vocabulary. Most of the nouns (“cage,” “wings” “stool,” “chair,” “window-sill”) are concrete; the verbs “withdraws,” “flits” and “hops” are most suitable to describe the movements of the bird (suddenly released from captivity).

Patmore, as stated earlier, usually sticks to the norms of language and does not conspicuously violate them. This is specially true of his practice in the two poems on wedded love, The Angel and its sequence. However, we find many instances in these poems, more particularly in the Preludes of The Angel, of his using simple words in such a way as to yield complex meanings. The complexity arises from the unusual contexts in which ordinary words are placed. This effect is further intensified through the poet’s use of paradox and anti-thesis. A deft handling of this device enables the poet to suggest the depth and subtlety of his meaning:
Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
On her sweet self set her own price,
Knowing man cannot choose but pay,
How has she cheapen’d paradise;
How given for naught her priceless gift,
How spoil’d the bread and spill’d the wine,
Which spent with due, respective thrift,

*Had made brutes men, and men divine.*

(Ibid., p. 79.)

The syntax of the two long poems, *The Angel and The Victories*, (constituting the bulk of what Patmore wrote before his conversion to Catholicism) is generally unobtrusive, and, therefore, of a piece with the diction. As a rule, Patmore does not violate the norms of syntax. He stays within the accepted forms, achieving his effects through subtle modulation of the norms where necessary. The periods tend to occur at the ends of lines, often at the ends of the quatrains as far as *The Angel* is concerned. The phrasal and clausal divisions are also seen to mark the terminations of lines. The following stanzas are cited as examples.

*How easy to keep from sin!*

*How hard that freedom to recall!*

*For dreadful truth it is that men*

*Forget the heavens from which they fall.*

*Lest sacred love your soul ensnare,*
With pious fancy still infer

‘How loving and how lovely fair

‘Must He be who has fashion’d her!’

(Ibid., p. 126.)

On the whole, Patmore’s handling of syntax in *The Angel* and *The Victories* does not involve any remarkable deviations from the established poetic norms. However, as observed earlier, he exploits possibilities and choices within the accepted forms and modulates the norms to the extent desirable. Such modulations are met with occasionally, as here in the Prelude entitled ‘A Riddle Solved’:

*Kind souls, you wonder why, love you,*

*when you, you wonder why, love none.*

*We love, Fool, for the good we do,*

*Not that which unto us is done!*

(Ibid., p. 97.)

It is the interposition of an elliptical sentence, the parenthetical “you wonder why” in each of the first two lines of the stanza, giving the lines a conversational tone, that is rather striking here. The parenthetical item “Fool” in the third line ties up with the elliptical construction mentioned above. In the last line, we would normally expect the preposition ‘for’ after “Not”; this is evidently deleted. The tone of the verse is characteristically conversational and argumentative; the manner is oblique. The “riddle” presented (and “solved”) is emphasized through the syntactic structure.
Patmore’s handling of language in the two poems shows that he is capable of achieving flexibility within the forms chosen by him. The three aspects of the linguistic structure of the poems—metre, diction and syntax—on the whole cohere in terms of the general simplicity they share. No one can deny the fact that Patmore “was the fore-runner of modern free verse.”9 His choice of the form was no doubt influenced by the earlier models provided by the odes of Wordsworth, Milton, Crashaw, etc. Thompson’s estimate of the metre of Patmore’s odes as “majestic, flexible and beautiful in a high degree, answering the feeling like the pulses of the blood”10 is quite appropriate and sound. Edward Dowden’s observation too is based on and accurate perception of the metrical quality of the odes:

Every syllable has been duly poised, and there is a sweet retarding movement in the lines which invites the reader to set down in his consciousness the weight of syllables to the least and lightest.”11

As an illustrative example, let us examine ‘The Child’s Purchase’ to show the suitability of the catalectic metre to its theme. Here the poet dwells on the unutterability that seizes him as he contemplates on the blessed Virgin. This inevitable “invasion of silence” is suggested effectively by the silences in the lines:

Ah, Lady elect,
Whom the Time’s scorn has saved from its respect,
Would I had art
For uttering this which sings within my heart!
But, lo,

Thee to admire is all the art I know.

My mother and God’s; Fountain of miracle!

Give me thereby some praise of thee to tell

In such a Song

As may my Guide severe and glad not wrong

Who never spake till thou’dst on him conferr’d

The right, convincing word!

(Ibid., pp. 438-39.)

The lines vary in length (measured in terms of syllables), the number of syllables ranging from 2 to 11 a line. The line ‘But, lo,’ consisting only of two syllables, it filled with the maximum silence possible, the pause at the end being very long drawn. The observing of the long silence is made inevitable further by the long lines immediately preceding and following:

(i) For uttering this which sings within my heart;

(ii) Thee to admire is all the art I know.

The extreme brevity of the line under discussion signals a breakdown of linguistic communication, suggestive of something too deeply felt, defying expression. The silence intervening between the poet’s ineffective attempts at affirmative statements gains in significance from the contexts provided by these statements (as the one contained in “But lo,” expressing wonder). The Latin prayer *Ora pro me!* repeated at intervals in the poem lends it a ritualistic character. The priest officiating at a ritual performs gestures and
utters words which have an esoteric meaning. That is what Patmore seems to be doing here. His ‘silences’ correspond to gestures and his affirmations (as the language used throughout the poem shows) consists of words which suggest far more than they state. To have an idea of the dignified language of the religious odes (distinguishable as such from the language of *The Angel* and its sequel), we may take a look at these lines of the same poem:

*Key-note and stop*

*Of the thunder-going chorus of sky-Powers;*

*Essential drop*

*Distill’d from worlds of sweetest-savour’d flowers*

*To anoint with nuptial praise*

*The Head which for thy Beauty doff’d its rays,*

*And thee, in His exceeding glad descending, meant,*

*And Man’s new days*

*Made of His deed the adorning accident!*

*Vast Nothingness of Self, fair female Twin*

*Of Fulness, sucking all God’s glory in!*

*(Ah, Mistress mine,*

*To nothing I have added only sin,*

*And yet would shine!)*

*Ora pro me!*  
(Ibid., pp. 439-40.)
The choice of the select vocabulary items “Key-note,” “stop,” “chorus,” “essential,” “anoint,” “nuptial,” “adorning,” “glory” is appropriate to the sacredness of the theme, majority of the items acquiring significance from their poetic and religious association. The two words “Key-note” and “stop” introduce a musical analogy conveying a complex of meaning. A sequence of closely-knit images is presented in the shape of Noun Phrases, followed by modifiers (Prep. Phrases containing Noun Phrases, which in their turn may involve a repetition of the ‘Prep.+NP’ pattern e.g. “Key-note and stop/Of the thunder-going chorus of sky-Powers.”)

Several of Thompson’s admirers in his day were specially impressed by the richness of his vocabulary, his ability to coin and use words in violation of grammatical conventions. His vocabulary provoked hostile criticism too. He, therefore, took pains to avoid in his New Poems what had been seen as his linguistic faults in the earlier volume. Despite this, the unfavourable criticism continued. Divergent views regarding the sources of his extensive vocabulary have been advanced. Arthur Symons, offering his views in this regard, denied Thompson a personal style. Reid upholds the same view.

The composition of Thompson’s vocabulary reveals a poetic synthesis at work, aiming at a language that would throw “a fresh light on the ancient and universal aspects of the human spirit.” Rather eclectic in his approach, he did not merely select words from the stock offered by his contemporaries but drew freely on a much larger source: the language used by his immediate predecessors. Shelley and Keats, the Metaphysicals, notably Crashaw, and
the Elizabethans such as Spenser. As we shall attempt to demonstrate through
illustrations, he succeeds in bending language to his needs in many poems, in
several of them using words, including deviant forms, appropriate to his
vision. Largely, his language tends to be remote from ordinary experience.
Edmund Wilson’s view regarding a poet’s attempt “to find, to invent, the
special language which will alone be capable of expressing his personality
and feelings” is applicable to Thompson’s practice. His vast reading
provided a rich resource for the “special language” he forged to express his
personal vision.

Symons and Reid, who have denied a personal style to Thompson, have
attributed this to his ‘imitativeness,’ to the lack of a poetic principle as they
would put it. Imitativeness one certainly comes across in the poet, but it is not
as obtrusive or persistent as it is made out to be and, in any case, it does not
obscure his own style. This applies as much to his early poems as to the
Pantasaph poems he wrote later under Patmore’s inspiration. The argument
that he does not have a style of his own or that he did not cultivate one
through a disciplined effort, cannot be sustained for two reasons. Firstly, the
cultivation of a personal style does not necessarily (and in all cases) depend
upon the conscious application of a theory or principle. Every poet or artist
does not have a theory to guide and justify his practice. Secondly, it is not
quite true that Thompson lacked a poetic principle. He had one though he did
not profess it with the rigour and consistency with which Patmore did his.
The state of his manuscripts, with words and lines erased at places, belies the
suggestion that he wrote carelessly. Influenced, no doubt, by Patmore’s maturer opinions, he does not simply echo the elder poet. He was more articulate than Patmore about avoiding a conscious didacticism in art. He believed that the poet must speak indirectly and communicate truths “synthetically” and did not see any fundamental conflict between Beauty and religious piety. Of the beauty pursued by poets he says, “Eve her not askance if she seldom sing directly of religion.”\(^\text{17}\) He maintained that a poet need not confine himself to specific themes and held further that “poetry and prose can, and sometimes do, play into each other.”\(^\text{18}\) On the whole, his poetic principle, as we glean it from his prose essays and poetry, is religious in motivation. A poet’s duty, he believes, is “to see and restore the divine idea of things to a fallen world.”\(^\text{19}\) This is consistent with his view of poetic creation as a divine \textit{fiat} as also with his idea of suffering as an important component of the poetic process. Thompson did not overlook the significance of the discipline that art demands. This is in spite of the inspirational view he seems to take regarding poetic creation in \textit{sister Songs II}:

\begin{quote}
The poet is not lord
Of the next syllable may come
With the returning pendulum;
And what he plans today in song,
\textit{Tomorrow sings it in another tongue}
\end{quote}

A more explicit and coherent account of the poetic process is given by him elsewhere:

The basis of the poetic faculty is neither intuition alone, nor emotion alone.... The basis of the poetic gift is intellectual insight, or intuition, combined with emotional sensibility. The union is so subtle that the poet may be said in a manner to see through his sensitive nature.\(^{20}\)

Thompson’s pronouncements regarding metre are seen by Reid as an echo of what Patmore says in his ‘Essay on English Metrical Law.’ As we have seen, Patmore practised the catalectic metre, which he recommends in the essay, in his odes. Thompson declares emphatically that he had tried the form of the “irregular” ode in his ‘Ode to the Setting Sun’ before he saw any of Patmore’s work. The metrical accomplishment in this ode confirms Thompson’s skill and originality. He was specially drawn to the catalectic metre for the great scope it afforded for variations. Regarding the principle of metrical variation, he observes:

The true law is that you take a metre (the more received and definite the better) and then vary it by the omission of syllables, leaving the lines so treated to be read into given length by pause and by dwelling on the syllables preceding or following the hiatus. The omission of syllables is the exception not the system of the metre, and the art of the poet is shown in skillfully varying the position and manner of the omissions. In this way the most delightful effects of loving, lingering and delicate modulation on the one
hand, or airy dance-like measure and emphasis on the other, may be compassed.  

The statement is quite convincing and reveals the poet’s grasp of the principle. He followed it in his own poetic practice (as will be demonstrated). It is not without significance that Patmore, on seeing Thompson’s verse, made this frank statement:

I feel a personal and a sort of proprietary interest in the metrical qualities of much of Mr. Thompson’s verse.  

Personal contact with the elder poet and familiarity with his work must certainly have helped to deepen Thompson’s metrical insights further. That he did not confine his practice to the ode–form alone (on which Patmore’s metrical accomplishment largely rests) but tried his hand at other forms too, such as the conventional sonnet, the pastoral, blank verse, etc, shows that his metrical knowledge was quite sound.

From the point of view of linguistic simplicity, Thompson’s two poems, ‘Daisy’ and ‘The Poppy,’ could be singled out from his early poetry as characteristic. The simplicity achieved here anticipated the form towards which he was to progress finally as a stylist. ‘Daisy’ is free from any linguistic “excess.” Its diction is unobtrusively simple, close to life in the country-side and largely objective in reference. The stanza used is an iambic quatrains with a, b, c, d as the rhyme-scheme. The first line and the third are each four feet long and the remaining two are three feet each. Within this measure, however, variations are noticeable: the lines are at places shorter or
longer than required by the basic pattern and some lines, such as “Red for the gatherer springs,” begin with a stressed syllable, providing instances of accentual inversion. The poem has a high frequency of monosyllabic words as this stanza will illustrate:

She knew not those sweet words she spake,
Nor knew her own sweet way;
But there’s never a bird, so sweet a song
Thronged in whose throat that day.

(Ibid., p. 5.)

The expression “big-lipped” in stanza 5 (reproduced below) presents a vivid image; the phrase stands out as an unusual collocation (‘big-lipped’ as the modifier of ‘surprise’), thus pinning down the image. The description of the girl reveals a clarity of definition achieved through the use of simple and precise words:

She listened with big-lipped surprise,
Breast-deep mid flower and spine:
Her skin was like a grape whose veins
Run snow instead of wine.

(Ibid., p. 5.)

The noun “sunshine,” used as an adjective in the following verse, is appropriate in its context; it conveys the poet’s meaning better than any other epithet would.

She looked a little wistfully,
Then went her sunshine way:
The diction of ‘The poppy’ too is generally simple. The following usages are, however, striking:

(i) *purpurate* (a Latinism used as an adjective),
(ii) *lethargied* with fierce bliss (coined out of the noun ‘lethargy’),
(iii) *leaved rhyme* (an adjective related to the plural of the noun ‘leaf’),
(iv) *swinked gipsy* (an adjective derived from the verb ‘swink’, an archaic word).

Against the background of the general linguistic simplicity of the poem, the above deviant forms serve to accentuate what is sought to be conveyed through them. In lines 2—4 of the first stanza, the alliteration and consonance (repetitive use of the consonant /f/) suggest the rapid movement of a flame itself:

*Summer set lip to earth’s bosom bare,*
*And left the flushed print in a poppy there:*
*Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,*
*And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame.*

(Ibid., p. 7.)

The oxymorona in the following verse are appropriate to the behaviour of a child and gain in significance through alliteration:

“This frankly fickle, and fickly true
*Do you know what the days will do to you?*

(Ibid., p. 8.)
The diction of the two parts of *Sister Songs* is largely elaborate and ornate. Here and there, however, we find lines which give evidence of the poet’s close observation and his controlled use of a language that is precise in reference:

*The long, broad grasses underneath*

*Are warded with rain like a toad’s knobbed back;*  
(Ibid., p. 21.)

The following passage, in particular, affords an extraordinary example of ‘Thompson’s descriptive power. The language used is free from any trace of diffuseness or vagueness. Thompson presents his plight accurately and vividly (the external facts of his situation as also the details regarding his psychological condition):

*Once—in that nightmare time which still doth haunt*

*My dreams, a grim, unbidden visitant—*

*Forlorn, and faint and stark,*

*I had endured through watches of the dark*

*The abashless inquisition of each star,*

*Yea, was the outcast mark*

*Of all those heavenly passers’ scrutiny;*

*Stood bound and helplessly*

*For time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;*

*Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour*

*In night’s slow-wheeled car;*
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dreaded wheels, and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.

(Ibid., p. 28.)

The deviant epithet “abashless” (derived from the verb ‘abash’) used in the line “The abashless inquisition of each star,” has its meaning defined and extended by the context in which it occurs. The usage is effective. So is the line “For time to shoot his barbed minutes at me,” a fine instance of concentrated language conveying subtleties of thought adequately, the words used being plain and familiar. Another passage from part II of the poem consists of a long-drawn descriptive simile in which detail is piled on detail and the device of personification used. Though the syntax is elaborate and intricate, the concreteness of the words contributes to the quality of vividness for which this passage is noted:

As an Arab journeyeth
Through a sand of Ayaman,
Lean Thirst, lolling its cracked tongue,
Lagging by his side along;
And a rusty-winged Death
Grating its low flight before,
Casting its ribbed shadows o’er.
The blank desert, blank and tan:
He lifts by hap toward where the morning’s roots are
His weary stare,–
Sees, although they splashless mutes are,
Set in a silver air
Fountains of gelid shoots are,
Making the day-light fairest fair;
Sees the palm and tamarind
Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind;—
A sight like innocence when one has sinned!
A green and maiden freshness smiling there,
While with unblinking glare
The tawny-hided desert crouches watching her.

(Ibid., p. 36.)

The description gains in effect through the simultaneous devices of contrast and personification: the figures of “Lean Thirst” and “rusty-winged Death” below shown as providing a contrast to the “green and maiden freshness smiling” above. The choice of words is suitable to the details observed, e.g., that of the word “gelid,” which does not merely mean ‘icy.’ Thompson’s fidelity to facts enables him to use language to extra-ordinary effect here. We notice deviant use of language at many places in Sister Songs. Mention may specially be made of a compound coined: “greening-saphire.” The first element “greening” of this compound is a form derived from the adjective ‘green’ As an attribute word fused with the noun “saphire,” the second element of the compound it is far more suggestive than the word ‘green.’

The line in which it occurs and the lines immediately preceding are reproduced below to indicate the aptness of the coinage:
With some sweet tenderness they would
Turn to an amber-clear and glassy gold;
Or a fine sorrow, lovely to behold,
Would sweep them as the sun and wind’s joined flood
Sweeps a gre-ening-saphire sea;
(Ibid., p. 24.)

The syntax of Sister Songs—of the greater part of the verse—matches the diction in elaborateness. At many places a somewhat baroque effect is produced when added to these features the syntax is involved too:

If Even burst you globed yellow grape
(Which is the sun to mortals' sealed sight)
Against her stained mouth;
Or if white-handed light
Draw thee yet dripping from the quiet pools,
Still lucencies and cools,
Of sleep, which all might mirror constellate dreams;
Like to the sign which led the Israelite,
Thy soul, through day or dark,
A visible brightness on the chosen ark
Of thy sweet body and pure,
Shall it assure,
With auspice large and tutelary gleams,
Appointed solemn courts, and covenanted streams.’
(Ibid., p. 30)
The loose and involute syntax of these lines accounts for the effect of diffuseness here. The clauses and phrases present images loosely strung together, the result being that the general drift of meaning is not immediately clear. The diction is largely ‘poetic’ and vague, exemplified by such words as “lucencies,” “pools,” “tutelary,” “covenanted,” etc. By and large, the verse of Sister Songs gives evidence of elaborate syntax and a diction that is conspicuously ‘poetic.’

Thompson’s skill in handling the ode form was acclaimed by Patmore when he read ‘The Hound of Heaven.’ The poem, studied at various levels of structure syntax sound pattern and lexis—reveals an extra–ordinary coherence and consistency of pattern. The inter-penetration of the three aspects of linguistic structure achieved in the poem has a cumulative effect: it renders the enactment of a spiritual experience possible. The fluctuations marking the rhythm of the lines correspond to the restless movements of the struggling soul chased by the Divine. Variations on the iambic measure used, including those in the shape of accentual inversions at the beginning of lines, are noticed in many lines such as these:

(i)  Float thy vague veil about me, lest He see!
(ii)  Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
(iii)  Naked I wait thy love’s uplifted stroke!

The rhymes are not disposed according to any definite scheme. For an idea of the other features let us look at the introductory lines of the poem:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him and under running laughter
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’

(Ibid., p. 77.)

Thompson’s ecclesiastical poems, such as the ‘Orient Ode,’ in which the poet makes use of terms drawn from Catholic theology, pose difficulties to the reader not aware of the exact connotations of these terms. The religious symbolism underlying these poems, providing the key to their mystical meaning, cannot at once be grasped. And when to this is also added, as in some other poems, a diction marked by violence, the meaning is further obscured. On the other hand, those of Thompson’s mystical poems whose diction is relatively simple claim our attention better, the underlying
symbolism being invariably not difficult to grasp. From the point of view of style, it is the relatively simple poems of Thompson, involving mystical themes, that represent the poet at his best. “Impressed by certain styles” no doubt, the essential Thompson is to be seen in his shorter and simpler poems where his meaning is clear and the mysticism unmistakable. Even among his early poems, there are some (‘Daisy’ for example) which show the poet to advantage in terms of their simplicity and freedom from “excess” The poems written under Patmore’s influence, reveal care exercised in the selection of language. At any rate, in the poems which are more characteristic of Thompson as a mystical poet, he is content with saying things in plain language, at the same time making an effective use of his ability to bend language to his needs, as our analysis of some of these poems in this chapter has established. It is here that he makes his mark as a stylist in his own right.

REFERENCES


2. Quoted in Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, P. xxxi.


7. Quoted in Frederick Page, Patmore, p. 164.

8. The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore, p. 268.


11. Quoted from the Academy, 28, April, 1877 in Frederick page, Patmore, p. 159.

12. The syntactic structure of these two lines is given below symbolically:
   NP + Conj. + NP + Prep. + NP + Prep. + NP

13. Thus F.B. Tolles asserts that Thompson's vocabulary is traceable to Rosseetti, Patmore and Alice Meynell. He dismisses the suggestion that the poet is in any way connected with the Metaphysicals as far as his language is concerned. See 'The Praetorian Coherts: A study of the language of Francis Thompson's poetry." English Studies (Amsterdam), 22, No. 2 (1940), 49-64. On the other hand, G.A. Beacock, in his doctoral dissertation (1912) tracks down the sources of Thompson's
vocabulary to the sixteenth and seventeenth century writers, Patmore, etc.


21. Quoted from the letter dated 18 July 1892 the poet wrote to Kartherine Tynan, See Poems of Thompson, p. 308.


23. We may refer, in this connection, to a parallel use of the word 'green' as a verb by Allen Tate in his poem (about an idiot boy) mentioned by Donuld Davie. See his Atriculate Energy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955) p. 146.

24.