

# Coventry Patmore and the Problem of Excerpts

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In 1857 the *North British Review* published a seminal essay by Coventry Patmore, ultimately titled *English Metrical Law*, that influenced poets and metrical theorists from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges to T. S. Omond to Yvor Winters to several modern linguistic theories. This earliest version of this piece, though, has proved elusive to users of HathiTrust and, consequently, the PPA.

Included in volume 27, 1857 (127-61), the article was printed several times with revisions that have been painstakingly tracked by Sister Mary Augustine Roth in *Coventry Patmore's "Essay on English Metrical Law"* (1961). The article was a review of several other metrical texts: George Vandenhoff's *The Art of Elocution* (London, 1847; Patmore is reviewing the 1855 edition), Edwin Guest's *A History of English Rhythms* (1838, to be reprinted and subtly revised in 1888 by Walter Skeat) and *The Ancient Rhythmical Art Recovered* by William O'Brien (Dublin, 1843). The first two monographs are in Hathi and

therefore in the PPA, while the third is in Google Books but not yet in Hathi. The original essay in *North British Review* has been, until very recently, absent.

Though HathiTrust now has volume 27 of the *North British Review*, Patmore's essay is not indexed as being by Patmore which means that when you put "English Metrical Law" into the HathiTrust search field, it won't lead you to the original version of the essay. Nor could you find it if you searched by Patmore's name. If you know that the article is titled "English Metrical Critics," as most (likely all) scholars of prosody would, then you can turn it up, but since several versions of prosodic arguments are refined over the course of reviews in periodicals, taking care to include all of them in our collection has been a priority. However, there is a bigger issue beyond the need to sift through HathiTrust's periodical holdings to find those prosodic gems we know to be buried there. In fact, HathiTrust indexes the periodicals slowly and so, until recently, we wouldn't have been able to turn up "English Metrical Critics" without going to the *North British Review*, finding volume 27, and scrolling to the proper page (as I originally did). In other words, you wouldn't be able to discover the original version of Patmore's essay unless you already knew it to be there. As I write this, that volume is being indexed for searching.

If Patmore's original essay might have been, over the past several years, too minor to merit inclusion in Hathi's index, our other issue is the too-largeness of the searchable pages. Though the article itself is 34 pages, the volume is 301 pages. When we ask Hathi for the *North British Review* article "English Metrical Critics," it arrives along with the additional 267 pages, meaning that the PPA currently has several hundreds

of pages we don't really need.

HathiTrust has many historical periodicals, but currently they index the entire periodical and do not support isolated searching across only the extracted or excerpted essay. So, for instance, though the Archive will take a user to articles published in the several periodicals we do include (*PMLA*, *Poetry Magazine*, *The Antiquary*, *The London Magazine*, *The Monthly Magazine*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *Macmillan's*, *Cornhill*, *Longman's*, *Fraser's*, *Blackwood's*, *Lippincott's*, and even *Comstock's Phonetic Magazine* and *Werner's Voice Magazine*), on the back end we have whatever number of pages are indexed in the digital surrogate that the particular library decided to include; that is, we not only get the volume we've requested (with the relevant article), but we get the other volumes included in the digital equivalent of the "bound periodical."

Working through some of these excerpt issues in collaboration with Cengage (who own the various databases marketed by Gale) and ProQuest is a major task for the coming year. We admire how commercially indexed periodicals allow us to search only individual articles, but we also worry about losing some of the serendipity enabled by having the fuller periodicals available. After all, T. V. F. Brogan had no occasion to come across the articles on either side of "English Metrical Critics" ("Early Christian Songs of the East and West," or "Slavery and the Slave States"), and we might need to make even more difficult decisions about what merits inclusion in a database devoted to the study of English verse form. Our preference would be to maintain a connection to the original sites of publication, as in Hathi, but allow our users to search only the articles and reviews that pertain to the study of prosody in our interface.

We have long had Patmore's later edition, reprinted at the end of Patmore's *Amelia, or Tamerton Church Tower* (1878) when it is retitled *Prefatory Study on English Metrical Law* and after it has benefitted from correspondence with both Hopkins and Bridges. Adding the earlier version (along with the additional 267 pages of baggage) is a temporary solution, but at least it puts Patmore's original essay in conversation with what it inspired. As we get closer to figuring out the technical solutions to including only excerpts rather than surrounding material, we're well aware that we'll also be raising common book historical questions and problems. Maintaining a connection--and an actual link--to the original sites of publication is important to us so that scholars who want to read around these articles and reviews may do so. But in order to efficiently track Patmore across his own revisions and those who responded to him, we are hoping to keep the (already quite broad) focus strictly on prosody in the PPA.