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G. F. Watts: The social and religious themes. (Volumes I and II)

Stewart, David Alan, Ph.D.
Boston University, 1988
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Dissertation

G.F. WATTS: THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS THEMES

by

David Alan Stewart

B.A., University of South Carolina, 1976
M.A., University of South Carolina, 1980

Vol. I of II

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
1988
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To Richard Jefferies, the curator of the Watts Gallery, I owe a debt of gratitude that cannot possibly be adequately acknowledged here. Without his efforts on my behalf, I would not have known of numerous documents and publications, I would not have had the benefit of his great insight into Watts, and I would not have resided at the Watts Gallery for two years. Richard Jefferies is simply a wonder, and when he publishes on Watts he will come to be known more widely as the great resource that he is. I thank the Trustees of the Watts Gallery for allowing me to quote from materials in the archives and for welcoming this study. The encouragement of Richard Ormond, John Christian and David Loshak was certainly a boost to my work as was the kindness, grace and wit of the late Wilfrid Blunt. I would also like to thank Benedict Read and the Staff of the Witt Library. I thank also Evelyn Newby and Douglas Smith of the Paul Mellon Centre for British Studies for assisting me, most generously, by photographing numerous paintings at the Watts Gallery. Edward Morris of the Walker Art Gallery was a great help to my work. I would also like to mention the help of Sir Brinsley Ford, Malcolm Hay and Frank Atkinson. Financial necessities were met in part by Samuel H. Kress Summer Travel Grants, a Samuel H. Kress Fellowship and a Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship. The support of my parents and family has made a considerable difference. In particular, my Grandfather, the late H.V. Meredith, and my Grandmother made it possible for me to pursue my goals. Their years of interest, support and encouragement were an indispensable buttress to my education. The intellectual, physical and moral support I have had from my wife, Susan, has been a gift beyond measure.
G.F. WATTS: THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS THEMES

(Order No: )

David Alan Stewart

Boston University Graduate School, 1988

Major Professor: Fred Licht, Professor of Art History

Abstract

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904) set out to be a muralist in public settings, but he discovered that his jarring style and his unsettling iconography would not bring commissions. After producing a series of conventional patriotic and religious murals including The Red-Cross Knight at the Houses of Parliament and Christ in Majesty at St. James-the-Less, Westminster, Watts abandoned his hopes for mural commissions and began to paint monumental easel paintings expressly for museum walls. Through these easel paintings Watts deliberately attacked all dogmas of beauty and truth. He employed symbolist devices such as stylistic and iconographical ambiguity as an expression of his belief that beauty, truth and culture were fluid, evolving and subjective products of the human spirit. Watts's beliefs
are well documented through numerous previously unpublished materials. These unpublished materials also help to define the differences between Watts and his closest English contemporaries such as Burne-Jones and Leighton. Much of Watts's art is devoted to undercutting the cult of beauty and inaction found in the paintings of these artists. What he presents instead of languor and beauty is a kind of social symbolism dedicated to action, wonder and antidogmatism.

The largely undocumented course of Watts's career as a muralist is traced to establish the great efforts he made to put his mural schemes before the public. A thorough investigation into Watts's involvements with the poor is presented as well as fresh interpretations of his social realist paintings, but the core of the dissertation addresses the style and iconography of Watts's allegorical paintings with which he attempted to create communal works of art for a fragmented society. Watts invented his own genre of social symbolism to create icons of aspiration for a world in which Truth and Beauty were old-fashioned ideas.
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Chapter I

Introduction: Watts's desire to reestablish a powerful social role for the artist

Unlike most social painters of the Victorian era, George Frederic Watts painted in support of no clearly defined movement or ideology. He painted, in fact, in deliberate opposition to them. Watts's opposition to narrow beliefs reflected a typically 19th century antipathy to conventional religion and ideology, but he feared that his convictions might preclude his art from performing a social role. What is more he feared that a meaningful social role for any artist might no longer be possible. He believed that "Most probably art, in its most natural domain, is a thing of the past."¹ Watts explained the dilemma for artists as follows:

Pictorial and plastic art has at its noblest been employed in the service of dogmas, or of particular patriotic expression these are not again likely to find full scope for exercise of the most elevated efforts. The wide range of modern thought requires a wide range of suggestions, significance, and appeal.²

Watts's reluctance to serve dogmas and patriotism forced him to turn away from the wall paintings of his early career. Because patrons wanted only wall paintings that reflected their own narrow beliefs, he turned instead to easel paintings and museums as vehicles to promote his program of
modern thought.

One of the most important views Watts hoped to foster through his paintings was recorded by his second wife, Mary: "The two inventions most disastrous to man are theology and metaphysics." He believed that clearly defined religions or ideologies could not explain the complexity of the world and he believed that the failure to recognize the limitations of theology and metaphysics could have the most serious consequences. Of his own day he wrote, "... It is an age of terrible wrong the more terrible because of the greater sense of right." Watts set his art against self-righteousness and against enthusiastically held truths. For Watts, truth could never be within human reach. David Loshak points out in the catalogue for the Watts exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1954 that Watts's concept of Truth is "... summed up in one word: the 'Unknownable'." As a result of his rejection of self-righteous ideologies, Watts could never actively promote socialism or any other clearly or narrowly defined ideological movements. In this respect, the social program of Watts's paintings is rarely closely allied to those programs of his fellow artists such as William Morris and Walter Crane who worked to promote socialism. Watts was a social painter who was deeply suspicious of programs.

Watts's religious beliefs were anti-theological just as
his philosophical beliefs were anti-metaphysical. He did not believe in a personal deity or in the afterlife but he was unwilling to give up the possibility of the truth of such beliefs. He wrote in a letter dated October 21, 1886:

I am unwilling to give up the idea of a personal beneficent Deity ... nor is it impossible that the jarring conditions that make our lives here so unsatisfactory and often so hard may also be resolved into harmony which shall give to all and each compensation ....

Watts was an agnostic and he refused either to accept or to deny theological possibilities. Religious doctrine he despised but he considered himself to be a highly religious person. Religion, for Watts, was aspiration after the unattainable. Art, for Watts, was the natural expression of aspiration after the unattainable. In this way art and religion were inextricably linked. He wrote that;

The one thing which is more than ever clearly perceived is the density of the veil that covers the mystery of our being, at all times impenetrable, and to be impenetrable, in spite of which conviction we ever passionately yearn to pierce it. This yearning finds its natural expression in poetry, in art, and in music.

Watts saw his art to be an expression of this religion of aspiration, but consistent with his anti-metaphysical views he rejected any clearly defined object of aspiration, and he often remarked of the gravely undesirable consequences of following narrowly defined theologies. He
said that it was "... left to Christianity to institute the most awful tortures the world had ever seen ...." Watts thought that by extolling the infinite complexity of the world, and by proclaiming the necessary inadequacy of attempts to explain it, that he could help to eradicate the power of dogmatism in all its forms.

It is crucial to understanding the philosophical foundations of Watts's style that his views on beauty be mentioned in relation to his views on religion and art. Watts saw the attempt to realize beauty as religious. He believed that the perfection of beauty was beyond man and therefore tied to the divine and infinite. The unlikely, but actual, consequence of his beliefs was that he became extremely antagonistic to any style that was upheld as beautiful. He was convinced that beauty must be unattainable. Watts wrote to the archeologist Charles Newton c. 1852,

I have a whole Mythology of my own: among the Deities are Time, Change, uncertainty, accident, and Ignorance - Beauty and Truth I do not forget, but they are too distant and too much obscured by human conditions to be profanely thought of even ....

Indeed Watts did find any attempts to define truth or beauty in a narrow way as completely profane. Through his paintings he made stylistic attacks on his closest friends, Frederic Leighton and Edward Burne-Jones, which attacks were
designed to undermine what he saw as their failed attempts to paint beauty.

As one facet of his religious and philosophical views, Watts believed the world to be completely spiritual or unmaterial. For Watts, spiritual reality consisted simply of past, present, and future thoughts. He wrote that:

> We know nothing of the past excepting that it [comes] down to us by literature or Art - therefore these have and can have the only real existence and so are to be more prized than the power and wealth which pass away and can only be known through the means of what appear to be so much less solid, though in fact all that is solid, the spiritual part of man.¹⁰

In this typically awkward passage Watts states that all that survives of the past is literature and art, and that they are products of the spiritual side of man; which in fact is the only thing that is solid or real. In another place Watts said that "Nature, Divinity, Humanity, are to me almost convertible terms."¹¹

Watts believed that since reality was mental or spiritual; it was highly relative. He believed that spiritual reality could never be grasped as a whole by one person. He wrote;

> That anyone should think he alone sees the truth must be a mistake, in one sense there are as many suns as there are eyes to see it, there may be one truth, but there are many points of view from which it may be seen. Truth may be likened to a beautiful Statue once whole
and perfect but thrown and broken, each of us may have a little bit.\textsuperscript{12}

Watts's relativism tolerantly embraced a wide divergence of truths, but he was adamantly opposed to those who attempted to find satisfaction in the purely material things of life. Watts admired Attila, Justinian, Mahomet, and Confucius among diverse others, but he vigorously attacked those who loved money or any other material goods.\textsuperscript{13} Watts had unsparing criticism for those who believed man could find fulfillment in material goods. He saw such attempts as regressing from the spiritual nature of man and he devoted much of his art to his fight against greed, gluttony, and gambling.

In addition to his dislike of conventional vices, Watts insisted on one religious doctrine which he saw as most directly derived from Christian beliefs. That is the doctrine of sympathy which for Watts was interchangeable with love. Watts justified this belief by seeing it as the only possible response to the failure of all other doctrines. Watts's promotion of love for his fellow man did not stem from a belief in human potential but rather from his belief in the inherently pitiable failure of everything human. He wrote the following in verse form;

\begin{verbatim}
His Earth worn nature draws him ever down
The Sum of knowledge, the most soaring thought
And mind laborious, can acquire, serves but
To teach him one pride crushing truth,
His whole existence may be a lie!
\end{verbatim}
How can he sustain a shock so rude?

... 

Oh Godlike reptile, insect wondrous, seek not to know
Or rather seek to know, such is your doom, seek
But never find, look in your pride ridiculous
But wondrous in attributes divine, of mind and thought
Go on the way ye have no power to leave
Bound round with chains, unseen through vanity

Watts sees man as a proud, ridiculous insect who blindly lives a lie, but rather than becoming a complete cynic, he drew from his belief in the universal failure of all human endeavors a universal sympathy with all human endeavors. Watts found the greatest value in sympathy and in suffering.

Mary Watts wrote in a condensed version of her diary:

To him [Watts] the great use of suffering was the bond it became with all sufferers. A wider sympathy learnt thro' disappointment sorrow and pain.

Philosophically, Watts founded his art, in great measure, on his doctrine of sympathy. He wrote:

This I think is the new religion of art, the universal love which would contain all other universal comprehension and recognition of human conditions, and the responsibilities of human action and humanity.

Watts's social agenda extended to attempting to counter the often paralyzing or even fatal cynicism of his day. He hoped that his promotion of the value of suffering would serve to give meaning, in fact the highest possible meaning, to those who suffer and who fail the most completely. Watts was convinced that aspiration was the one source of value in
life, and conversely that the life of satisfaction was completely devoid of meaning. This outlook was intended to redeem the lives of failed romantics, to set society after the highest goals, and to crush schemes claiming to promote satisfaction such as capitalism, socialism, and even spiritualism.

Watts had a social and religious program for his art but he was forced to find innovative ways to implement it since his views consistently differed from the views of his potential patrons. The evolution of his program and the evolution of his techniques to promote it form the history of a remarkable attempt to produce social art for a fragmented and modern society.
Chapter II

Life and Times

At the time of George Frederic Watts's birth in 1817 England and Europe witnessed the growth of several strains of pessimistic Romanticism. In that year, Lord Byron published *Manfred* which together with other Romantic works made the Byronic man such a fashion throughout Europe that the consequent rash of suicides began to cause some alarm. At the Royal Academy in that year J.M.W. Turner exhibited *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* (Tate Gallery, London) with attached verses from his increasingly pessimistic manuscript poem *The Fallacies of Hope*. In France, Théodore Gericault was painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (Louvre, Paris). In Italy, the Nazarenes sought to recapture the innocence and piety of Quattrocento art. Meanwhile in Germany, Caspar David Friedrich was painting landscapes of men lost before the immensity of nature. The climate of the time was such that many Romantic artists expressed alienation or wanderlust or cynicism or, more often than not, simply disillusionment.

In England and Europe there was a steady production of Romantic art until the turn of the century despite the notable fact that mid-century realist movements often set themselves against their Romantic predecessors. Of course,
the Romantic movement, in 1817 and throughout the rest of the century, was confined to a relatively small number of artists. The general population of England was in a new phase of optimism, having defeated Napoleon at Waterloo only two years before. This was a time of industrialization, imperialism, and the consequent expansion of England's economic and political power. The optimistic sentiments of the age are reflected in works such as Edmund Bird's Embarkation of Louis XVIII at Dover, 1816 (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol), or David Wilkie's immensely popular Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Gazette of the Battle of Waterloo (1822; Wellington Museum, Apsley House, London). Wilkie and his followers helped to undermine the academic hierarchy of paintings by placing bourgeois values and subject matter above history painting. His paintings epitomize the confidence of this age which extolled domesticity over religion, philosophy, and history. The prospect of achieving more and more seemed assured and became the common sentiment.

It was such optimism and unchecked confidence that helped to make Watts's father, George Watts, an almost complete failure. He was a working class man living in London who would have been a perfect subject for a novel by Emile Zola. A skilled piano manufacturer and tuner who had ambitions to be a musical inventor, his ambitions served to ensure his failure. Against the grim backdrop of the deaths
of two wives and three sons and, perhaps worse, the burden caused by the survival of four children, he pursued his plan to create an instrument which would combine the wind properties of the aeolian harp with the string properties of the piano. He pursued his scheme at the expense of all his time and money until he had no energy or resources left. His intelligence and industry had brought him to ruin.¹

George Frederic Watts, born on February 23, 1817, in Queen Street, Bryanston Square, had the luck of living with a father who was a perfect example of the kind of failed life upon which Romantics so often dwelled in ancient classical literature. He was a working class Icarus that Watts could study and come to understand. In such lives Watts later came to find something quite positive. In contrast, Watts's mother, Harriet, embodied for him all the worst of the Puritanical fervor of the Low Church Anglicans. He came to be an agnostic though his mother was a religious fanatic of the hellfire and brimstone variety, and it would seem more than a coincidence that he set himself so actively against both fanaticism and the theology of eternal damnation in the iconography of his art.

From the time of Watts's birth his mother was ill. She lingered with consumption until her death in 1826 when he was nine. Watts's three younger brothers died before he was six and it seemed at that time that George was very likely to follow. He was a sickly child plagued with headaches.
that resulted in unrelenting attacks of extreme nausea and vomiting. These attacks occurred as frequently as once a week for his entire boyhood. Given this litany of misfortune, Watts must have often wondered if he was less fortunate than those family members whose deaths at least saved them from a continued life of pain.

For most of his youth, Watts was too infirm to earn any money for his family. He was also too infirm to attend school, but his father did provide a few books, including the Iliad and Walter Scott novels, which he read repeatedly. He drew illustrations for these books and after several years of amateur drawing began to develop some skill. What art education he received, he received on his own or in the shop of the sculptor William Behnes, whose studio he began to visit in 1827. There, rather than acting as a real apprentice, Watts merely found a group of sympathetic friends. He did not take an interest in sculpture but rather discussed intellectual matters with Charles Behnes, William's brother. He did spend some time practicing drawing and painting and in 1832 began painting in oils at Behnes's studio where he produced a surprisingly accomplished copy after Lely (Watts Gallery, Compton).

By 1834, Watts had found a measure of financial success. He made and sold chalk portraits and it appears that the income from this allowed him to support himself and soon his father as well. At this time, Watts emulated or
simply copied John Hamilton Mortimer, Peter Lely, Diego Velasquez, Giovanni Bellini, George Morland, William Etty and Benjamin Robert Haydon. It was during this period his father took a portfolio of drawings to Martin Archer Shee, the President of the Royal Academy, to ask if Watts had a future as a professional painter. Shee's answer was no, but since failure seemed to be the rule for the Watts family, such a judgment had little effect. Watts continued to draw and in time he received somewhat more encouraging responses from Benjamin Robert Haydon, champion of the Elgin Marbles and the foremost promoter of High Art in England. Ironically, Watts, not Haydon, won a prize in the Houses of Parliament Competition, which led in part to Haydon's suicide.

It was also Watts who wrote a rather stinging introduction to the posthumous *Autobiography* of Haydon. In his later life, Watts guarded against the ultimately self-destructive aspects of Haydon's character, never to expose himself to the kind of ridicule that drove Haydon to suicide.

On April 30, 1835, Watts was admitted to the Antique School of the Royal Academy and his name appears on the books for the following two years. Despite the story that William Hilton found him to be a promising student, it would seem that he only briefly attended regularly and that he learned virtually nothing there. He stated in 1863, four
years before he was elected A.R.A., "I entered very young, I
do not remember the year, but, finding that there was no
teaching, I very soon ceased to attend ... I thought there
was no teaching whatever."  

In 1837 he sent paintings to the Royal Academy
Exhibition though at about that time he abandoned his
education at the Academy schools and began to frequent the
Alfred House Academy run by Nicholas Wanostroch. This
experience resulted in the improvement of Watts's literary
education and in a handful of illustrations for
Wanostrocht's cricket book, *Felix on the Bat*, published
years later in 1845. 1837, in addition to being the first
year of Queen Victoria's reign, was the year Watts met his
first important patron, Constantine Ionides, whose regular
requests for family portraits helped him through rough
financial times. At the Royal Academy that year, Edwin
Landseer exhibited *The Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (1837;
Victoria and Albert Museum, London) which was a great
sensation. At the same exhibition, Watts exhibited
*A Wounded Heron* (1837; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 1) in
the manner of Landseer's *Hawking in Olden Time* (1832; Iveagh
Bequest, Kenwood), which had been exhibited at the R.A. five
years before. Watts also exhibited two portraits of young
girls which were high in finish and rather high in
sentimentality. These paintings received no notice nor did
the nine paintings he exhibited at the Royal Academy and the
British Institution over the next five years. In 1843 Watts pessimistically entered the competition for the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, and much to his surprise and the surprise of everyone else, he won one of the three first prizes for his William Etty-like Caractacus Led in Triumph through the Streets of Rome (1843; in fragments only: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, fig. 2).\textsuperscript{12}

From 1843 until the mid 1870's Watts's reputation rested most firmly on his highly esteemed capability as a muralist, while his income depended on portraits.\textsuperscript{13} But before Watts was ready to commence his career as a muralist, in 1843 he set out for Italy with his prize money to learn how to paint and to go to the source of great fresco painting.\textsuperscript{14} It appears possible that Rome, with its artist colonies, was not even on his itinerary.\textsuperscript{15} Unlike Frederic Leighton who studied in Florence under Giuseppe Bezzuoli and Servolini, in Frankfurt under Jacob Eduard von Steinle, in Brussels briefly under Louis Gallait and Antoine Wiertz, and then in Rome considered apprenticeship to Johann Friedrich Overbeck,\textsuperscript{16} Watts never apprenticed himself to anyone on his travels, just as he had avoided such relationships in England. He did frequent the Café Doney in Florence where he could find Hiram Powers, the American sculptor, Seymour Kirchup, a follower of Haydon, William Spence, a man of many talents, and others, but in no way did Watts find a mentor among these men, nor did he become a mentor to them.\textsuperscript{17} In
Florence, Watts was much more on his own than he would have been in Rome with its vestiges of the Nazarenes, The French Academy, and the many clutches of artist colonies that were such a part of that city.

When in Florence, Watts managed to have himself taken in by Lord Holland who was British Minister to the Court of Tuscany. Watts stayed for four years as his guest and as a working part of the salon that Lady Holland ran. The Hollands' role as patrons of Watts was limited to occasional requests for portraits so that otherwise he was able to do as he pleased. Watts managed to achieve similar relationships allowing him freedom from the pressures of the commercial art market for nearly thirty years of his adult life. It was not until 1875, at the age of fifty-eight, he was forced to buy his own house. Financial independence from the influence of patronage allowed him to achieve a position outside the clearly defined movements of the century. He eventually set out to undermine these movements as aggressively as he did religious fanaticism for he came to see clearly defined artistic movements as forms of fanaticism.

Life at the Hollands' was not selected by Watts so much for the company as for the opportunity to work as he pleased. The fact that Lady Holland was a Roman Catholic did not bother Watts despite the fact that he remarked in a letter of January 27, 1847 that "... I cannot conceive what
an educated mind and clear intellect ... can find to approve in that mess of extraneous matter [Roman Catholicism] that was happily pruned away by the early reformers.20 Even given their religious differences, Watts seemed fond of Lady Holland and she of him. Watts's relationship with Lord Holland was not so intimate. Lord Holland repeatedly complained of Watts's refusal to make a living at art, but even so he believed in Watts's potential.21 The situation suited Watts perfectly. His major responsibility was to be charming, which he was, but his intimates failed to appreciate fully that more and more his paintings were becoming anything but charming. Watts did not expect or require their understanding, only their roof and their admiration.

While in Italy, Watts studied Renaissance painters including Giotto, Michelangelo, and Giorgione, and he learned fresco technique which he practiced on the walls of the Hollands' Villa Medicea at Careggi near Florence.22 Today there remains at Villa Medicea a rather remarkable fresco entitled The Drowning of the Doctor (fig. 3) which presents a disturbing scene of human cruelty. In the center of the composition, a young doctor is held by Michelangelesque men who beat him, try to break his neck, and who are about to succeed in throwing him to his death into a well. To the left is a fashionably dressed Florentine gentleman who elegantly and casually witnesses
this brutal scene. On the right, an old Catholic priest is restrained by a stern glance and a hand on the wrist. The juxtaposition of the fashionable with the brutal is reminiscent of many Christian martyrdoms such as Fra Angelico's *Martyrdom of Saints Cosmo and Damian* (Louvre, Paris), Veronese's *Martyrdom of St. Justina* (Ufizzi, Florence) or Murillo's *Martyrdom of St. Andrew* (Prado, Madrid), but in *The Drowning of the Doctor* salvation seems to be withheld rather than guaranteed.

In addition to subjects of extreme violence, Watts explored subjects of overt sexuality such as *A Story from Boccaccio* (1844; Tate Gallery, London, on loan to Keble College, Oxford, fig. 4). In this mural size painting, Watts conflates tension, fear and violence with the thrill of lust, desire and sex. As Chris Mullen states:

Watts illustrates *Philomena's Tale*, the eighth novella of the fifth day, from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Typically Watts has chosen a theme of sexual anxiety. Anastasio degli Onestri of Ravenna persuades the daughter of Paolo Traversaro to marry him by revealing to her a vision of a beautiful naked woman hunted down and devoured by hounds.23

As Mullen also points out, "Watts combines Mannerist influences with details of the weird and uncanny derived from Fuseli,"24 but a more contemporary source is William Etty who, in works such as *The Destruction of the Temple of Vice* (1832; City Art Gallery, Manchester), sets up similar groups of gesticulating figures in a scene that depicts not
simply one, but several panic stricken, fleeing, nude women. From this time forward, disturbing content and increasingly disturbing style would continue to be themes of Watts's work. These themes stand in sharp contrast to the charming image of the man and his works portrayed by many of his biographers.

Even so, that sociable and charming side of Watts does find its way into some of his paintings and particularly into his early portraits. Watts's portrait of Lady Holland (c.1844, Watts Gallery, Compton) presents her as a demure, charming, coquettish and thoroughly vapid woman in the most sympathetic way. Wilfrid Blunt quotes Haydon's outrage over Watts's involvement with such portraits:

That boy Watts, I understand, is out and went out, as the great student of the day. Though he came out for Art, for High Art, the first thing the English do is to employ him on Portrait! Lord Holland, I understand, had made him paint Lady Holland!! Is this not exquisite?

Most often Watts did not paint these portraits for financial reasons, but rather to appease his hosts who, as Haydon understood, were not generally interested in his more serious work. By painting portraits Watts kept his hosts happy and thereby could expect independence for nearly all his other works.

By 1847 Watts was ready to return to England with his painting Alfred inciting the Saxons to resist the Danes.
(1847; Houses of Parliament, London, fig. 5) which he determined to enter into the Houses of Parliament competition along with Echo (c.1847; Tate Gallery, London, on loan to the Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 6). Watts intended to return to Italy soon because he felt that he had more to learn from Italian Renaissance painting, but his roots in Italy were not terribly strong. In Italy he had unsuccessfully courted Georgie Duff Gordon, who was well beyond his station, and the financial security he had found there had evaporated since the Hollands were now living in London. Furthermore, shortly after his return to England, he had come to believe that the Italian Renaissance style itself was exhausted. In response to a suggestion that the mantle of the Italian masters had descended upon him, he said, "... if I have received a mantle at all from them, it was only after it had been quite worn out!"

In England Watts again met with success as he won one of several first prizes for Alfred inciting the Saxons which was purchased for the Houses of Parliament. Later, he was commissioned to paint a fresco, The Red-Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon (fig. 7) in the Upper Waiting Hall of the Houses of Parliament which he completed by 1853. The subject for this painting is mentioned in a fragment of an undated, unaddressed letter written by Watts:

... an illustration of Spenser the subject is the triumph of the Red Cross Knight and will be found in the XVIIth
Canto of the first Book of the Faerie Queen, from the 3 to the 13th Stanza ... showing the participation of all classes in the benefits arising from the triumph of Christianity.\textsuperscript{32}

The phrase, "the participation of all classes in the benefits," reflects a social consciousness that recurs in Watts's writings and paintings; although Watts never adhered to dogmatic socialism.

By 1849, Watts had a strong ally in John Ruskin. Ruskin hung Watts's painting Time and Oblivion (1848; The Hon. Mrs. Hervey-Bathurst, Eastnor Castle, Ledbury, fig. 17) on the wall of his house in Park Street, which he occupied until 1851.\textsuperscript{33} In c.1852 Ruskin wrote for the Traveller's Edition of The Stones of Venice:

\begin{quote}
We have as far as I know, at present among us, only one painter, G.F. Watts, who is capable of design in colour on a large scale. He stands alone among our artists of the old school in his perception of the value of breadth in distant masses, and in the vigour of invention by which such breadth is sustained; and power of expression and depth of thought are not less remarkable than his bold conception of colour effect.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Ruskin's respect was no small asset for an artist and not surprisingly it boosted Watts's confidence. He decided to continue to direct his energies away from portraiture and other commercial genres in favor of a program of subject pictures that he hoped in time might generate a following and thereby raise the standard of British painting to that
which art had known before the 19th century.

It was at this time, c.1848, that he imagined a massive project called "The House of Life" which would fill some hall with a history of civilization starting at the beginning of time. 35 This unrealized project is similar to the history of civilization painted by James Barry in 1784 at the Royal Society of Arts and Paul-Joseph Chenavard's unrealized plans of 1848 to decorate the Panthéon of Paris with scenes representing the history of humanity. Watts's plan reflects the confidence he had upon his return from Italy but his sense of confidence would not last for many years.

As Wilfrid Blunt documents, Watts had fallen out with the Hollands upon his return to London. 36 In 1849 he set up his studio at 30 Charles Street and sent to the Royal Academy his first painting since his return to England. 37 This ambitious painting entitled Life's Illusions (1849; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 8) matched the pessimistic and Romantic mood of Watts's realist paintings of roughly the same date: The Irish Famine, Found Drowned, Under a Dry Arch and The Seamstress (all four at the Watts Gallery, Compton, figs. 9, 10, 11 and 12 respectively). The reviews of Life's Illusions were harsh, and Watts's entry the following year, The Good Samaritan (fig. 13), aroused little interest, was hung badly and, according to Marilyn Board, failed to win a gold medal contest for a subject
representing an Act of Mercy.\textsuperscript{38} Watts sent no subject pictures to the Royal Academy for the next eight years and no pictures at all for five of these years. He suffered from periods of acute depression and illness due to the fact that his paintings generated little interest at the Royal Academy exhibitions, his extremely pessimistic and classically Romantic outlook on life, and the attention the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood captured.\textsuperscript{39} Its rise to fame coincided almost exactly with his disappearance from the Royal Academy and it is telling that his wife wrote in an extract of her diary for March 14, 1892, "Lost 40 years of his life because discouraged by the Pre-Raphaelites."\textsuperscript{40}

Watts was discouraged by the Pre-Raphaelites not only because of their fame but because he thought their movement was simplistic. Watts believed that Pre-Raphaelite realism failed on two counts; first that the process of imitation itself was mindless, and second that the resulting painting was admirable only for the process. He wrote, "... realistic work makes one feel how like the imitation is to the fact, imaginative representation makes one feel that one has never appreciated the fact before."\textsuperscript{41} Not surprisingly, Watts's difference of opinion with Ruskin concerning beauty and truth strained their friendship. Watts wrote in an undated letter to Ruskin:

... I do not agree with you in your estimation of truth, or rather your view of truth. It appears to me that you
confound it too much with detail, and overlook properties; and that in your appreciation of an endeavour to imitate exactly, you prefer the introduction of what is extraneous, to the leaving out of anything that may be in existence. Beauty is truth, but it is not always reality.42

Watts experimented with Pre-Raphaelite techniques, but his opposition to the movement was strong; and it did indeed cost him the support of Ruskin for years. The P.R.B. also reinforced his dislike for sharply defined artistic movements of any sort.

In a letter fragment dated June 11, 1852, Watts first asked the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn in London that he be allowed to paint, in return for materials only, a fresco in the recently finished hall of Lincoln's Inn, designed by P.C. Hardwicke.43 The Benchers accepted his offer and Watts completed in 1859 a fresco entitled The Hemicycle of the Lawgivers (fig. 14), derived in some ways from Raphael's School of Athens. This was to prove to be the largest mural project of Watts's career. Since Watts was to realize no profit from the mural, he could not have made such an offer without a degree of financial independence. He simply did not have that independence upon his return from Italy and after his poor showing at the Royal Academy it seemed unlikely to come.

More decisive for Watts's career than depression, bad reviews, or a good commission, was the formation in 1851 of
a new salon with Watts at its center. Through the Thoby Prinseps in London, he found again the independence he had enjoyed at the Hollands’ in Italy. Watts lived with the Prinseps at Little Holland House which they leased for twenty-five years from none other than Lord Holland, and Watts stayed with them until they were forced to leave. The head of the household was Thoby Prinsep, a former Indian Civil Servant and then a director of the East India Company, but it was Mrs. Sara Prinsep who ran the salon. Watts had no necessity of public exhibition for he immediately made direct contact with England’s cultural and social powers through the salon. The list of visitors is so distinguished as to be staggering. The regulars included Gladstone, Tennyson, Thackery, Dickens, Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ruskin, Leighton, J.M. Cameron and others. Wilfrid Blunt quotes A.M.W. Stirling’s description of the character of Little Holland House:

A breezy Bohemianism prevailed. That time of dread, the conventional Sunday of the early Victorian era, was exchanged for the wit of cynics, the dreams of the inspired, the thoughts of the profoundest thinkers of the day.\(^{44}\)

The atmosphere at Little Holland House was more stimulating than that available through his hosts, the Hollands, in Italy, and Watts was able to maintain even more easily his independence in this bohemian environment.\(^{45}\)

Nonetheless, Earnest Short points out a fact of Watts's
relationship with Lord and Lady Holland which captures something of the atmosphere of Little Holland House, despite the fact that visitors of nearly every political affiliation were common enough.

Watts's association with Lord and Lady Holland cemented his allegiance with the aristocratic reformers, alike against the whig capitalists and the reforming chartists.46

Watts's stay at Little Holland House allowed him to continue casting about for a style, a process which had begun on his return to England and lasted up until the mid sixties. The differences in style between Alfred, Life's Illusions, Under a Dry Arch, Time and Oblivion, Aurora, Mrs. Nassau Senior, The Hemicycle of the Lawgivers, Bianca and Choosing (fig. 15) are staggering. It was this range that much later led Roger Fry to write that "The fact is that no one of our time has known so much of the technical possibilities of paint or has mastered more various and more difficult manners."47 Watts's stylistic restlessness added to his sense of depression and brought him to question not only his own aims but to question the broad range of styles he had explored.

During the early years at Little Holland House Watts was most actively involved with mural projects. In 1852 he painted a spandrel in Dr. Henry Acland's house at Oxford with a copy of one of Flaxman's illustrations to Hesiod that had been engraved by Blake (fig. 16).48 Also, on the walls
of Little Holland House, Watts made several large scale copies of Flaxman's illustrations to Dante's Inferno and Paradiso, which were a concrete expression of his lifelong promotion of Flaxman's powers of design. By 1853 he completed The Red-Cross Knight for the Houses of Parliament and around the mid-fifties he painted a large series of murals on the Four Elements for Lord Somers at 7 Carlton House Terrace which, as Wilfrid Blunt correctly points out, are based on Titian and Michelangelo. Watts also decorated Little Holland House with a series of allegorical figures representing the arts, world civilizations, time and truth in a style similar to the style of Pheidias he used in Time and Oblivion (fig. 17). At Lord Lansdowne's country seat, Bowood in Wiltshire, Watts began in 1857 two murals: Achilles Watching Brises Led Away From His Tents and Coriolanus. These were completed in 1859, the same year Watts completed his monumental painting at Lincoln's Inn.

This was also a period of extensive travel for Watts. He visited Italy in 1853, Paris for several months in 1855-56, and he went to Halicarnasus in 1856-57. Very little is known of his activities in Paris, but it seems likely that he would have taken an interest in the spate of mural decorations in that city. By that year, Hippolyte Delaroche had completed his Hémicycle for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; Eugène Delacroix had completed his murals for the Chamber of Deputies, the library of the Luxembourg, the Galerie
d'Apollon in the Louvre, and the Salon de la Paix in the Hôtel de Ville; Jean Hippolyte Flandrin had decorated St. Séverin, St. Germain-des-Prés, St. Vincent-de-Paul, and the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers; and Theodore Chassériau had decorated the grand staircase of the Cour des Comptes, St. Merry, St. Roch, St. Philippe-du-Roule. Whether or not Watts actually studied these and other murals while in Paris rests on rather tenuous stylistic connections, but even so it seems safe to assume that many of these works aroused his interest.

In the fifties, mural painting in England did not compare with that of France. There had been great excitement over the decorations for the Houses of Parliament in the 1840's when Peter von Cornelius, the Nazarene muralist of international stature, came to London to advise on the upcoming decorations. The austerity, clarity and clear sense of order in his works made his opinions of great interest to the commissioners. As T.S.R. Boase put it;

      His vast, pretentious designs seem today cold and mechanical, but they had a quality of correctness which, coupled with his administrative powers, made him the schoolmaster of Europe in all matters of wall painting. 54

Murals were completed at the Houses of Parliament by Watts, William Dyce, Charles Cope, John Horsley and Daniel Maclise, but they were not judged to be as good as those in Munich by the "schoolmaster of Europe". What is more many
were simply crumbling off the walls as soon as they were painted so that the excitement of the forties gave way to the disappointment of the fifties.\textsuperscript{55}

In 1857, Dante Gabriel Rossetti brought together Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, Arthur Hughes, Spencer Stanhope, and Val Princep to decorate the library of the Oxford Union and for a time the prospect of mural painting in England again improved. Despite his friendship with Rossetti, Watts stayed free of this medievalizing movement in mural painting, but Watts's former students, Spencer Stanhope and Val Princep, joined Rossetti whole-heartedly.\textsuperscript{56}

Stanhope and Princep had just returned from an expedition to Turkey with Watts in 1856 where Watts joined his friend Charles Newton at Halicarnasus. At this archeological excavation numerous and impressive examples of ancient Greek sculpture were unearthed. Watts's interest in the Elgin Marbles led him to see Newton's dig first hand. It came as a confirmation of his beliefs when sculptures were unearthed with bright colors still visible.\textsuperscript{57} Watts was certainly not unique as a painter in his travels to see the Ancient Near East. David Wilkie, Holman Hunt and Horace Vernet among others had preceded him, though their interest had been in the biblical rather than the classical past.

By the late fifties, Watts had begun to paint and collect a series of portraits of distinguished sitters which he planned to give to the nation. The National Portrait
Gallery catalogue G. F. Watts' The Hall of Fame' states that in May 1861 The Athenaeum announced; "Mr. Watts has expressed his intention to leave to the nation, at his death, the valuable and interesting collection of contemporary portraits he has for some years, and is still forming." Watts continued painting portraits for this collection for the rest of his life but he never considered the project to be of the same order as his mural paintings or subject pictures.

At the close of 1858 Watts was 41 years old and after twenty-one years of occasional public exhibitions he had aroused no public following beyond that produced by his portraits. With the close of the 1850's came Watts's first success since the end of the 1840's: the reception of his Lincoln's Inn fresco was positive and openly so. The Times, The Spectator and The Art Journal were enthusiastic, as were John Everett Millais, Charles Eastlake and Rossetti. The Benchers honored Watts with a dinner, a silver-gilt cup and a purse containing £500. The Athenaeum was scathing, but even so Watts was encouraged by the support he did receive. Watts's mural was not in a public setting, but the approval it generated convinced him to try his luck in public again. Furthermore, the fervor over the P.R.B. had begun to subside and the Brotherhood even showed signs of dissipating as a movement. Millais exhibited in 1860 his Black Brunswicker (Lady Lever Art
Gallery, Port Sunlight) which certainly marked a shift in his career, as he turned from the high ground to commercially fertile ground.

In c.1860, Watts offered to paint, in return for expenses only, the Great Hall of Euston Train Station. Meyer Shapiro documents the promotion of station decorations in France by Gustave Courbet and the socialist group, the Démocratie Pacifique. In England, Felix Summerly's article of 1847, "Fine Arts at the Railway Station," demonstrates a similar if less radical interest in train station murals. Watts's offer was refused and this refusal was the source of considerable bitterness later in his life since it represented to him a lost opportunity to produce art for the broadest possible public.

Watts did accept a commission to paint a large fresco in George Edmund Street's church of St. James-the-Less (fig. 18), which he completed in 1861. His subject was Christ in majesty and despite its potential for broad appeal the reviews were mixed and not enthusiastic. Watts exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year a deeply sensual Rossetti-like painting entitled Bianca, similar in eroticism to his Peacock Fan of the same year which, though never exhibited, was sold to Mr. J. L. Mieville. Sir Galahad was also contributed to the R.A. exhibition in 1862. These were not works that Watts thought were his best, but rather ones he thought would arouse interest, but they failed to
generate great response. In 1863, Watts submitted a design to St. Paul's Cathedral in London for a fresco of the Transfiguration (Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 44) to be placed prominently at the east end of the Cathedral. This second ambitious painting of Christ by Watts was not realized. The committee favored the design of Baron Triquetti, but, as with most competition winning designs for St. Paul's, it was never implemented.

1864 is the year in Watts's life that has attracted the greatest attention. It was a year of great anecdotal interest, but is quite unnoted as a decisive year in Watts's artistic career. It was the year that Watts chose to exhibit at the Royal Academy a work he prized: Time and Oblivion (fig. 17), the painting that Ruskin had once praised so highly. It was painted in 1848 and was only now to go before the public. In 1865 Watts wrote to Julia Margaret Cameron that he was designing murals for the spandrels at St. Paul's; "Amongst other things I am designing a St. John (fig. 19), one of four figures to be executed in mosaic for St. Paul's; so my mind is tuned to grand major key...." This was Watts's first truly public mural and his letter rings with excitement. Also in the autumn of 1863, Watts had been invited to produce a design for one of the large lunettes at the South Kensington Museum which by May 31, 1865 he had completed. But, it is the course of events between February 20, 1864 and January
26, 1865 that continue to fascinate those interested in Watts. The first date is that of his wedding to the sixteen year old Ellen Terry and the second is that of their legal separation eleven months later. Ellen Terry went on after their separation to become the best known actress of the century, and almost for that reason alone these months she shared with Watts have become of such interest. Their divorce was made final on November 6, 1877 on the grounds of adultery. It was Watts's claim that her adultery had not occurred until after their separation. Watts stated in the proceedings that her behavior during their marriage had resulted in

... an insane excitability indulging in the wildest suspicions accusation and denunciations driving him to the verge of desperation and separation became absolutely necessary unless he gave up his professional pursuits which was out of the question as he had no independent means ....

Watts's jealousy and general incompatibility with this world-wise girl some thirty years his junior was enough to end the marriage, but to make matters worse, Ellen Terry was incompatible with Watts's hosts the Prinseps. There is no doubt that he would have needed to leave Little Holland House to save the marriage, and he did not have the money to afford it without wrecking his career. He gave up the excitement and annoyance of Ellen Terry in favor of his crucial independence at Little Holland House, and in favor
of the long awaited public success he saw for himself.

1866 saw the completion in mosaic of Watts's *St. Matthew* (fig. 20) under the dome of St. Paul's and it saw also the exhibition to good reviews of *Scenes of Manufacture* which was Watts's design for a lunette at the South Kensington Museum. By 1867 Watts was bold enough to be defiant. He exhibited a portrait of Algernon Swinburne at the Dudley Gallery which was a clear statement of his support for the notorious poet who in the previous year published his *Poems and Ballads* arousing outcries of pornography. Watts insisted that Swinburne not alter his avant-garde appearance for the portrait. Swinburne wrote in a letter dated May 22, 1867,

> Also I am in the honourable agonies of portrait-sitting - to Watts ... and he won't let me crop my hair, whose curls the British public (unlike Titian's) reviles aloud in the streets.

The following year Swinburne enthusiastically reviewed Watts's entries for the Royal Academy, *The Wife of Pygmalion* and the sculpture *Clytie* (fig. 46). In his review of *Clytie* he wrote;

> Not imitative, not even assimilative of Michelangelo's manner it yet by some vague and ineffable quality brings to mind his work rather than any Greek sculptors. There is the same intense and fiery sentiment, the same grandeur of devise, the same mystery of tragedy. The colour and passion of this work are the workman's own. Never was a divine legend translated into a diviner likeness. Large, deep bosomed, superb in
arm and shoulder, as should be the woman
growing from flesh into flower through a
godlike agony ...."'

Watts resisted the aesthetic movement that was being
promoted at this very time by his friend Swinburne, whose
Academy review of that year was rapturous over Albert
Moore's entry Azaleas. In 1868 the movement was not yet
coherently defined, but Albert Moore had already painted
Pomegranates (c.1866; Guildhall Art Gallery, London) and
A Quartet, A Painter's Tribute to the Art of Music AD 1868
(W.A.C. Coltart Collection, Hastings, New Zealand), and
J.A.M. Whistler had already painted The White Girl (1862;
National Gallery of Art, Washington) and
Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen (1864; Freer
Gallery of Art, Washington). Their later paintings served
to undermine the subject picture whether historical,
literary, social, or philosophical; and despite Watts's
antagonism with much that was being done in subject
pictures, he saw the subject picture as the fundamental
starting point for his style. Watts's increasingly
symbolist approach to the subject picture served, in a way
different from the aesthetic movement, to break down
conventions, but Watts was never terribly sympathetic with
the aims or approaches of the aesthetic movement. He was
impressed with the beauty of their work but he believed that
their style was too easily achieved and that their aims were
uninteresting. The beautiful application of paint was of no
more interest to Watts than sentimentalization of subject: both for him were shallow. Aversion to the art for art's sake movement was not at all unusual in that day, simply because it threatened the existing order. In a different way, the Pre-Raphaelite rebellion against the well painted picture had derived from their tenets of truth to nature and sincerity of purpose, but Watts's aversion was to satisfaction with style itself. For Watts, dogmatic stylistic approaches were forms of vanity, and vanity was always a subject of his attacks. Watts thought that by undermining vanities he could make art reflect what he saw as grand and fundamental mysteries rather than making it reflect what he saw as circumscribed and petty verities. The difference between Watts's vanitas and that of earlier vanitas painters is that Watts does nothing to imply the possibility of salvation.

Through the late sixties and early seventies his rejection of aestheticism had more of an impact on his choice of subject than it did on his style. Although Watts almost never painted a work that can be grouped with the aesthetic movement, his style was often quite close to that of Titian and therefore by conventional standards of beauty he painted some superb works, such as _Ariadne deserted by Theseus_ (1867-75; Guildhall, London). In subject matter Watts tended toward grand mysteries such as _The Angel of Death_, but it was not until the eighties and even later that
Watts consistently rid his style of conventional beauty and thereby set out to undermine virtually every current trend whether academic or avant-garde.

By the late sixties, Watts came to enjoy public success. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1867 which honor he initially declined. Later that year he accepted, and by the end of the year he was voted in as a full member. He successfully exhibited at both the Royal Academy and the Dudley Gallery regularly and he met his first important patron of subject pictures, Charles Rickards. Rickards bought virtually everything Watts offered him, and if Richards felt he could not afford the price he usually found a wealthy friend who could. By 1880 Richards had bought 56 paintings from Watts representing a total investment of £24,000. The amount was not extravagant but it certainly guaranteed Watts's financial stability.

In 1871 appeared the first periodical article of any scale devoted exclusively to Watts. He is noted chiefly as a muralist which is rather ironic since by that time he had already painted his last mural. In 1874 Watts was asked to abandon his work for South Kensington in favor of his close friend Frederic Leighton; and after meeting with Alfred Waterhouse in early 1877 to discuss mural decorations for Waterhouse's Manchester Town Hall, Watts's plans for the project gave way to those of Ford Madox Brown. Watts was
interested in painting a series of subjects derived from his most important easel paintings while Madox Brown was agreeable to painting the history of Manchester. Thereafter Watts did no mural painting although he did remain an enthusiastic supporter of wall painting in England. He frequently offered to produce designs that could be elaborated and carried out by students. No one was interested in such designs except for William Britten who elaborated Watts's designs for the spandrel figures at St. Paul's of St. Luke and St. Mark and called them his own.

In the mid-seventies Watts came to look on public exhibition in a new light. Prior to the seventies, Watts had seen public exhibitions as a forum in which flashy, superficial, and simplistic paintings were often awarded the greatest interest; and this was one of his lasting complaints against the Royal Academy Exhibition. In 1874 Watts exhibited at the Manchester Institution The Angel of Death, Love and Death, Rider on the Black Horse, Orpheus and Eurydice, Blanche, Richard Johnson, and Rev. James Martineau. He believed that by hanging several pictures in a group he could encourage the viewer to reflect on the merits and meanings of his paintings without becoming distracted by other paintings in the exhibition. Watts came to use the Grosvenor Gallery in this way as he also continued to do in Northern galleries. He also exhibited
nine works at the Exposition Universalle in Paris in 1878, and in 1880 Rickards exhibited his large collection in Manchester.

At this time when Watts was finding desirable ways to exhibit his paintings, the Prinseps's lease on Little Holland House was about to expire. In 1875, Watts was forced to provide his own accommodations which he built at Freshwater, the Isle of Wight, and by this time he could afford to move the Prinseps into his new home. Also in 1875 Watts was planning his London studio at 6 Melbury Road which was completed in 1876 and called rather imaginatively Little Holland House. As Marilyn Board points out, the original plan for the studio gave over half the space to Edward Burne-Jones. This scheme never materialized despite the fact that, both before and after the origination of the plan, Watts and Burne-Jones were close friends. Their art diverged though in ways more striking than the standard interpretation that places Watts as a classicist and Burne-Jones as a medievalist. Watts's entry for the Royal Academy in 1875 is most telling. It was Dedicated to all Churches, later exhibited as The Spirit of Christianity (fig. 21), which is a powerful but unattractive painting. In Watts's rendering of the central figure, the eyes are blackened, sagging, and asymmetrical; the outline of the face turns abruptly, and the skin is the color of wet concrete. By contrast, Burne-Jones's paintings such as
Love Among the Ruins (fig. 22), which he exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1873, typically include figures that are mesmerizing and haunting in their beauty. He was a follower of the Pre-Raphaelite attraction to female beauties, or stunners, which he included in a great proportion of his works. For Watts, beauty was becoming something unattainable, while for Burne-Jones it was becoming the most important thing one could attain. The two would be on increasingly different paths from this time forward.

In late 1881 Watts held a one-man show at the Grosvenor which included 205 works. It was a retrospective show including many of his works from the forties and all subsequent decades. No category of work was excluded as even The Irish Famine of c.1848 was included and appears to have made its first public appearance this year. With this exhibition Watts at last began to receive acclaim for his most ambitious works. These included Love and Death (fig. 23), Time, Death and Judgment (fig. 24), The Angel of Death (fig. 25), and a series of paintings from Genesis all of which were works begun in the sixties and earlier. The tenor of Watts's works up to this year was deeply pessimistic, but a change would occur in the following years that made it possible for viewers to see sentimental qualities in these earlier works. Without the iconography Watts presents in his later works such interpretations would have neither occurred to viewers nor would they have been
accurate. Time and Death are repeatedly represented by Watts as inevitable destroyers whose only virtue consists in the release they offer from the pain and frustration of life. For the most part, this melancholy sentiment was not lost on the critics and as a result they repeatedly commented on the lack of popular appeal in that sentiment. The paintings were simply too depressing, oppressive and serious. G.W. Prothero in a review of the Grosvenor show wrote:

It may, however, be objected that his pictures when viewed together, produce a gloomy or depressing effect. Their prevailing gloom is oppressive to the public that wishes to be amused, to take refuge for a moment in some sunny clime or some gay scene from the murkiness and insipidity of daily life.90

Also typical of the reviews, Cosmo Monkhouse wrote of Watts's Paolo and Francesca (1875; Watts Gallery, Compton) as unsentimental and quite in the spirit of Dante:

The lachrymose sentimentality of Scheffer and the theatrical posturing of Doré are equally foreign to the stern impassioned quiet of the great Italian. Here, though, we see what Dante saw. Here we are overpowered, with the sense of the irrevocable, the hopelessness sublime, the terribleness of love dead and fruitless but everlastingly potent.91

This exhibition generated many lengthy reviews and almost overnight Watts became the grand old man of English Painting. He also regained the sponsorship of John Ruskin which had been withheld from him since the mid-fifties. On
May 12th and 16th of 1883 Ruskin delivered lecture II of his Art of England series entitled "Mythic Schools of Painting E. Burne-Jones and G. F. Watts." He wrote of Watts and Burne-Jones:

Truth is the vital power of the entire school, Truth its armour - Truth its war-word; and the grotesque and wild forms of imagination which, at first sight, seem to be the reflection of a desperate fancy, and a terrified faith, against the incisive scepticism of recent science, so far from being so, are part of that science itself; they are the results of infinitely more just and scrupulous integrity of thought, than was possible to any artist, during the two preceding centuries ....

Ruskin's later comments on Watts are by no means completely supportive, but it cannot be doubted that such a lecture and its subsequent publication in the following year raised the critical, commercial and public stature of Watts. To add to the laurels that were beginning to pile up, he was offered a baronetcy in 1885 by Gladstone which he refused in part because of the financial demands he believed came with the title, and because he believed the title did not recognize the intellectual character of his pursuits. He would have preferred a Privy councillorship to the Queen.

Prior to the Grosvenor show Watts's name had considerable repute in Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham, but he had not captured the imagination of London through the Royal Academy reviewers or the Bond Street dealers. The Grosvenor show of 1881-82 and the one-
man show that travelled to New York, Birmingham and Nottingham over the years 1884-86 made Watts a public force in the art world. Watts was 70 in 1887 and it was not until this period of the later 1880's that popular sentiments were gleaned rightly or wrongly from his works. The Rev. P.T. Forsyth gave a series of lectures on art, including one on Watts which was later published in 1889. The lecture epitomizes the kind of popular appeal of Watts's paintings, and such opinions sentimentalized Watts until he became indistinguishable from Herbert Schmalz in the eyes of his admirers. The fact that Watts saw himself as opposed to sentimentalism seems incongruous in the face of the stream of articles that began at the time of the Forsyth lectures. Forsyth writes of Watts's Love and Life (fig. 26), Hope (fig. 27), and Love and Death (fig. 23) that in them he sees that "The Soul just needs to know that Love is there..." and that "There is still a star to lead our wise men to their worship, and to cheer them till they find their Christ and King," and also that "... the great com'er who forgets nobody and spares none [Death], is after all but the old, irresistible kindness, and Love which loves on to the endless end." 

The explanation for this transformation in the reception of Watts's work does not rest solely on the dissemination of his paintings to a sentimental audience. Watts's iconography begins to change at just this time and
the paintings that most appealed to sentimentalists best
demonstrate this change. Between 1884 and 1886 Watts
painted *Hope, Love and Life* and *The Happy Warrior* (fig. 28)
and each in its own way seems to present something of
unquestionable value: *Hope*, making the best of life;
*Love and Life*, the great assistance love offers; and *The
Happy Warrior*, the hope of a warm embrace that awaits us
after death. Herein the public found the sentimentality
that had been so lacking from the bulk of Watts's earlier
work. The essence of the sentimentality drawn from Watts's
paintings was crystallized by Ronald Chapman who published
these often repeated lines in 1945:

Watts's 'message' ran something like this: a good spirit pervades the
universe (*Dweller in the Innermost*, *The
All-pervading*). It is, however, difficult to prove anything and we must
be tolerant (*Spirit of Christianity*, *To
all the churches*). This spirit seems to
work in the world through evolution
(*Progress*). We must remember this and
learn to accept personal suffering which is the inevitable concomitant of
Progress. All is for the best. Therefore aspire to great things
(*Aspirations*), seek truth (*Sir Galahad*),
hope when it seems hopeless - it isn't
(*Hope*). Remember love can help us along
(*Love steering the boat of humanity*,
*Love and Life*) and though death may seem
to destroy *Love triumphs over death and
time* (*Love Triumphant*). Death is not
to be feared. It is like a messenger
(*The Messenger*) who leads us to a better
land where all that is wrong here is put
right."

It is ironic that Ronald Chapman also wrote an opposite
and more accurate interpretation of Watts's iconography ten years later which states the case of the critics in the minority who saw Watts as far removed from sentimentality. He wrote, "This pessimism [from The Wounded Heron of 1837] is to become more and more, through all evolutions of his thought and style, the hallmark of his work. By the end of his life, for instance in Hope it is omnipresent, oppressive."97 The fact is that, in the context of Watts's own work, the meanings of these works of the mid-eighties are not optimistic and sentimental. Hope is much more appropriately equated with despair, life is a time of acute suffering, and death, rather than ensuring something better, is simply a cessation of the pain of life and a reminder of the failure of the intellect to answer questions as to what might or might not lie beyond. By and large, however, the public found in Watts a welcome sentimentality as they would come to find something irresistibly happy in Van Gogh's Sunflowers.

For the most part, Watts was not displeased with the reaction, for he felt that in the context of his other paintings his public might go beyond such superficiality. But as it turned out, wave after wave of such superficial sentimentality was ushered forth by these paintings. The unfortunate climax was the three volume biography by his second wife, whom he had married in 1886.98 A study of these late pictures by Watts reveals a much more interesting
program of iconography, style and aims than his enthusiastic admirers understood. If they had understood, many certainly would not have remained his admirers.

Hope, Love and Life and The Happy Warrior, therefore, are not inconsistent with three other pictures that Watts painted in the same three year period, 1884-1886, which are among his most bitter: they include Mammon (fig. 29), The Minotaur (fig. 30), and Vindictive Anger (fig. 31). These paintings are social indictments that are so steeped in violence, brutality, and ugliness that, like Hogarth's Four Stages of Cruelty or Goya's Disasters of War, it becomes questionable whether or not they imply the attainability of a world free of such vice or whether they are simply indictments of human nature. Such ambiguity is in fact a deliberate and increasingly utilized feature in virtually all of Watts's work by this time. His works begin to rely on the viewer to supply his own meaning and in this way these works are appropriately grouped with the symbolist trend in Europe and Britain. In this respect, they are certainly not settling or supportive of sentimental values.

These paintings of the mid-eighties were conceived, in part, as an antidote to the failure and traumas that had beset Watts, his friends, and his fellow artists on the cutting edge. By 1883, Swinburne was under the intellectually dissipating care of Theodore Watts-Dunton who was treating his alcoholism. Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal
had died due to gross physical dissipation. William Windus was paralyzed by melancholy, Whistler was bankrupt and seething with bitterness, Simeon Solomon was living in the streets. Even worse to Watts's mind, Millais and Landseer, in his opinion, had sold out their values for money. The strain of failure, unrelieved by religion or philosophy, was taking a considerable toll so Watts set out to find ways to keep his friends and himself from mental and physical collapse. Watts's solution was to find the greatest value life had to offer in suffering and in sympathizing with the suffering of others. Love became a source of value for Watts. Sympathy for one's fellow man is Watts's meaning of Love, as it was for Tolstoi and Whitman. No doubt, this is a form of sentimentality, but his love of society is so sweeping as to include all contradictory beliefs, values, vices and virtues. The universal failure of human endeavors is the bond that holds this love together, and in this his sentimentality is rather grim.

In 1886 Watts made a decision that in all likelihood is the main reason he was able to remain alive until 1904. He married Mary Fraser-Tytler aged 36. He told his friends at first that she was to be his nurse. Seeing a wife as a nurse and little more than a buttress to his career was certainly consistent with Watts's character as he had seen separation ending in divorce as crucial to making his career. Despite the evidence of a teasing letter from
Burne-Jones criticizing Watts for mistreating Mrs. Watts on their honeymoon, it appears that Watts and Mary had a warm and close marriage.\(^{101}\) Given Watts's age it is not surprising that the marriage did not result in a child, but it did result in a large output of paintings and sculptures. On their honeymoon which lasted from 1886 to 1887, they travelled to the Mediterranean and Egypt.

It is from the late eighties until the end of his life in 1904 that Watts made the most radical changes in his style. During the late eighties, the works of Watts's close friends, Leighton and Burne-Jones, tended increasingly toward the beautiful and ideal while Watts was moving in the opposite direction, even to the extent of attacking and undermining their ideals. Watts consistently placed the highest value on beauty, but only as an unattainable ideal. He came to believe that in order to set out to paint a beautiful or ideal picture an artist must employ a canon. Since he believed that any canon is a form of dogmatism, he also believed that any painting that purported to be beautiful or ideal must necessarily be flawed.\(^{102}\) Partly as the consequence of his aversion to dogmatic style, he came to be deeply suspicious of the meanings implied by the works of Leighton and Burne-Jones. Undoubtedly their exquisite sleeping figures placed a premium on beauty, but to what end? Watts saw something more disturbing to him than the self-satisfaction of producing paintings that are presumed
to be beautiful: he saw a cult of lethargy, sleep, and inaction.  

In *Peace and Goodwill* (begun c.1888; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 32) he painted his version of the slumbering beauty in which he parodies and undercuts the iconography of his closest fellow artists. The painting employs a sleeping figure but reverses the iconography which was being utilized by Leighton, Burne-Jones, and Albert Moore. In discussing Leighton's *Flaming June* (fig. 33), Kenneth Bendiner explains an aspect of similar paintings dating back to the sixties:

> *Flaming June* epitomizes that ideal: a sensuous perfumed life without action, where dreams can breed, and where sleep and death are reinforcements of stasis, the morally righteous dedication to labor and diligence advocated by Thomas Carlyle and others at mid century had been denied.

This ideal was one for which Watts had the greatest contempt. It was no accident that in commenting on *Peace and Goodwill*, which presents a bandaged, broken, and simply ugly reclining figure, Watts found it appropriate to remark on "... the fact that the spirit of work was vanishing from among us ..." and that "Man is not a nocturnal animal." In this painting and in *Slumber of the Ages* (fig. 34) which followed, Watts tried to undercut the dreamy iconography and attractive style of his fellow artists.

It was during this period that Watts set out to make a
lasting influence on art and since he believed that the achievements he could realize during his life were minimal, he developed plans to have an influence after his death. It was announced in The Magazine of Art of 1886 that he would devote all his work to the nation, and donate all his works to the nation, with the exception of Love and Life and Time, Death and Judgment which he would donate to the United States and Canada respectively. This plan was nearly realized as he provisionally donated nine of his most important paintings to the nation in 1887. These were hung in the South Kensington Museum until they were moved to the Tate Gallery. In 1897 he officially made a gift of nineteen paintings to which he later added four, so that until WWII the Tate Gallery had an exhibition twenty-three of the paintings he had donated; in 1946 they were all left in storage. In 1895 Watts made his first installment of paintings to the National Portrait Gallery which now holds a collection of forty-two portraits donated by him. Watts's practice of donating paintings dates back to 1852 when he donated the Good Samaritan to Manchester Town Hall, and it culminated in the collection of over two hundred paintings which he bequeathed to public galleries. His wife kept most of them as a permanent collection to be housed in the Watts Gallery, Compton which was completed in 1904 when Watts was 87. The notion that Watts was unaware of his wife's plan implies a humbleness that is inconsistent with his large
gifts to the Tate Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. Even so, the perpetuation of the Watts Gallery was the result of the trusteeship drawn up by Mary Watts and was not due to any explicit plans of G.F. Watts. Compton, near Guildford, was the site of the Watts Gallery, Watts's home, the Compton Potteries, and Mary Watts's Mortuary Chapel. In 1891 after moving into their home called Limnerslease, Compton became an arts and crafts community modelled on the principles of the Home Arts and Industry movement.¹⁰⁶

In addition to his involvement in the Home Arts and Industry movement and painting for the nation, Watts was deeply engrossed in sculptural projects. Since 1883 he had been working on his monumental Physical Energy in his London studio which he continued to use until his death. Watts arranged to have it cast by the state on the condition that it be accepted as a gift. In 1903, the first of three full scale casts was made upon the insistence of Lord Grey, but Watts continued to work on a revised version which was cast after his death. This sculpture is only one in a series of sculptures which occupied Watts as early as his first trip to Italy in the 1840's. The list includes Medusa, 1840's and early 1870's; Thomas Cholmondeley, 1866-71; Hugh Lupus, 1870-74; and Daphne, 1878-79. By 1899 he was also actively working on a monumental sculpture of Tennyson which he completed in 1903.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the most interesting sculptural project of Watts's life was his monument to
Everyday Heroes which he realized in 1899. As early as 1866 he said he hoped "... to erect a great statue to Unknown Worth! ... I could execute a colossal Bronze statue that should be a real monument."\(^{108}\) By 1899 he had come to conclude that, if he could make the monument, he would "... put aside the artist altogether and indeed consider any art (certainly of mine) presumptuous that made an effort to place itself on a level with such solemn subjects."\(^{109} \) He believed, in this case at least, that art could only demean life. The completed monument, in Postman's Park, London, is composed of a list of brave acts by everyday people. The date, heroic act and name of the hero are each set on a ceramic tile set into an outside wall in the courtyard of Postman's Park where they are protected by a wooden awning and a long bench.\(^{110}\)

In his late paintings Watts continued to try to undermine those stylistic qualities that he found so narrow and demeaning. His works became more vaguely evocative and indistinct as he substituted a crumbling surface for any appearance of brushstroke. His aims were becoming more and more allied with mystery, infinity, and the realm of the unknown. He wanted to inspire wonder rather than satisfaction. The known for Watts paled before the unknown, and the attained paled before the unattainable. Such sentiments, however, did not keep Roger Fry from becoming devoted to Watts as a painter of significant form. As early
as 1887, after seeing the Rickards estate collection at Christie's, Fry said, "I came away more fully convinced than ever that not only is he [Watts] the greatest modern painter but one of the greatest men." After writing eight enthusiastic articles on Watts and favorably reviewing many of his works elsewhere, Fry abandoned Watts about 1910 in favor of the Post-Impressionist school. Nonetheless, as late as 1928 he wrote of Watts in the introduction to the catalogue of the Lady Lever Art Gallery, "... his picture of 'Una and the Knight' in this Gallery shows a consciousness of the claims of pictorial construction such as none of his contemporaries could recognize." Fry saw in Watts the same sense of design that Ruskin had so highly praised, but he could not abide Watts's combination of philosophy and art. He also could not find in Watts's paintings the devotion to those formal aspects of painting that were so crucial to his theories, and he came to chastise Watts's paintings for reflecting an opposition to his theories.

Watts's art still undercuts many highly respected styles and in that respect it remains unsettling. He was no painter of beauty as his wife wished to believe, rather he set out to smash all ideals of beauty for he saw them as necessarily flawed. On July 1, 1904 Watts died, admired as a painter of Beauty and Truth: ideals which he saw as unattainable.
Chapter III

Public Commissions and Competitions

Watts set out to be a painter of public walls, but over the course of his career he found that he could not obtain commissions for murals which would embody what he saw as the best of 19th century thought. Watts wrote, as many biographers have pointed out, "I would like to have done for modern thought what Michelangelo did for theological thought." From 1843 until about 1877 he sought and received commissions from the state, the church, and public institutions. After becoming frustrated with the fact that he could only receive commissions for conventional subjects, he reluctantly determined to paint easel pictures for a public setting: the museum. What Watts failed to grasp during the first forty years of his career was the fact that modern institutions and modern thought would remain mutually exclusive. The values of institutions could not embrace the relativity and subjectivity which were integral parts of the kind of modern thought that Watts wanted to promote. A study of Watts's attempts to receive commissions as vehicles for modern iconography reveals the extreme difficulty, if not the impossibility, of producing an art of modern iconography for modern institutions. For painters as diverse as Delacroix, Courbet, and Van Gogh, not to mention
a wide range of British painters, the social role of the artist was one of the central issues of the century; for Watts it was an obsession that resulted in years of frustration.

In his youth, Watts was an enthusiastic believer in the ideal of painter to the state, the church, and the public at large. After he won one of three first prizes in the Houses of Parliament Competition of 1843, he aspired to become "England's Michelangelo".² His winning entry, Caractacus Led through the Streets of Rome (fig. 2), was not radical in subject or style, but rather was a highly competent and striking cartoon that proclaimed its roots in traditional history painting. It is a work that invites analysis to discover sources of influence leading as far back as ancient Greek sculpture. The list of artists mentioned by various writers as having influenced this work include William Etty, Annibale Carracci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Mantegna, and Pheidias.³ Such parallels, and more, are certainly appropriate. The composition is that of an academic machine following the canons laid down since the time of J.L. David. In true academic form, Watts displays his ability to present a great range of figures in a style that demonstrates his skill as a draughtsman and his assimilation of the old masters.

The subject is slightly more daring than the style
fitting the requirement that the subject be "from British History, or from the works of Spenser, Shakespeare or Milton." 4

The subject is Caractacus, the King of Silures in the West of Britain. Following the invasion of Britain by Aulus Plantinus, Caractacus was taken prisoner and sent to Rome. There, Claudius was so impressed by Caractacus's noble spirit that he pardoned and released him. 5

As Board points out, Caractacus had been suggested as a good subject in John Flaxman's Lectures on Sculpture published in 1829. 6 The fact that Watts deeply respected Flaxman makes the case for a connection quite likely. 7 Beyond its being an important subject from early British history, this was a subject extolling dignity and nobility in defeat. Watts places the defeated and captive Caractacus in the center of the composition in the midst of a crowd of Roman onlookers who have gathered for the Roman triumphal procession. Caractacus towers over the crowd of onlookers whose faces read, in the manner of Poussin, explicitly of respect and even awe. In Watts's oeuvre, this noble treatment of the defeated Caractacus is the first in a long series of paintings devoted to finding value in the midst of failure, of which Hope (1886; Tate Gallery, London) is the most famous example. Watts's treatment and handling of Caractacus as a subject was not so idiosyncratic or unpatriotic to cause most critics to raise objections for,
as T.S.R. Boase states,

The Illustrated London News, while suggesting it was "founded on the combined excellencies of the old school of the Carraccis," thought it lost "a little of its power by a fastidious refinement, and by an evident predisposition in the mind of the artist to do mighty things in a graceful manner."  

The interest here was style rather than subject. The Athenaeum, however, did find the subject unsatisfactory;

A British captive led in triumph to "make a Roman holiday"! - Would the Delaroche and the Delacroix's adorn their Palais de Justice with Napoleon dying under the eyes of English Sentinels! ... Here he [Caractacus] is but a chained savage, led in humiliating procession by his victors.

The Athenaeum argued that Caractacus before Claudius would have provided a more dignified subject. This subject would, at least, have been a more conventional subject.

After studying in Italy with the prize money for Caractacus, Watts returned to England in 1847 and entered in the oil painting competition of the Houses of Parliament. He entered Echo (fig. 6) and Alfred Inciting the Saxons to Prevent the Landing of the Danes by Encountering them at Sea (fig. 5). Alfred won one of three first premiums of £500, and was one of only four paintings to be purchased; but Echo won no prize and was not purchased. Alfred was an aggressively patriotic, nationalistic, and militaristic painting which extolled the virtues of the naval defense of
Britain, aided by the church and realized through the blood of British youth. Watts accurately describes the picture as follows;

Alfred stands, as you know, in the centre of the picture, his foot upon the plank, about to spring into the boat. I have endeavoured, to give him as much energy, dignity, and expression as possible, without exaggeration. Long-limbed and springy, he is about the size of the Apollo, the other figures are bigger, so you see my composition is colossal. Near to Alfred is a youth who, in his excitement, rends off his cloak in order to follow his King and leader; by the richness of his dress he evidently belongs to the upper class, and I shall endeavour to make that also evident by the elegance of his form, and the grace of his action. Next to him is a youth who is probably a peasant; he grasps a ponderous axe and threatens extermination to the whole Danish race. Contrast with him you see the muscular back of an older man, who turns towards his wife, who, with a child in her arms, follows distracted at the thought that her child's father is about to rush to danger. He points upward, and encourages her to trust in the righteousness of the cause and the justice of Heaven (religion and patriotism).  

This highly conventional painting is a machine, similar in style to Caractacus, as it includes figures of all ages and many types in a variety of actions responding to the dashing figure of Alfred. This painting employs a fusion of religion and patriotism which Watts later came to see as unacceptable. After Alfred, he never returned to subjects of this kind. It could be argued that defense, rather than
aggressive nationalism, is the theme of Alfred, and that Watts was willing to go only this far in his promotion of British nationalism. He certainly did not go as far as Daniel Maclise, in The Death of Nelson (The Palace of Westminster, London), who painted Nelson's death as a kind of deposition at sea. Whatever the case, military history had already served as a subject for Watts for the last time.

The critics were less than enthusiastic about Alfred, but they said nothing to make Watts's future patrons doubt his capability. The Athenaeum wrote:

That Mr. Watts's talents are of a high order this production [Alfred] and his cartoon of 1843 [Caractacus] both show, but without proper direction these talents - oscillating between diverse schools and masters, the severer Florentine and the ornate Venetian - will lay no hold in the sympathies or hearts of beholders. Mr. Watts may please the learned in Art by his careful readings and high estimates of great authorities - but will not found a sound reputation while he allows himself to deal in the dead letter.\(^{13}\)

This cautious review was considerably longer and somewhat more positive than the excerpt quoted here, and, along with the first prize premium he received for Alfred, this recognition must have made Watts a favorable candidate for future commissions at the Houses of Parliament and elsewhere.

It proved to be an indication of Watts's limited future with the Houses of Parliament that he submitted Echo to the
paintings competition. This painting of a melancholy, nude female contemplating her lost love is an unlikely subject for the Houses of Parliament. In terms of Watts's iconography, it is a feminine corollary to Caractacus; each presents a scene of loss; while Caractacus transcends loss through nobility, Echo transcends it through beauty. The transcendence of failure was simply not the kind of subject suitable for a nationalistic program of paintings, but Watts seemed to think it should be.

Watts was commissioned to paint a fresco in the Upper Waiting Hall of the House of Lords which he finished in 1853. The commission was offered only after Joseph Severn's illustration from the Faerie Queen had been rejected. As mentioned in Chapter II, Watts's design, The Red-Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon (fig. 7) was conceived from a socially conscious perspective, but this had no apparent effect on the iconography he used in the painting. It would have been impossible for a viewer to have seen it as a socialist work, or, to have thought that considerations of class ever entered Watts's mind in relation to this work. The Red-Cross Knight is composed as an allegory of virtue triumphing over evil, similar in conception to numerous versions of the Archangel Michael standing over the serpent. The Red-Cross Knight stands on the neck of the slain dragon, he holds a banner and turns his beatific face heavenwards in
thanks and devotion. At his left stands an adoring young woman who holds his hand and fawns over his heroism. In the foreground is a peasant who tips his hat in astonishment at the faithful and courageous knight.

This painting is an unequivocal promotion of purity, bravery, virtue, and devotion to heaven. It reflects more strongly the spirit of chivalry than even Maclise's *Spirit of Chivalry* (fig. 35) which presents by contrast a less cliché and less homogeneous collection of figures. Watts embodied in this work the spirit of medieval chivalry in a distilled form rather than including everyday incidents and historical reconstruction in costume and setting. *The Red-Cross Knight* also differs strongly from Pre-Raphaelite interpretations of medieval subjects such as William Holman Hunt's *Rienzi* (1849; private collection), which was painted in direct opposition to accepted approaches to such subjects. Hunt's theme is bitter revenge: a complicated virtue at best, and one that makes a mockery of the spiritual unity of the Middle Ages. In terms of style, Hunt's fragmented composition and microscopic detail are a sharp contrast to Watts's conventional allegorical arrangement and generalized treatment. For Watts the medieval past had a distinctive historical spirit which he crystallized in this work; for Hunt the medieval past was never so simple, and he undermined the myth of the unifying
spirit of the medieval period and the conventional ways of depicting it.

After this work, Watts received no further state commissions despite the fact that he specifically offered to paint more walls.\textsuperscript{15} Why he was refused is unclear. He could have been seen as too socially radical to be supported by the state. By 1852 he had painted \textit{The Irish Famine, Under a Dry Arch, The Seamstress}, and \textit{Found Drowned}. These paintings were not publicly exhibited for many years, but it is unlikely that they could have been unknown to the commissioners of the Houses of Parliament decorations who included several artists who knew Watts personally. These four paintings would have seemed far more politically revolutionary to the commissioners than anything seen to that date at the Royal Academy Exhibitions. The years following the revolutions of 1848 were not years for radicals to expect government work.

The paintings Watts did exhibit at the Royal Academy, such as \textit{Life's Illusions} (1849; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 8), were of a type wholly unsuitable for the needs of the Government, and it is not surprising that they chose artists who displayed an independent inclination toward historical painting. Edward Armitage and C.W. Cope, for instance, could be favored since they had painted works such as \textit{Trafalgar 1805} (unlocated; exhibited at the Royal Academy in
1845) and *Cardinal Wolsey arriving at Leicester Abbey* (1847; Royal Collection) respectively. On the other hand, Watts was not painting subjects from British history; in fact his *Lady Godiva* (1880; Watts Gallery, Compton) may be the only example of such a subject in the 57 years he painted after completing *Alfred*. Despite the occasional outcry from critics as powerful as John Ruskin that Watts should be employed at Parliament, he was not again asked to paint for the state.¹⁶

In the fifties Watts might have been willing to paint more or less conventional works for the state, but what he wanted to paint was a series of murals which he called "The House of Life". This plan seems to date back to the late forties and, although it was never realized, Watts described his conception in depth and actually painted some fragments of the scheme as easel paintings. Watts's idea was to paint a History of the Cosmos; a sort of cultural history that would embody all phases of thought from the beginnings of time to the present.¹⁷ His approach was highly relativistic. Rather than depict the earliest people and their successors with archeological accuracy, and rather than depict stories from ancient and later literature, he depicted the *meaning* the world had to various peoples. Watts painted the nature of the world as changing as ideas about the world changed. Such an approach was, and still
is, highly unconventional; but it was by no means unknown in England at that time. In literature, this approach to history was disseminated most conspicuously by Thomas Carlyle, but it is also to be found among other innovative thinkers of the 19th. century after the writings of Frederick Hegel. This notion that the world itself changes as culture changes had clearly reached Watts for he painted the beginning of the world as it existed through the eyes of the earliest peoples. He painted the world as anthropomorphic in early times and wrote the following of the scheme;

Silence and Mighty Repose should be stamped upon the character and disposition of the giants; revolving centuries and cycles should glide, personified by female figures of great beauty, beneath the crags upon which might forms should lie, to indicate (as compared with the effect upon man and his works) the non-effect of time upon them.  

It should be remembered that this is but one phase in the evolution of the cultural world, and that Watts's intent was to depict its truth; and that later ages would call for different truths. Watts was no believer in giants of the earth unaffected by man, but he believed that there was a time when, for man, that was indeed reality.

In the Metropolitan Museum Catalogue for the Watts exhibition of 1884, Emilie Barrington interprets the painting, *Chaos* (fig. 36), which was to be a part of the
House of Life:

The artist's desire was not merely to repeat the incidents of history as recorded by poets and as painted by old masters, but to interpret the story of the world from his own point of view, including in the interpretation a modern view of thought and feeling, and regarding the past from the more comprehensive area of modern acquirement. Taking a large view of the important incidents of the world's history, such part of it as could be expressed in a pictorial form, he hoped to have painted the salient points on which turned the changes and progress of the world as we know it, and to have described the past by the light of the present ....

Barrington makes a distinction between conventional histories and modern interpretations of history, and such a distinction would have made sense to those acquainted with modern thought in 1884. The most concrete and easily understandable expression of this modern approach to history is found in Watts's painting, *The Genius of Greek Poetry* (c.1860-1878; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 37; 2nd version, Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge, MA), in which Watts attempts to capture the anthropomorphic essence of Greek thought. In his painted interpretation of the meaning of the world for the Greeks, idealized figures merge with the land, sea, and air. His approach was not that of archeological accuracy, nor did he try to assimilate the values of Greek thought into a modern conception as Renaissance artists had done; rather Watts attempted to depict, from a modern perspective,
what it would mean to see nature as anthropomorphic as the Greeks had.

In his House of Life, Watts hoped to treat all phases of human development as seen from his modern perspective, but no one was interested in commissioning modern ideas for modern walls. Such a fracture between contemporary ideas and contemporary public commissions was never so deep until the 19th century. Not surprisingly, Watts and others tried, usually without success, to find a place to realize such schemes. Between 1777-84, James Barry painted his mural, The Culture and Progress of Human Knowledge (fig. 38), at the Royal Society of Arts, but his depiction of history is that of a grand, almost homogeneous, continuity; rather than that of a series of cultural metamorphoses which cause such radical changes from age to age that distant ages appear completely alien. In Paris, Paul-Joseph Chennavard attempted to paint a similar grand scheme at the Panthéon, but his commission to paint The History of Humanity was cancelled in the wake of the Revolution of 1848 which brought in a new government with new priorities.20

It must have been clear to Watts that he would never paint his House of Life for the Houses of Parliament, and for that reason it is unlikely that he vigorously courted their patronage. Watts explained the patronage problem for his mural schemes in a letter fragment in the archives of
the Watts Gallery. The letter is unaddressed, undated, and cannot be tied to a specific mural scheme, but it clearly states that Watts had no hope of gaining the kind of commission he wanted from the government:

That the government from the nature of its character must be crippled, that I therefore visited a powerful class to undertake that which you can hardly expect a private individual to do....

In the early 1850's through the efforts of Henry Wentworth Acland, physician and later curator of the Oxford Museum, Charles Newton, archeologist, and Dean Liddell, Dean of Christ Church then at Westminster, Watts was anticipating important commissions at the Oxford Museum, later the Ashmolean Museum. J.B. Atlay describes how close Watts came to being painter in residence at Oxford and how he lost the opportunity, in part, because of fears over potential damage to library books;

Watts he [Acland] had known as far back as 1850, when negotiations had been entered into to bring him down to execute a fresco on the wall of what is now the University Galleries but was then known as the Taylor Institution. The originator of the scheme was Charles Newton, who pressed it in letter after letter.

"Here is a man (he wrote) perishing as Flaxman perished before him, merely because he has not a wall to paint. If he leaves this country and settles at Athens, as he talks of doing in the spring, I feel that it will be my fault, that I have not exerted myself enough for him; that if proper trouble had been
taken to acquaint people with his art, it would have been better appreciated. I am convinced that it would be a great and lasting benefit to the University to have something really intellectual like 'Time and Oblivion' to look at."

Acland interested himself vigorously, and at one time the matter seemed so finally settled that Newton wrote to thank him for bringing it about, and to suggest the propriety of placing a vacant set of rooms in one of the colleges at the artist's disposal. Difficulties, however, intervened, apparently through the disinclination of the curators to take the risk of any damage to the books contained in the room which was to be decorated; and Oxford lost her fresco, to the grievous disappointment of Newton and Acland.  

'TBoth Liddell, then at Westminster, and Halford Vaughan, the Regius Professor of Modern History, had striven hard with the curators.'

This quotation from a biography on Acland fills an important gap as there is no published account of Watts's involvement with the Oxford Museum in Watts literature. On March 27, 1894 Acland wrote to Watts to ask if he could photograph Watts's "sketch for the Taylor Library ceiling". The Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute in London has a photograph of a sketch which must be a sketch for the Taylor library ceiling (fig. 39). Its shape corresponds to the slightly irregular octagon of the present ceiling in every respect. Today the Taylor Library is still lined, floor to ceiling, with books that were spared the risk of damage at the hands of Watts and the fresco
promoters.

The sketch for the ceiling is of an octagon divided into concentric rings. The outer octagonal ring is composed of eight lunettes, the next ring is blank to accommodate the circular carved moulding of the ceiling, and the inner circular ring is composed of a balustrade around which are placed, at regular intervals, eight chairs or thrones. One figure is seated in each chair, with the exception of a single chair in which two figures are seated. These nine figures, in all likelihood, represent the nine muses. The figures closely resemble the muses of Poetry, Science, and The Arts which Watts painted for Little Holland House in Kensington. Furthermore, the subject of the nine muses was used elsewhere at the Oxford Museum for a sculptural group, and it is possible that this was to be an echo of that theme. The outer eight lunettes seem to represent scenes of education. In most lunettes, one clothed figure seems to instruct either one or two nude figures by reading, playing music, carving stone, or speaking. The nude male and female figures are strongly reminiscent of Adam and Eve as depicted by innumerable artists since the Renaissance, but the sources for these compositions are not to be found in Genesis. It seems that Watts had manufactured his own iconography of education to accompany his more traditional treatment of the nine muses, but the exact subject of both
the inner and outer ring is at present only conjectural. The style of the sketch is somewhat similar to Watts's designs from Flaxman, in which he adds modeling to Flaxman's severe designs, but this sketch is unfortunately too slight to gain a clear notion of the handling Watts intended for the fresco.

It appears that the only concrete result of Watts's work at Oxford is a large design he did from Flaxman's illustration to the *Theogony* of Hesiod. The design was conceived for Acland's house, but Acland donated it to the Oxford Museum in 1853 (fig. 16). The subject is *The Brethren of Satan Delivered*. In terms of strong outline, shadow space, sculptural modeling, and subdued colors, it is similar to *Time and Oblivion* (fig. 17), and possibly gives some indication of the style of painting Watts hoped to carry out at the Oxford Museum.

About the same time as the collapse of the Oxford commission, Watts was engaged in decorating the Governesses' Benevolent Institution at 66 Harley Street in London. The frescoes are lost, but some information about them does exist in the biography of Roddam Spencer Stanhope by A.M.W. Stirling, which includes some pertinent correspondence. Roddam Stanhope wrote to his mother;

> Watts is not going to Liverpool this year, for he has to fresco the House of Lords [completed 1853] ... He is going to fresco the Governesses' Institution
in Harley Street this week, and he has invited me to go there and make drawings of the Elgin Marbles, of which he had casts there ....

Stanhope's mother writes;

I wish you could see the horrible, naked mutilated figures from the Elgin Marbles with which he [Watts] intends to decorate the Governesses' Institution. There is one as large as life, I think it is the Theseus - enough to frighten them all out of their wits ....

Then Roddam Stanhope wrote in September of 1852;

Watts has got on with the fresco, and will, I expect, soon finish it.

The frescoes do not appear to have survived, certainly not in their original location. Unfortunately, Mrs. Stanhope's estimation of their style reveals only that Watts was working from the Elgin Marbles which Watts is known to have been extremely enthusiastic about by this date. What is important to note of Watts's work at the Governesses' Institution is that he did realize this minor commission in a rather public building, in a style that seems to have been of his own choosing.

As early as June 11, 1852, Watts was planning to paint a monumental mural at the law school of Lincoln's Inn in London, and by the autumn of 1853 it was "well in hand". In terms of subject and handling, Watts came close to the kind of mural he had been envisioning since his return from Italy, but still, the great drawback of the project was that
it was not for a public building. Watts's mural in the
great dining hall would expose his work to a large audience
over the years, yet Watts was far from reaching a cross
section of society with such a commission. Even so, Watts
devoted the better part of seven years to the mural and he
later considered it perhaps his most important achievement.

The fresco is titled *Justice: A Hemicycle of the*
*Lawgivers* (fig. 14) and it is framed by a great three part
arch. The composition is divided into three sections from
bottom to top. Starting at the bottom, a semi-circle of
figures arranged on a flight of stairs comprises the first
section and takes up nearly two thirds of the composition.
These figures are the modern Lawgivers; including Edward I,
Attila, Justinian, and others. Next, is a row of seated
figures, the ancient Lawgivers, set three stairs above the
highest figures in the semi-circle. The ancient Lawgivers
include Zoroaster, Moses, Solon, and Confucius among others.
At the top are small, rather indistinctly rendered figures
of Truth, Mercy, and Justice which are partially obscured by
the row of figures below, and are dwarfed by the expanse of
open space above and around them. The effect of the
painting is to lead the attention of the viewer toward the
top and center of the painting, as in Raphael's *School of
Athens*, but by contrast, in Watts's painting, the point of
focus is so indistinct, distant and uncommanding that the
viewer either turns back to the individuals or focuses his attention on something he cannot clearly see. In this way Watts deliberately undermines the composition's expectations.

His painting is strikingly different from Maclise's Spirit of Justice (fig. 40), for the House of Lords, in which the figure of Justice dominates the composition in color and centrality. What is more, the figures Maclise arranged around the erect figure of Justice either look up to Justice with devotion or bow in prayer. Of the thirty figures Watts included below the figures of Truth, Mercy and Justice, none looks directly up and none bows his head in reverence. Despite the fact that Moses and Mohammed turn their heads, as if beginning to look up, the effect of the composition is to make explicit the inaccessibility of justice in the abstract while making very palpable the form justice takes in practice through these Lawgivers. The allegorical figures do not compositionally dominate the figures below, and thereby these allegorical figures are placed so that they do not legitimize the Lawgivers. The allegorical figures are not directly related to human justice: human justice is presented as a function of humans. Many of the Lawgivers carry a sword to illustrate the fact that their laws are not maintained or upheld by truth in the abstract.
Watts presents the Lawgivers as responsible for the foundations of thousands of years of culture. His hero worship is akin to Carlyle's and Nietzsche's, but it should be remembered that it was born out of a strong sense of relativism and not the kind of fanaticism that sometimes is attached to hero worship. For Watts, to worship all heroes was to worship no one hero overmuch. These progressive ideas are presented in a rather radical composition.

The idea of including notable men from different ages in one composition was not uncommon. James Barry, Ingres, and Delacroche, in addition to Raphael, had painted similar schemes, but even so Watts's treatment is quite distinctive. Barry's Elysium from his mural, *Culture and Progress of Human Knowledge* (fig. 38), at the Royal Society of Arts depicts a great mass of geniuses from all times as a part of the great homogeneous family of genius in which Greeks and Romans embrace and converse with geniuses from all later ages. Barry's painting emphasizes unity and continuity, while Watts's work presents his Lawgivers as uncommunicative and highly heterogeneous. Watts's Lawgivers are separated by their distinct codes of justice, unlike Barry's geniuses who are unified by their common genius. Like Maclise's *Spirit of Justice*, Ingres's *Apotheosis of Homer* (Louvre, Paris) employs a strong central focus which dominates the numerous figures in the composition, as does Delacroche's
Hemicycle (Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris). For Watts this a
convention which made a mockery of the cultural diversity of
the men gathered. His solution was to create a pyramid of
figures but virtually omit the apex.

As to the subject of the mural, Watts stated c.1859;

... the picture cannot be said to have a
subject, being neither historical, nor
allegorical, nor poetical, and aiming at
no dramatic expression of effect; I
would call it suggestive, my intention
being to produce a combination of forms
and colour, which should have a grand
monumental effect, and pervades, so to
speak, the building like a strain of
Handel's music, becoming one with the
architecture.29

This is the first statement by Watts which clearly
demonstrates his symbolist way of thinking, in advance of
the symbolist period. His stated desire is to produce a
striking and suggestive effect, rather than to relay
specific ideas to the viewer through the subject. Even so,
in effect, Watts's painting does not seem to operate as a
symbolist work in several respects. First of all, it does
have a specific subject: justice as manifested through those
men who created codes of justice. The nature of the justice
laid down by each Lawgiver is characterized to a certain
extent. For instance, Ptah the Egyptian God is presented as
tyrannical through his clenched fists and fierce expression,
while Manu the mythical author of the Hindu Code of Manu is
presented as contemplative and at ease. Watts limits the
suggestive or symbolist elements of the composition through
differentiation and characterization of the Lawgivers; but,
on the other hand, he does not powerfully single out the
legitimacy of any particular kind of justice, and thereby he
makes the iconography rather open-ended.

The lack of a clear hierarchy in Watts's composition
puzzled many critics and brought some censure. R.E.D.
Sketchley complained, in his book on Watts, that in
comparison to Raphael's School of Athens

... the authority of Moses among the
lawgivers is not supreme as the dual
authority of Plato and Aristotle, and
the comparative diffusion of the
intellectual accent, consequent on this
want of a comprehensive centre,
necessarily weakens the composition. 30

Sketchley sees as a weakness that which is the essence
of Watts's iconography: an assertion of the values of all
laws, truths and cultures. The Art Journal of February 1860
was more to the point when it wrote, " 'The School of
Legislation' is undoubtedly a great work, but its greatness
is not accumulative but distributive: it is an assemblage of
splendid individualities." 31

As mentioned in Chapter II, the reception of The
Hemicycle of the Lawgivers was overwhelmingly positive, and
it was this that encouraged Watts to pursue public
commissions again. On December 28, 1859, The Times, in
praise of Watts's work at Lincoln's Inn, stated;
Indeed so great has been the impression produced by the fresco upon the architect [P.C. Hardwicke] of the hall that he has declared that he will provide every facility for similar decoration in all the buildings he may thereafter design, similar in character and destination to this Hall of Lincoln's Inn.32

What Watts did was to offer to decorate, for expenses only, a building Hardwicke had already completed, the Great Hall of Euston Train Station. The offer seemed especially reasonable since Hardwicke had envisioned mural paintings in this room in his original design.33 As Spielmann wrote in 1886,

Immediately following up his success at Lincoln's Inn, Mr. Watts, by way of practical demonstration of his opinion that by decoration of our railway stations and streets important results to the art taste and education of the public might be attained, generously offered to cover the interior of the great hall of Euston with a series of mural paintings....34

Watts's offer was refused as he explained before a Royal Academy Commission three years later in 1863;

[Lord Elcho speaking] If I mistake not, the offer which you made was to paint that hall, simply receiving the bare outlay for your expenditure in scaffolding and colours?

[Watts speaking] Yes.
That offer was made by you through a friend to the Chairman of the railway company at that time?
I believe it was made to the Chairman.
It was not accepted?
No.
Was the reason why it was not accepted stated privately to be that, in the state of railway property, they would not be justified in going even to the expense which would be required merely for scaffolding and the colours?

Yes; the architect expressed great alarm about it. 35

Cost might have been the main reason for the refusal, but the fact that Watts finished Lincoln's Inn a full seven years after commencing would have given the railway directors pause before allowing him to set up scaffolding in a heavily used room. Also, the severe problems of decay of the recently painted frescoes at the Houses of Parliament could have caused great concern for the future maintenance and stability of frescoes at Euston Station. For whatever reason, the directors decided that they did not need frescoes.

It is frequently stated in Watts literature that the subject of the scheme was to be the History of the Cosmos or the House of Life, but, as it is stated in numerous sources, there is absolutely no evidence to support such a theory. Mary Watts wrote that Watts specifically stated that he never intended to paint the Houses of Life at Euston Station. Long after the time of the collapse of his plan to decorate Euston Station, Watts still had hopes of realizing his brand of modern art on a large scale in a public setting, but in his later life his failure to achieve such a scheme made him look back on this lost opportunity with
bitterness.

Next, Watts accepted a commission for a fresco with Christ as its focus for the church of St. James-the-Less, in Westminster. This commission (fig. 18) stands in sharp contrast to the bulk of Watts's work, but it is not mentioned in Mary Watts's three volume biography, nor in Wilfrid Blunt's quite comprehensive work of 1978; nor is the fact that Watts painted Christ documented in any recent publications. The Athenaeum of July 6, 1861 announced that,

> Mr. Watts is engaged upon a large fresco painting, over the chancel arch in the church being erected by Mr. Street in Upper Garden Street, Westminster. The subject of the picture is illustrative of the verse "Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."\(^3\)

One reason that Watts was willing to lend his support to conventional religion, with such a conventional subject, was the fact that he believed that society needed conventional religion to prevent chaos. He saw it as pragmatic to perpetuate the church despite the fact that he could not embrace church theology. Barrington quotes Watts as saying,

> Let the Agnostics find something better than the Church before they attempt to demolish her. The indefinite teaching of the Agnostics will never, in order. They require a positive creed.\(^3\)

This may seem a strange thing to say for one who
himself is an agnostic, and so deeply convinced of the threat of positive creed, but Watts was not so narrow in his thinking as to try to eliminate creeds. He believed that creeds provided a meaning for life for those who were not likely to come to modern relativistic humanistic philosophy. The fact that Watts was willing to apply different truths to different classes makes him unquestionably an elitist; but it should also be remembered that Watts believed truth to be a concept that evolves with culture. For these reasons, for Watts, painting Christ at St. James-the-Less could make perfect sense: it provided the truth its audience needed.

The **Illustrated London News** wrote of the recently completed church:

> In one of the poorest parts of Westminster has been built during the past year one of the most remarkable and beautiful of modern Gothic churches; St. James-the-Less in Upper Garden Street, Westminster. The lofty tower which rises from amid the squalor and poverty around it as a lily among weeds.38

Like this church by G.E. Street, Watts's painting was designed to give meaning to the lives of the poor. This was not art at the service of the social revolution, but rather art as a salve. As stated earlier, Watts's painting was to illustrate the verse, "Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, And I will give you rest." A drawing of an early scheme for the fresco (fig. 41) seems to illustrate the verse better than the completed painting. Its composition
is quite different from the basic composition of murals being painted in England at that time. Whether one turns to William Dyce with his Nazarene inspired *Holy Trinity* for All Saints, Margaret Street, London, to Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites with their medievalizing at the Oxford Union, to C.W. Cope with his academic *Prince Henry Acknowledges Judge Gascoigne's Authority* in the House of Lords, or to Leighton's renaissance revival *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* for Lynhurst Church, the compositions are firmly based on balancing horizontal and vertical elements which create a sense of dignity and stability. Outside England, the murals of Antoine Wiertz, Eugène Delacroix, and many of those by Wilhelm von Kaulbach employ undulating diagonals inherited from baroque paintings of the school of Rubens, and are somewhat closer to Watts's early composition for St. James-the-Less. His sketch is composed of undulating diagonals, but it lacks the violence which is such a common element in Wiertz, Delacroix, and Kaulbach and which is derived from works such as Rubens's *Fall of the Damned* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Watts's sketch, with its ecstatic, contorted figures, derives from late Renaissance and Mannerist sources such as Raphael's *Transfiguration*, (fig. 42) Vasari's *Pentecoste* (Santa Croce, Florence), and Pordenone's *Annunciation* (Sante Maria degli Angeli, Murano). Perhaps Watts resisted the didactic, authoritarian approach to
religious painting implied by the rigid style of Dyce and others because he saw religion as flexible, changing and mystical rather than dogmatic, and he found the Mannerist style suited his needs. Watts's style in this drawing, though, is less confusing than the Mannerism of Vasari and Pordenone, and less assertive than the Baroque style of Rubens, but it adopts the irrational mysticism of the one and the compositional focus of the other.

Mannerist and Baroque compositions, with their high appeal to emotion, were common in France but appear to have been unwanted in England for murals, so Watts's Mannerist approach to ecclesiastical art gained little support. Enthusiasm of any sort was feared in England in the wake of revolutions in Europe, which may account for the fact that Watts's enthusiastic art was generally not well received. The completed fresco at St. James-the-Less, later converted into mosaic (fig. 18), distinguishes sharply between heaven and earth by a painted wall above which is Christ flanked by two distinct groups of angels, rather than by masses of mortals, filling the spaces to the sides of Christ and below as in the preliminary sketch (fig. 41). Below the wall that divides the heavenly and earthly realms are four evangelists passively recording the gospel. The finished work was highly conventional, and, in fact, quite similar in the upper half to Dyce's Religion: Vision of Sir Galahad (1851;
Houses of Parliament, fig. 43). The Art Journal remarked of Watts's fresco that, "It is different from the fresco by Mr. Watts at Lincoln's Inn in so much it would not be pronounced to be by the same hand. In the arrangement, Mr. Watts aims at nothing new."[^39] It does aim at nothing new, and it is not surprising that Watts was unsatisfied with his results.

Shortly after completing his work at St. James-the-Less, Watts became involved in the decorations of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Mary Watts writes that in 1861 Dean Milman of St. Paul's corresponded with Watts concerning embellishments for St. Paul's.[^40] Watts did not become actively involved until 1863. In that year he stated before the Royal Academy Commission that no designs had yet been requested for the dome of St. Paul's, but that he had sent in one design for "over the window" (fig. 44).[^41] This design was for the most prominent position in St. Paul's: above the windows at the east end of the cathedral. The Athenaeum of February 21, 1863 describes the subject of the competition and Watts's entry: "The idea to be expressed is that grand one of the Savior and prophets uniting in the impressive theme of the Transfiguration." The article also states that "Messrs. G.F. Watts, F. Leighton, A. Stevens, and Henri de Triqueti were invited to furnish designs in the composition. The first named of these artists [Watts] declined to compete, but agreed to contribute a design."[^42]
It appears quite possible that Watts "declined to compete" after he had lost the competition. The Minutes of Evidence imply strongly that Watts lost the competition before the designs had come before the public. If Watts had been asked for the use of his design, it seems highly unlikely that he would have refused, especially in the light of his subsequent work for St. Paul's.

Watts's design for the Transfiguration (Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 44) is composed of three sections. In the center section is Christ, in the section to the left is Moses, and in the section to the right is Elias. Below Christ small angels shield themselves, and below Moses and Elias are figures dazed by the appearance of Christ. These emotional twisting figures below the main figures derive, in the case of the shielding angels, from works such as Pordenone's Annunciation; and, in the case of the dazed mortals, from Raphael's Mannerist Transfiguration. The design is simple and clear, and yet it is much more emotional and dramatic than his completed work at St. James-the-Less. Why none of the submitted designs was used is unclear. The design by William Blake Richmond that eventually filled this space was not commissioned or completed until the 1890's. It differs from Watts's proposal in that it is static, Byzantine, and unemotional.

In addition to his frustrating work for religious
institutions, Watts was trying to encourage the Royal Academy to promote mural paintings by suggesting that they have students paint murals from professional designs. He said to the Royal Academy Commission in 1863:

I think that the decoration of the public schools, for instance, might fairly have been taken in hand by the Royal Academy. With their means they might have offered the authorities of Eton, for example, that during the vacation they would paint, or cause to be painted by students, it might be Flaxman's classical designs, which are extremely beautiful and very interesting to the student.45

He went on to state that many artists "... would for a public purpose of the kind make such designs with a great deal of pleasure."46 The Royal Academy did not take the hint. In 1866, in the same spirit, he offered, through his patron, Charles Rickards, to produce a design for a mural to be placed in a Manchester Grammar School with the subject to include Roman history in the broader context of a history of the world. Watts was interested in providing the design only, which he hoped would be completed by students of the Manchester School of Art.47 It appears that the offer was not accepted, and that the prospect of murals painted by students generated little interest. Watts was never asked to produce such designs and no such project was undertaken. Watts's motive in these schemes involving students was to create a general climate for mural painting in England. He
thought that in such a climate he might be able to find wall space for his unconventional themes, but he had remarkably little effect in realizing his scheme to create such a climate.

In 1863 Watts was also asked to produce a design for a lunette at South Kensington Museum which was to be *Scenes of Manufacture*. Although such a subject would apparently not lend itself to Watts's kind of social or religious themes, his agreement to become involved is consistent with his general promotion of murals in England, for he believed that he could not hope to realize his schemes until murals were widely produced. Watts sent his design to the director of South Kensington, Henry Cole, on May 31, 1865. John Physick writes of the fate of this design as follows;

> It was intended that Watts should work on a full size cartoon, and he asked for students to help him with the task at his house, but the subsequent fate of the cartoon is hazy. He was still asking Cole for student assistance early in 1866, but after that silence falls.

Watts was clearly interested in the commission, but Cole failed to provide student assistance for months. Even so, Watts no doubt was encouraged by the review in the *Art Journal* of 1866 that stated;

> Several competition designs for the lunette were sent in, but one by Mr. G.F. Watts alone proved at all suitable ... At present the design exists only as a slight oil sketch; necessarily, therefore, it lacks the severity of form
indispensable for mosaics. The colouring, however, is full of Venetian harmonies and both in conception and execution, as far as indicated, the work is worthy of its distinguished author. 51

In 1868 Watts was formally asked to design a fresco as was his friend Leighton. 52 As Richard Ormond points out, "Watts' proposed design for his lunette was similar in period and subject to Leighton's and it is odd that the two were not thought to conflict." 53 Very possibly, in Watts's mind, they were thought to conflict, for after this period his work seems to have stopped. In 1872 Leighton was commissioned to design the companion lunette, which was presumably Watts's commission. 54 One year later the administration was still corresponding with Watts concerning his work for this same lunette. Physick describes what follows;

When as late as December 1873, Redgrave eventually wrote to [Watts] to enquire how the work was progressing, he was told that a design was in hand, 'but the matter has not grown very far and I do not feel that I have any claims that need embarrass the new administration at South Kensington.' 55

Leighton and Watts had been assigned virtually the same subject, and in the end they were assigned the same wall. Rather than press his contract of 1868 to win this commission back from Leighton, Watts ceased to work on murals at South Kensington. 56 The only project that Watts realized at South Kensington was a full figure of Titian
which, in 1869 was placed, in mosaic, with a series of mosaics of other artists, around the South Court.\textsuperscript{57} Watts's work at South Kensington collapsed not only because of bad administration, but because the commissions were not iconographically close to the subjects such as \textit{Time and Oblivion}, \textit{The Curse of Cain} and \textit{Love and Death}, which Watts was still interested in turning into public murals. The commissions at South Kensington simply did not provide Watts an outlet for his schemes.

In 1865, two years after Watts first began work for South Kensington and two years after the Transfiguration competition at St. Paul's Watts began work on spandrels for St. Paul's. St. Paul's was certainly a sectarian building, but it was also the largest, most public religious building in England, and Watts hoped his desire to paint murals for a broad audience could be realized here. \textit{The Athenaeum} of August 5, 1865 announced;

\begin{quote}
We are glad to learn that Mr. Watts has undertaken to make designs for mosaics to represent the four Evangelists in as many of the pendentives of St. Paul's \\
\ldots \textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Watts had submitted one design by July 1, 1865 and in 1866 Watts's St. Matthew was installed in mosaic by Salviati (fig. 20).\textsuperscript{59} In late August or early September of 1865 Watts wrote to the photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, describing one of his designs;
Amongst other things I am designing a St. John, one of four figures to be executed in mosaic for St. Paul's; so my mind is tuned to a grand major key.

This letter demonstrates not only Watts's enthusiasm for the project but securely dates it to 1865 rather than 1861, the date assigned heretofore.

Watts's design for St. Matthew (fig. 20) includes a contorted, praying angel quite similar to those he used below Christ in the Transfiguration (fig. 44) and it appears that this figure and the element of anxiety it expressed was unsuitable for St. Paul's, for sometime between 1888 and 1893 St. Paul's had W.E.F. Britten remove this figure and substitute two particularly placid angel heads (fig. 45).

Watts's design for St. John (fig. 19) was the only other design acknowledged to be by Watts to be placed in St. Paul's. The design corresponds closely to the completed mosaic and it shows St. John recoiling from two angels who vigorously command him: "What thou seest, write in a book." The dynamic reeling figure of St. John is reminiscent of the excised angel in St. Matthew, and reminiscent of Watts's sketches for St. James-the-Less and the Transfiguration at St. Paul's. The violent gesture of the commanding angel has the spirit of Delacroix, and in particular one of his spandrel figures in his decoration, Justice, in the Salon du Roi at the Chambre de députés.
Watts's highly energetic composition appears to be the only religious mural he was able to complete without interference.

As is clear from the letter to Cameron the design was begun by 1865, but as late as 1882 a St. Paul's sub-committee reported that

They have already ascertained that Mr. Watts is willing to prepare designs and cartoons for these spaces [the pendentives] ... They therefore ask to commission Mr. Watts to make designs for figures of the three remaining Evangelists, and full-sized cartoons for those of S. Mark and S. Luke to be fixed experimentally on the two pendentive beside the chancel arch.64

Watts seemed willing to continue work for St. Paul's even though seventeen years had passed since he produced his first spandrel design. Drawings at the Watts Gallery for the remaining Evangelists on stationery dating from 1880 confirm Watts's continued interest in the project, but it seems possible that he was never formally commissioned to proceed with more work on St. Mark and St. Luke. By July 9, 1888 Britten had completed the enlargement of a Watts cartoon and was asking for payment.65 On January 1, 1890 The Builder announced that Watts's St. John had been executed in glass mosaic.66 Britten completed St. Mark and St. Luke by 1893 and took credit for the designs as entirely his own, though they were not.67 Mary Watts's diary entry for August 25, 1888 reads, "Signor [Watts] doing the wax
sketch for St. Luke and St. Mark in St. Paul's.\textsuperscript{68} This is confirmed by a photograph of the wax sketch of St. Mark (Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 47). What is more, there is a drawing of St. Mark by Watts in the British Museum (fig. 48) which, as is the wax sketch, is extremely close to the completed design that Britten claimed to be his own creation (fig. 49). It seems clear that by the late eighties and nineties Watts had concluded that he had better places to put his energies than St. Paul's, so the fact that he did not demand recognition for the designs Britten claimed as his own is not surprising. Watts had often offered to produce designs for others to carry out. Thirty years after his first involvement with St. Paul's only two of his five submitted designs were completed, one was altered, and two more were given away; the experiment with church commissions had failed.

In 1876, two years after he was asked to stop work for South Kensington, Watts still entertained the idea of achieving the kind of mural painting he hoped to realize in 1848. He wrote to Charles Rickards on November 12, 1876 of his scheme for the walls of the Manchester Town Hall;

\begin{quote}
With regard to the decoration of the Town Hall; I honestly think that no better subjects for the purpose could be found for such purpose than my Time, Death, Angel of Death ... I should greatly like to paint a picture or pictures for the Town Hall. For example, the 3 tall pictures subjects
\end{quote}
from Genesis, "The Creation of Eve," "The Condemnation of Adam & Eve" & "Cain" for the Creation of Eve I would substitute a design having for its subject Adam & Eve in Paradise surrounded by a Group of Angels symbols of those virtues which constitute happiness. The intention would be to show Poetically, Religiously & Philosophically the peace & happiness that would result from the exercise of the highest of human aspirations. The degradation consequent upon disobedience of divine laws ending in appalling misery & murder. These subjects if grandly painted would I think be exactly fitted to the purpose in view, & there I could afford to paint on more moderate terms, not cheaply, a great town like Manchester would have no right to ask such a thing and I should have to pay as I have now for assistance, but still I would not make money an obstacle; my object being for the future ... 69

This scheme is extremely different from anything Watts realized in his earlier public commissions. In fact, it is rather close to his long desired House of Life, and it seemed that Watts had within his grasp a long awaited type of commission. He wrote to Rickards just over a week later about the Town Hall murals,

... with regard to material, waterglass I do not like or think successful, the wax process I am not acquainted with but it is probable that it would be well adapted, certainly (the difficulty of locality apart) I should be more than willing to undertake such things greatly in the hope of forming a school ... creating a School would be to me more desirable than money for such a reason I would forego the baser object, and even to some extent put aside other works .... 70
These extensive quotations serve to counter the frequent assertions that Watts dropped this project out of a lack of interest and a conviction that mural painting could not survive the weather in England.71 The reason for the collapse of this commission was that Watts would not paint what Manchester wanted. Watts wrote to Rickards on October 13, 1876, "... I would only paint a certain class of work, Religious, Philosophical or Poetic. None of these perhaps would be wanted."72 Such subjects were not wanted. The type of subject desired was indicated as early as February 6, 1869 in an announcement in *The Athenaeum,*

The Manchester people are already providing for the interior of their grand Town Hall when built. A large subscription was made last year for a picture by G.E. Tuson of 'The Presentation to the Sultan in Buckingham Palace of the Major and Corporation of Manchester and the Cotton Supply Association.' This is now nearly finished.73

No subject could be farther removed from the kind of painting Watts wanted to promote. On March 4, 1877 Watts wrote to Rickards that he discussed the subject of the decorations with the architect of the Town Hall, Alfred Waterhouse.74 After this Watts never again mentioned the commission. The subject of the mural series had been chosen before artists were sought.75 On June 23, 1877 *The Athenaeum* announced that "F. Madox Brown and F. Shields" accepted the commission; "The subject of the intended
pictures will illustrate the history of Manchester."\textsuperscript{76} Watts never again tried to obtain a mural commission.

This final episode in Watts's failed attempts to put his choice of subjects before the public through mural commissions coincided with his success in the public exhibitions of his easel pictures. Shortly after his one-man show at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881-82, friends of Canon and Mrs. Barnett installed a copy in mosaic of Watts's painting \textit{Time, Death and Judgment} in the facade of St. Jude's in Whitechapel to commemorate their efforts to exhibit oil paintings to the poor.\textsuperscript{77} By this time Watts was convinced that in order to play a social role he would have to abandon his plans to paint murals. In 1886 he announced publicly that he would donate all his work to the nation.\textsuperscript{78} From then on, when he painted, he turned exclusively to the easel.
Chapter IV

Paintings for the Lower Classes

Watts's paintings, The Irish Famine (fig. 9), The Song of the Shirt (fig. 12), Found Drowned (fig. 10), and Under a Dry Arch (fig. 11) (all: c.1849-50; Watts Gallery, Compton) stand as strong indictments of English society at mid-century. They must be considered to be among the most powerfully painted social realist works of the 19th century, yet the man who painted these works, between c.1849-1850, never again painted social realist works. Rather, he manifested his social consciousness in financial projects for the lower classes and in exhibitions in poor urban areas. Like many others during the century including John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Crane, the record of Watts's involvement with the poor demonstrates a persistent and concrete concern. Although his involvement, including exhibiting works directly to the poor, does not place him at the forefront of social activism for the century, a study of his involvement with the lower classes throws light not only on these four paintings, but on the many works he conceived as part of broader social schemes.

Watts's depiction of the lower classes in his Peasants of the Roman Campagna (1845; collection of the Earl of Clarendon, on loan to the Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 50)
reveals little evidence of the social consciousness his paintings would later display. The peasants, painted during his stay in Italy, are far from downtrodden. As mentioned by Allen Staley and pointed out by Board, its alternative title was *Dolce farniente (It is pleasant to do nothing).* This title links the work iconographically with the school of paintings after Léopold Robert which treats the life of the peasant as idyllic while glossing over the harsh realities of making a living from the soil. Watts's treatment is somewhat different. He turns this pair of peasants, a man and a woman, into figures that are grand, beautiful, serene, drawn from classical types and noble in their presentation. They dominate the bulls with which they are depicted and they dominate the canvas in a manner far more bold than that realized by Giovanni Costa later in the century in his large scale paintings of rather weak looking peasants. The compositional format for this painting is taken not from standard genre paintings, but from the noble double portrait. The unperturbed, muscular male and the stately female seated on her bull are commanding. They look directly at the viewer, and express an air of superiority that was quite novel in treatment of peasants. Le Nain and Paul Potter made their peasants dignified but they never raised them pictorially to a status close to royalty, nor did they paint them with the anatomy of Greek gods, as Watts
had done. Despite the rarity of such grandiose treatments of peasants, this painting is not jarring but rather visually pleasing. It is bright in color, high in finish, and it demonstrates an observation of details of animal anatomy and characterization that, as pointed out by Staley, clearly links this work to Landseer. This highly attractive, accomplished, and salable genre painting is of a type that Watts would never again produce after his stay in Italy.

The Guelphs and Ghibellines (c. 1846 and later; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 51), painted in Italy and apparently reworked in England, rewards close investigation. The reworked composition reflects Watts's altered attitude toward the poor after his return to England from Italy. A beggar was included as an accessory figure in the original composition (fig. 52); but in the later composition, as a social statement, Watts included a mother crying over her dead child at the side of the beggar. The focus of the composition, however, in both the earlier and later version is Buondelmonti, a Guelph, who is riding on a great white horse. He turns toward a woman whose beauty causes him to pause. This scene illustrates the origin of the feud between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, for Buondelmonti's attraction to this woman causes him to break his engagement to a Ghibelline. The consequence, not painted by Watts, was
the death of Buondelmonti, great civil turmoil, and the subsequent exile of the Guelphs, including Dante, from Florence. 4

The original composition is known through an early oil study and by the easily read pentimenti on the canvas at the Watts Gallery. In the original design, a beggar, seated in front of a wall and somewhat behind the outstretched leg of Buondelmonti, holds out his hand and leads the viewer's attention to two dogs viciously fighting in the foreground. The placement of the beggar in the composition gives him minimal iconographic importance. He serves simply to link the scene above with the scene of conflict below. The beggar functions as one part of a tightly knit group of figures and fighting dogs which illustrates the beginning of this feud quite effectively.

Through observing the pentimenti, it is clear that the beautiful woman and her attendant were originally framed by an arch and its two supporting columns. The arch was expunged completely and replaced by a wall. Both columns were removed and the entire left quarter of the painting has been repainted with large columns to the far left, a black servant just to the right with a lap dog at his feet, and a mother with her dead child below on the ground beside the beggar. The position of the beggar, with mother and child, no longer unifies the group; but rather breaks it apart:
aristocratic, romantic conflict is played against the more disturbing personal tragedy of beggars. The black servant, and lap dog above, make the opposition between rich and poor all the more jarring and underlines the heightened social consciousness that brought Watts to alter the composition to address the grim life of such street people.

In all likelihood, the visual source for the transformation of the Guelphs and Ghibellines is found in Watts's own oeuvre. His Irish Famine (fig. 9), also known as the Irish Eviction, is probably the source for the beggar family; it employs a strikingly similar group of figures.

The Irish Famine has been analyzed by Allen Staley, Robert Rosenblum, Lindsay Errington, Julian Treuherz and many others. Errington's analysis conclusively places the creation of this painting at the heart of a general concern in London with the Irish famine stirred by the illustrations and commentaries in the pages of Punch, the steady flow of newspaper reports elsewhere, and the writings of men such as Aubrey de Vere. Errington convincingly argues against the view that Watts painted this and his other social realist paintings because of personal and private frustrations, and effectively proves that he was responding to the general climate of the times. As probable sources for Watts's concern, Errington cites de Vere's poems The Year of Sorrow - Ireland written in 1849, and English Misrule and Irish
Misddeeds written in 1848, among other works which treated Irish blight, emigration and starvation. She does not see Watts's painting as illustrating any specific passage from de Vere but she argues that;

When one remembers that The Year of Sorrow was the year 1849 in which Watts probably painted his Irish subject and was certainly in contact with de Vere, it seems inconceivable that the poet did not heavily influence the painter's choice of subject, especially as the scene was set in a country Watts had never seen.

Mary Watts securely dates the painting to before October 1850 and she provides the proof that it was not a record of Watts's trip to Ireland, for he had completed it before that trip;

... Mr. de Vere, writing from Coniston in October 1850 to arrange with him [Watts] to go to Curragh Chase at the invitation of his brother Sir Vere de Vere, says: "You would find much to interest you deeply in Ireland, besides the scenery, including not a little of which you must have had a second-sight vision before you painted your 'Irish Eviction'" (afterwards called "The Irish Famine").

The starting date of the painting is not secure but is generally assigned to c.1849 after Watts's return from Italy, a time when the social and political climate of England, Ireland and Europe was volatile and radical. Mary Watts records that The Irish Famine "... obliterated another design, called 'Panthea,' a more splendid subject
from Xenophon's Cryopaedia .... "7 As with the Guelphs and Ghibellines, Watts's destruction of Panthea demonstrates that he was aggressively distancing himself from his Italian subject matter and style.

Since Allen Staley observed that The Irish Famine was a reworking of a Renaissance Holy Family or Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Robert Rosenblum has written;

Here, a starving Irish family, homeless and displaced in a gloomy no-man's-land, takes in the iconographic resonance of the Holy Family or, even more, given the migratory subject, the Rest on the Flight into Egypt ... the painting smacks of the grandiose figural rhythms and chromatic warmth that Watts had studied in the art of Michelangelo and Titian.8

In fact, however, this painting is a bitter, ironic reversal of the Holy Family: it shows four lives well on their way to anonymous, inevitable death with no sign of salvation. No doubt the painting recalls the Holy Family, but it does not perpetuate the theme, rather it powerfully reverses it. This is no Holy Family on a flight to safety; this is a family in a waste land on its way to death. The sky is nearly blackened, far from displaying chromatic warmth, and there is no light from above, and certainly no host of accompanying angels. The mother turns desperately to the father. The child is positioned on the mother's lap as the Christ child is often positioned on Mary's lap with its arm dropped at its side in a conventional attitude of
death. This child represents no foreshadowing of a death that will redeem the sins of mankind, but rather it depicts a dead or dying child; nothing more.

The Holy Family structure of the painting is further undercut by the harsh and jarringly realist depiction of the four figures. William Hogarth is a possible source. Errington mentions that Watts's published essay of 1853 on Haydon suggests that Watts was considering the social realism of Hogarth as a viable option for his style. In that essay Watts criticizes Haydon's genre painting *Punch* for failing to include the harsh side of life seen in Hogarth's works;

Hogarth would have given some wretched child, made indifferent to the Humour of Punch by sickness and hunger, made old by misery.

Watts's adoption of figural types from Hogarth's prints is part of what makes this nearly life-size painting, and Watts's other social realist paintings, so disturbing. Watts makes his figures wretched, dissipated, made old by misery, and well on their way to indifference and death as Hogarth had done in works such as *Gin Lane* and *Rake's Progress*; but Watts does not do this to condemn the wretched as Hogarth had, rather he does it to arouse sympathy for undeserved distress.

Watts's treatment of this theme is strikingly different from any of a number of other paintings relating to the
famine. John Joseph Barker's *The Irish Emigrants* (1847-48; Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, fig. 53) presents an attractive, rather well fed but beleaguered family that retains an air of grace, poise, and humanity. The children are pretty: this is a nice group of people. Watts's figures are not nice; they are drained of beauty, drained of emotion, and soon to be completely drained of life. Watts's baby is not cute but rather ghastly; leading one to wonder if decay of the flesh is not well under way. His is a painting of the dissipation of human lives. Rather than showing sweet people having a hard time, Watts shows people being relentlessly worn down into death.

Watts's treatment differs too from Walter Howell Deverell's *The Irish Vagrants* (c. 1850, Art Gallery, Johannesburg) and Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (1852-1865; City Art Gallery, Manchester) in which far from starving Irish emigrants are depicted living on the street out of a lack of industry.

*Found Drowned, The Song of the Shirt,* and *Under a Dry Arch* comprise a series of related paintings which documents and encapsulates the grim alternatives available to poor women in London in the late 1840's. Watts's style is generalizing, but these images capture some of the horror of the conditions poor women faced. As Errington and T.J. Edelstein have pointed out, Henry Mayhew, Thomas Carlyle,
F.D. Maurice, and Charles Kingsley and many others were all publishing shocking accounts of life among poor women in the years 1849-50, **Punch** was illustrating such scenes, and London was full of such scenes. For the most part, Watts's paintings function in the manner of Mayhew's equally startling personal histories published in *The Morning Chronicle*. Watts's social realism is personal and subjective, yet it is loaded with horrific facts which expose an unseemly side of London life to scrutiny.

**Found Drowned** (fig. 10) was the most conventional painting of the series and it was also the most exhibited. It is the only painting of the series in which the woman is depicted as beautiful: death has spared her from the hardships of life. When a small version was sold from the Charles Rickards estate on April 2, 1887 at Christie's, it was listed in the catalogue as **The Bridge of Sighs** and was accompanied by the following verse from Thomas Hood's poem of the same title;

> Take her up tenderly,  
> Lift her with care.

This verse is perfectly appropriate to the tenderly sentimental painting. Unlike the woman in either **The Song of the Shirt** or **Under a Dry Arch**, this woman is, and was, quite attractive. To continue quoting from Hood's poem, she is "Fashion'd so slenderly, Young and so fair!" In a time-honored manner, Watts uses the plight of the attractive
young woman to arouse sympathy. Richard Redgrave had used such a scheme in both his _The Seamstress_ (1846; The Forbes Magazine Collection, New York, fig. 54) and his _The Governess_ (1844; Victoria and Albert Museum, London) and the trend would continue and expand into grotesquely sentimental works such as Herbert Schmalz's _No One to Love Me_ (1904; Mrs. Simpson Hinchcliffe) or the innumerable sweet children of the street by Augustus Mulready.

Barrington wrote in the Metropolitan Museum Catalogue of the 1885 Watts exhibition that _Fond Drowned_ was "... suggested by an incident seen by the artist."13 Even so, it is highly unlikely that this painting is a record of what Watts saw. As Errington points out;

... Watts took liberty with his subject matter. Most of these suicides, though they succeeded in destroying themselves, failed to drown and scarcely have been picturesquely stranded by the ebb tide.14

There is no doubt that Watts did take liberties with his subject, for the arms of this woman are extended in the attitude of crucifixions: a posture too powerful and striking to be accidental. As with _The Irish Famine_, Watts reverses the meanings of the conventions he employs. Unlike other adaptations of scenes from the passion in contemporary subjects, such as Benjamin West's _Death of Wolfe_ (1771; Royal Collection), where Wolfe is treated as a Christ figure dying for his fellow man, Watts's drowned woman assumes the
position of Christ but simply dies forgotten. Watts's use and reversal of painting conventions is devilish.

Watts places his suicide under the arch of a bridge and as Errington and Julian Treuherz point out George Cruikshank's *The poor girl, homeless, friendless, deserted, and gin mad commits self-murder* from his series of prints *The Drunkard's Children* of 1848 may have provided Watts both with his subject and with his arch motif. However, this popular print lacks Watts's monumental treatment and it avoids Watts's pointed allusions to Christian iconography, so it can only be seen as a source in a rather limited sense.

Errington points out that,

> The title chosen by Watts, *Found Drowned*, is not a phrase taken, as one might suppose, from the *Bridge of Sighs*, nor is it of his own invention. It is a legal term, and refers the reader, by implication, to the reports of coroner's inquests upon bodies of suicides, as they were given in the daily papers. Look, it seems to say, and I will show you what lies behind the cold and scanty record that you skip over in your *Times* each morning.

In this way, through the title, Watts heightens the potency of this image.

The woman wears extremely plain clothes, quite similar in fact to those worn by Watts's impoverished seamstress in his *Song of the Shirt*. The causes of her suicide are hinted at in the surrounding cityscape. As Richard Jefferies
points out she is washed up beneath Waterloo Bridge and directly across the Thames from the Shot Tower. To the right is Brunel's Hungerford Suspension Bridge. Her body lies at the site of numerous suicides in a particularly impoverished part of London; but the landmarks Watts chose imply deeper meanings: he had to distort the topography to include both the Shot Tower and the Hungerford Suspension Bridge.

The Shot Tower was a remarkable bit of military ingenuity, built to manufacture high quality shot. Molten lead droplets were released from the top of the tower so that they could fall, within the tower, into a vat of water below to be formed into high grade shot. The technique was ingenious and highly effective, and by an odd coincidence its invention is attributed to a man named Watts. This tower stood as part of the highly effective British war machine, set here by Watts to contrast with this image of social failure. The Hungerford Suspension Bridge, included in the painting to the right, was opened in 1845 while Watts was in Italy. This bridge was a technological wonder of the day, and when Watts painted it in this picture, just after his return from Italy, it would have been charged with meaning. The contrast between technological success and social failure was a theme that repeatedly accompanied cries for social reform in these years, and Watts effectively
makes this contrast part of his iconography.

As with Found Drowned, his painting The Song of the Shirt (fig. 12), also known as The Seamstress or The Needlewoman, is inspired, at least in part, by Thomas Hood's poetry. As the Times of 1882 stated,

The "Needlewoman" is a plain statement pictorially of what Hood told so well in verse, "The Song of the Shirt" at least one phrase in that song.¹⁹

Hood's poem seems an undeniable starting point for Watts's painting. Hood's Song of the Shirt²⁰ published in 1843 brought awareness of the plight of the seamstress through its description of a woman vainly sewing without rest. The poem stimulated Watts and others to rally to the cause of the seamstress which was indeed a shocking issue. As Errington points out conditions were so extreme for seamstresses that, regardless of their industry, they faced either starvation or prostitution.²¹ Richard Redgrave's The Seamstress, (fig. 54) exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844, appears to be the first painted example of the theme. As Staley points out;

... no work by Redgrave, whom Thackery called 'namby-pamby', has either the formal or the emotional power of Watts's four pictures, and it is difficult to see more than a superficial similarity of interests.²²

Redgrave's woman is wide eyed and gazing heavenward in the manner of Greuze's many paintings of young women.
Despite her poverty she is neatly dressed, clean, attractive and reeking of virtue in her sparsely furnished, but neatly arranged garret. A wash basin and pitcher are prominently placed not far from Redgrave's clean, godly, sweet seamstress. He attempted and succeeded in creating a strikingly fanciful, but nonetheless effective, sympathy for the seamstress. It begs a response from the viewer, much as Octave Tassaert's The Unfortunate Family, also known as The Suicide (1849; fig. 55), which directly begs emotion and sympathy from the viewer. As Edelstein argues, an important source for Redgrave's painting can be found in images of saints;

One such link, easily visible in Redgrave, is to images of saints. His portrayal of the seamstress as a martyr to modern urban society is heightened by the almost supernatural light of the candle, hidden by the cloth, and by the upturned gaze of the shirtnaker. Certainly, the popularity of such seicento painters as Carlo Dolci and Guido Reni in England, with their sweet, pious saints turning their eyes to heaven, made such an iconographic association easy for Redgrave's audience.23

Watts's seamstress is no beauty, nor is she gazing to heaven for help. Her floor is strewn with rags next to her sewing box, and her window, very indistinctly painted, appears to be broken and stuffed with rags. Reviews from the 1880's remark of a mouse, no longer visible, in a corner.24 This is no painting of virtue crying for its
reward, but a painting of a ravaged life. This is a painting of despair, resignation, and futility. This woman is presented as being worn down and destroyed by her life. Her neck is drawn and emaciated, she supports her head with her hand, and she stares with a blank glazed expression. As in Redgrave's painting, a candle helps to define the time as night, but by contrast, in Watts's painting, smoke rises from the candle which has just burned out, effectively making it impossible for the seamstress to work and iconographically suggesting her approaching death.

In an unpublished note, Spielmann points out that Watts's painting should not be seen as an illustration of Hood's poem but as a sequel to it.

This picture, which from its subject might be thought, in reality is not, an illustration of Hood's the "Song of the Shirt" ... In a wretched chamber (where a grey mouse in the corner speaks eloquently of the silence of her grief), sits the poor needlewoman whose face is a [illegible] image of despair and disease cannot see to ply her needle no longer; her sad thoughts rush upon her, she gives herself over to them and bursts into a fit of weeping - .... If it may be so described the scene here depicted the sequel to Hood's poem.25

Clearly Watts's painting does not illustrate any scene in the Song of the Shirt in which Hood describes a woman ceaselessly working, not one reflecting on her hopeless condition. This painting provides a graphic illustration of one side of life that the suicide of Found Drowned escaped:
the suicide was not to die in the ghastly way Watts shows this seamstress is doing.

_Under a Dry Arch_ (fig. 11) completes the series of social realist paintings. It depicts a hideous old woman crouching under an arch, probably Waterloo Bridge, with the dome of St. Paul's looming in the distance. As with _Found Drowned_, Watts creates a powerful sense of irony by placing this decaying woman before a great symbol of British official religion. It is possible that Mayhew's letters to the _Morning Chronicle_ were the source for Watts's ironic placement of St. Paul's behind this woman, for Mayhew makes the same contrast between the wealth of St. Paul's and the squalor that surrounded it.²⁶ St. Paul's is presented in each case as a sign of the failure of the church to address social ills successfully. The woman Watts presents here is so haggard, indifferent, aged, and sickly that it is difficult to see immediately that she is a woman. Her face is ghastly, her eyes are tiny slits, and her expression is that of a long pained person near death. Sources for this genuinely disturbing image may include Michelangelo's _Last Judgment_ and Hogarth's more grim figures.²⁷

When it was exhibited in 1881-82 at the Grosvenor the _Times_ remarked;

> It would be impossible to describe the unique power of this picture, all of which is contained in the expression of the woman's face ... Not picturesque,
sentimental wretchedness by any means, but a cruel fact of life such as it is to some of us. 28

The Spectator of January 7, 1882 warned;

It has a singular effect, this silent problem that hangs upon the walls of the most aesthetic gallery in London, and is surrounded by portraits of beauties, and statesmen, and warriors and divines. Bad policy, Mr. Watts, to confront these "curled darlings" with so vital a question. You come too close to home Sir to our consciences to be agreeable. 29

The Times went on to complain that;

No doubt it shows a certain defect of Mr. Watts's art and mind that he gives us no phases of modern life among the poor than these vitally wretched ones. 30

Such was the general consensus, and not surprisingly, none of these paintings were sold from the exhibition.

As is often mentioned, D.G. Rossetti's Found (fig. 56) appears to have been heavily influenced by this painting. 31 In that painting, a similarly dissipated woman, wearing a similarly cut shawl, nuddles against a wall resisting the attempts of a man who recognizes her to take her back to the simple farm life she left. This woman, painted in Rossetti's early Pre-Raphaelite style, is unquestionably a prostitute. Watts's woman is depicted in a more generalizing style. Despite the fact that her clothes do shimmer more than the clothes of his other social realist women, Watts does not blatantly label this woman as a
prostitute. F.G. Stephens, one of the original Pre-Raphaelites, interpreted this figure as "... the wreck of an 'unfortunate woman' crouching with her tarnished finery against the wall of Waterloo Bridge."³² Perhaps by "tarnished finery" Stephens means to define her place in life as that of a prostitute. A passage from Mary Eaton 1848, by Mrs. Gaskell, quoted by Edelstein in a different context, pinpoints Stephens's meaning:

He turned and saw ... that the woman who stood by him was of no doubtful profession. It was told by her faded finery ....³³

Such an interpretation sees this painting as documenting an almost universal fact of life for poor women in London of this period, but whether Watts conceived of this woman as a prostitute it is impossible to know. What seems possible, though, is that Rossetti and Stephens saw her as one.

As the critics of the Grosvenor show stated there is no sentimentality here. Watts's discussion of this work reveals the same harsh approach he used in painting it. He stated that, "Pictures, like my old woman under the archway, it has no beauty but it has a purpose. It, I hope, arouses pity for human refuse."³⁴ "Human refuse" is what he painted. Under a Dry Arch, when considered with The Song of the Shirt and Found Drowned, makes the suicide of Found Drowned into a seductive ideal, and a release from the far more unpleasant forms of death suggested in the other
two paintings. Furthermore, as a group, these paintings sum up powerfully the most grievous problems for women in London and places the blame with capitalistic greed, church neglect, militaristic obsession, and misspent technology.

Although these paintings were not shown publicly at the time Watts painted them, they appear to have had a significant effect on artists in London including D.G. Rossetti and Leopold Egg. Egg's trilogy, *Past and Present* (1858; Tate Gallery, London) is certainly based in part on Watts's social realist paintings. Jefferies correctly points out that the husband in *Past and Present I* (fig. 57) is derived from the husband in *The Irish Famine*. These men are nearly identical in posture and facial expression. *Past and Present II* (fig. 58) draws from *Found Drowned* and Under a Dry Arch. It includes a view through an arch across the Thames to the Shot Tower and it includes a woman, in this case with her child, huddled under an arch, in this case one of the Adelphi arches. *Past and Present III* (fig. 59) is the least related of the series but it draws compositionally from both Watts's *The Song of the Shirt* and Redgrave's *The Seamstress* with its centrally placed female figure, night interior, and prominently placed window. Perhaps the three part format was also derived from Watts: *The Song of the Shirt, Found Drowned,* and Under a Dry Arch may have operated at one time as a triptych. Despite the numerous
connections between Watts's social realist paintings and Egg's trilogy, Egg's series is anecdotal, cluttered with symbolic objects, and iconographically unrelated to Watts's paintings. Egg explores the consequences of marital infidelity while Watts exposes social evil on a more sweeping scale.

The fact that Watts did not exhibit any of these paintings until years after he painted them is puzzling, especially in light of the fact that Julia Cartwright, after speaking with Watts, wrote in 1896 that, "These were mostly painted with the deliberate intention of awakening sympathy with certain forms of want and suffering." How could Watts hope to awaken sympathy without exhibiting these works? Watts's record of exhibiting these works makes some sense in light of his exhibition history as a whole. He finished the series c.1850 and from 1851 to 1861 he exhibited no subject pictures of any consequence because his poor reception at the Royal Academy in 1849 and 1850 upset him greatly. He exhibited no subject pictures at all from 1851-58. In 1859 he exhibited *Isabella* which was in reality a portrait, as was *The Window Seat* exhibited in 1861. It was not until 1864, when Watts exhibited *Time and Oblivion*, that he was beginning again to send to exhibitions what he considered his most serious works. Fourteen or more years had passed since his social realist phase so it is not
surprising that he failed to promote publicly this terminated phase of his art. In 1875 Watts did exhibit at the Dudley Gallery, Piccadilly, *Found Drowned* (date disputed; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), then in the possession of Charles Rickards. He had sold this small version of the painting to Rickards, but it remained the only social realist painting Watts sold.

All Watts's social realist paintings were exhibited in the Grosvenor 1881/82 one-man show along with a great percentage of his other quite different works. They were not hung together, but rather spread throughout the gallery reducing the impact they might have had as a group. This was the only time *The Irish Famine* and *The Song of the Shirt* were exhibited during Watts's lifetime. *Found Drowned* was exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1862, the Dudley in 1875, the Grosvenor in 1881-82, New York 1884, Birmingham in 1885 and Whitechapel in 1903. *Under a Dry Arch* he exhibited in the Grosvenor show 1881-82, Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel 1891 and Victoria Hall, Southwark in 1894. From the 1880's onwards, Watts was exhibiting paintings in galleries all over England almost constantly. Almost every work he had in his studio collection circulated widely but the social realist paintings seem to have been exhibited with caution and were never exhibited as a group.

The reason that Watts never exhibited *The Irish Famine*
in his later career may seem to reflect a diminished interest in the Irish struggle, but in fact Watts's interest in Ireland did not flag. In an undated note Watts wrote;

> Idiotic culpable indifference to Irish opinions and necessities which have resulted in the development of the worst qualities of National character and which will in future history cause Irish struggle for independence ... If we have been so wrong and so unfeeling as there is much reason to believe we have been, we ought to retrace our steps ....

On May 7, 1896 Watts wrote to Gladstone, a long time associate;

> ... the appalling difference between the very rich and the very poor! ... many generations so frightfully unjust to Ireland, cruelty and injustice whose bones do live and will live returned to us in the rotten machinery for which we have forsaken precious human means and endowments ....

Watts's feelings for Ireland were strong, but he nonetheless found it unacceptable to exhibit this painting. The reason for its non-exhibition appears to concern both iconography and style. Above all this is an image of resignation and despair; and one of the main objectives of Watts's later paintings was to develop an iconography that would make the intensity of despair into a virtue. The iconography of this painting is the opposite of that of his later paintings such as Hope. Furthermore, the style and commonplace subject matter was not satisfactory to Watts even as early as 1853;
To the painter of actualities the materials are ever available and good. There is nothing to prevent the perfect success of another Hogarth. The details of everyday life and the police courts, looked at from a philosophical point of view, furnish subjects perhaps superior, certainly more affecting, than the majority of these treated by earlier painters. But still the beautiful, the dignified and the glowing form part of our national wants, and cannot be given up without regret. 41

What Watts did was to abandon his realist style without regret for what he saw as a more significant and elevating style. Watts later strongly believed that;

The purest art can no more be evolved by representation of purely material facts, however interesting and impressive in reality, than the noblest music can be produced by the imitation of natural sounds.42

Furthermore, painting or exhibiting in a realist style would have tended to undermine the validity of his style. He told Spielmann:

The PRB was right in its way, but I was right, too, in mine. There are often several right ways of doing a thing especially in art.43

The one thing that Watts most believed was right was that there is no one right way, no one truth. For Watts, the realists most arrogantly defied that truth.

It appears likely that it is for many of these same reasons that Watts exhibited The Song of the Shirt only once in his lifetime. The repeated exhibition of Found Drowned
suggests that Watts viewed it in a different light. Exhibited without connection to Under a Dry Arch and The Song of the Shirt, it is a painting that extolls beauty and conventional views of femininity by leading the viewer to feel that, if only he could do something, such charming lives could be saved. Such a message was not inconsistent with the iconography of the paintings Watts produced and exhibited in his later career. It seems appropriate therefore that he should exhibit this work and not his scenes of even greater despondency and despair. In his later life, to have exhibited Found Drowned as part of his social realist series would have been out of the question. When arranged with the other, more grim social realist paintings, the case of the suicide appears as that of a blessed release from life rather than that of an object of pity. Thematically, the highly pessimistic iconography of such an arrangement would be consistent with Watts's paintings of c.1849 such as Life's Illusions, (fig. 8) but, for Watts, it would have been thematically unacceptable by the 1880's.

Of the social realist paintings, Under a Dry Arch has an interesting exhibition record. As will be discussed, Watts exhibited several hundred paintings to the poor during his career, but the paintings he found most important for them to see did not include his social realist works despite
the fact that similar works by Frank Holl, Hubert von Herkomer and others were commonly exhibited to the poor. In the 1880's when Watts did exhibit this work in the slums his aspirational style was full blown. The iconography of paintings such as Hope, (fig. 27) Orpheus and Eurydice (fig. 60), The Happy Warrior (fig. 28) and others extolled the virtue of the painful struggle, and Watts hoped that this message would reach the poor. It appears quite possible that Under a Dry Arch was exhibited to the poor, not to arouse pity for them, but as a warning to them against giving up the fight. It is a painting of wretchedness displayed to those most likely to take that same grim path. Despite the fact that Watts almost certainly did not originally conceive Under a Dry Arch for this use, he appears to have employed it in the 1890's in such a fashion. Otherwise, he believed strongly that his allegorical paintings would do the poor the most good, and it appears from some letters and reports he received that he was not entirely wrong.44

One painting that Watts produced in the grand style in sympathy with the lower classes early in his career was The Good Samaritan (1849-52; Manchester City Art Gallery, fig. 13). As Staley points out;

When the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy, the catalogue contained the statement, "Painted as an expression of the artists admiration and respect
for the noble philanthropy of Thomas Wright of Manchester, Vide Chamber's Edinburgh Journal." As the statement implies, Watts had read in a magazine article about Thomas Wright, foreman in a Manchester iron foundry, who had dedicated himself to helping former convicts re-establish themselves in life, and unbeknown to Wright the picture became a tribute.45

In contrast to Millais, who attempted to interpret specific moments in time in works such as The Rescue (1855, National Gallery of Australia, Melbourne), Watts attempted to produce a more universally relevant image, in this case inspired by Wright's actions for convicts. For Watts, charity was the concern, and not simply Thomas Wright's charity. In his early career Watts assumed that by painting within the classical style, which had survived for nearly 2000 years, he would enhance the power of his art for years to come. In his attempts to be a painter of and for his day, he attempted to incorporate devices that would give his work a lasting meaning. Because of its classical foundation, his style, even though it was often innovative, was tainted and came to be seen as anachronistic.

The two monumental figures that dominate the canvas are Michelangelesque in proportion. Staley mentions that Michelangelo's Deposition in the Florence Cathedral is strikingly similar and that it is a likely source;46 but the factor that makes the figures so striking is the composition. These figures have great presence by the sheer
fact that they occupy a great percentage of the canvas. They are placed so far forward that their sculpturally rendered elbows and knees seem to protrude into the viewer's space. The figures further dominate the canvas and the viewer by looming far above the horizon line and by the fact that they are set against a virtually blank backdrop. Painters of the mid nineteenth century such as Courbet in The Stone Breakers (1849; Formerly, Museum, Dresden), Millet in Man with a Hoe (1859-62; Private collection, on loan to the California Palace of the Legion of Honour, San Francisco), Hunt in The Shadow of Death (1873; City Art Gallery, Manchester), Millais in The Return of the Dove to the Ark (1851; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), Dyce in Joash Shooting the Arrow of Deliverance (1844; Kunsthall, Hamburg), and Ary Scheffer in Dante and Beatrice (City Art Gallery, Wolverhampton) often placed monumental figures in a shallow space, but none of these artists used such a bold, simple, and iconic presentation for a painting of this scale.

The effect of the painting is arresting. It has the impact of an eye-catching shop sign, and employs the same simplified compositional devices. Through this format, not unknown in paintings such as J.L. David's Napoleon Crossing the Alps (1800, Versailles) Watts's painting operates as a vehicle for propaganda. It promotes the deeds of all good
samaritans rather than Wright's deeds in particular.

In 1852 Watts donated this work to the Manchester Town Hall, where, in the home town of Wright, it could honor his work for convicts and promote civic virtue in general. In the same year Watts was serving the Governesses' Benevolent Institution in London, which was established, in part, to care for ex-governesses who otherwise would have been living on the street. The concern for poor women which brought Watts to paint *Found Drowned*, *Under a Dry Arch*, and *The Song of the Shirt* brought him shortly thereafter to paint a fresco at the Governesses Benevolent Institution with figures drawn from the Elgin Marbles. This high art style, rather than his previously employed social realist style, is what Watts thought should be displayed before these women.

This institution is of considerable interest in light of the fact that Watts associated himself with it. It had on its staff the well known reformist, F.D. Maurice, as chairman of Education of Queen's College, its education branch. The "Outline of the Institution" stated:

> The Governesses' Institution has been established, to raise the character of Governesses as a class, and thus to improve the tone of Female Education: to assist Governesses in making provision for their old age; and to assist in distress and age those Governesses whose exertions for their parents, or families have prevented such provisions ....

The *Times* of April 23, 1852 reported
An idea of the extent of the society's usefulness may be gathered from the few facts in connection with its working: In the past year temporary assistance has been sought for in 618 cases, and £950 has been expended in affording relief to the applicants. The annuities to the aged are now 49 in number, and are all granted from capital and not income ....

The fact that Watts chose to support this organization with his art is characteristic of his better-known, later involvement with Canon Barnett at Whitechapel and with other socially minded groups elsewhere.

By 1853 Watts had begun painting The Court of Death (see fig. 25), then titled the Angel of Death, now known in many versions. In later years it was stated that Watts conceived of the painting as a decoration for a mortuary chapel. Still later, it was stated that the original conception was for a decoration in a pauper's mortuary chapel in the slums. Although there appears to be no early document to establish the validity of this theory it seems plausible. The reason no scheme appears to have been realized is unknown.

In all versions of the painting, Death is painted as the great social leveler to whose altar all must come. A king and a knight resign their power before Death as a beleaguered poor man and a slave approach the altar to seek release from the pain of life. In a time honored iconography, Death comes as a sobering loss to the rich and
a release to the poor. Spielmann states that the painting "portraying for them the impartiality of Death, to whose call all must equally surrender."\textsuperscript{56}

This painting makes no call for social revolution, but rather offers a salve. Watts wanted the poor and oppressed to recognize themselves as of equal value to the rich, yet he wanted to maintain class structure.

Watts's outrage at the excesses of capitalism never drove him to socialism, rather he believed that each class should aspire to greatness in its own sphere. He stated in an interview quoted in part by Blunt that;

\begin{quote}
... I am not a socialist by any means, although I take what are called broad views of social questions. So far from being a Socialist, my inclinations are all the other way. I love pomp and ceremony: I would like to see a duke wear his ermine and a king his crown; I would like to see them drive about in gorgeous, picturesque state coaches, and I would like to see the nobility live again in the pompous and stately way of former ages. Also I would like the working classes to retain their distinctive dress, which was not only infinitely more picturesque, but also infinitely more dignified than the present straining to imitate the clothes of the wealthy ....\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Clearly Watts was no socialist, but he could easily sound like one:

\begin{quote}
Of this I am sure unless we do refer to principles, the principles laid down by the Founder of Christianity, the truest Socialist that ever lived, our national
\end{quote}
life is doomed ... The unequal balance of poverty cannot be permanent, a change must come in spite of oppressive interests in the security of which men have forgotten that the advantages they possess carry with them duties.

What Watts believed in is a kind of vigorous noblesse oblige that should, at least, eradicate poverty. Watts once wrote in verse;

Peace & good will, on promises made invain
Peace does not wreath her brow with ironklater
Nor good will spend her life in forging guns,
No, nor in gathering or in keeping gold
While in misery's throat starvation's rattle
Shores the palace gate.

Watts's social philosophy was not radical, but it was vociferous as was his painting.

The great percentage of Watts's paintings were not conceived specifically for the poor, although Watts hoped that they would be of use to the poor. Richard Dorment sees Peace and Goodwill (c.1888-1900; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 32) as "... a reworking of the Madonna and Child theme, showing the pair as homeless paupers." Such stimulating connections should not be taken too strictly for they are generated more by the viewer confronted by Watts's symbolist and suggestive style rather than by the iconography of the paintings.

In Industry and Greed (c.1892-1901; Watts Gallery, Compton, figs. 61 and 62) Watts directly addresses class conflict. The Daily Telegraph of April 23, 1901 saw it as
"Socialism in paint."61 Roger Fry enthusiastically praised this work for "... such magnificent plastic ideas as this of the figure of Labour ..." He states though that;

His Greed and Labour add nothing, so far as we can perceive to what the words convey to the average imagination. That Greed is cramped and contorted, that his hands clutch and his head is bent; that Labour is strong and somewhat stupidly good natured - these are surely the merest commonplaces ....62

Watts employs "such magnificent plastic ideas" for the figure of Labour because it pictorially expresses his belief that the reward of labour overwhelms that of greed. Spielmann correctly pointed out;

"Greed & Labour" W. claimed as socialist on this! But labour seems to have all his deserts - for he bears the fruit in his arms & greed the responsibility & care along with the pain of rapacity. Greed - intellect & rapacity; labour - happiness & stupidity.63

As with J.F. Millett, Watts believed that peasant life, with its brutalizing physical demands and its equally brutalizingly slight intellectual demands, could be a kind of ideal. In no way did Watts see peasant life as the ideal, but rather as one ideal among many; including the life of science, philosophy, art, etc.

Wilfrid Blunt cleverly points out a visual fact in the painting that surprisingly has been missed. The figure of Greed is Watts. Greed wears the skull cap that Watts constantly wore.64 Perhaps this self portrait is the
realization of a long running inside joke between Watts and his wife Mary, who was constantly trying to get more of his money for her many social projects.\textsuperscript{65} This painting offers an interesting view into the private life of the artist, and the fact that Blunt discovered this self portrait is a testimony to the great interest he took in that side of the man.

The public Watts was generous to the poor with his money, his paintings, and his energies despite the fact that he produced only a few social realist works. The scarcity of such paintings among his works has led Allen Staley and others to see the expression of Watts's social consciousness as lacking "concrete sympathy with the poor." Staley writes;

\begin{quote}
... as David Loshak has pointed out its expression later [after 1850] took "the form of abstract hostility to the rich rather than concrete sympathy with the poor."\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

No doubt, Watts's paintings do demonstrate hostility to the rich, but Watts's active interest in exhibiting his paintings to the poor also demonstrates his concrete sympathy with them. It may come as a surprise that his allegorical paintings were more enthusiastically received by the poor than the social realist paintings of other artists, such as Herkommer, whose works were shown at the same exhibitions.\textsuperscript{67}
Watts, along with William Morris and others, was an early member of the Kyrle Society founded c.1878. In 1881 Barrington wrote in *Good Words* an article entitled "The 'Kyrle Society'" in which she states that:

The object of the society is to bring "beauty home to the poor," and it proposes to itself the following means of carrying out this object: "to decorate by mural paintings, pictures, and mission-rooms. To lay out as gardens any available strips of waste ground ... To organise a voluntary choir of singers to give oratorios and concerts to the poor."68

Not surprisingly, Watts was enthusiastically involved in promoting mural decorations through the Kyrle Society. Barrington reports in the same article that:

In a paper written by Mr. Watts (also a member of the Kyrle Society), and read at the Social Society meeting ... He suggested that any native talent in a parish should be encouraged to decorate walls of their own public rooms, by first copying and enlarging prints from our best illustrated newspapers, the subjects chosen being those which would appeal most to the latent enthusiasm for heroic deeds ... - such subjects as launching a lifeboat, the saving of a crew, the brave scenes which occur at nearly every fire.69

The fact that Watts could suggest that scenes from everyday life, drawn from newspaper illustrations, could serve as effective public murals proves that he still believed in the usefulness of the social realist approach he used c.1850. Even so, he thought he could be more effective in his own
style.

In 1885, Watts joined the St. George's Guild which, as Chapman aptly states, "... was a Utopian scheme to wean England from industrial materialism." It does not appear, though, that Watts functioned as a very active member. Ruskin wrote to thank him for his promise of help for the Guild. Watts responded;

I hope you [Ruskin] understand I intend to join you in your scheme confessing that I am not sure it will result in any practical success, I know nothing about that, perhaps it is entirely utopian, I don't care, it is a protest against mammon worship ....

Watts certainly did not support the group blindly.

Documents demonstrating Watts's financial commitment to social projects are not numerous, but they do show a persistent involvement in such schemes. Barrington explains Watts's social concerns partly as a matter of guilt;

Watts ate his frugal supper ... The meal was always the same - the cold remains of the dull little pudding made without sugar which had been hot for his dinner in the middle of the day, and a tumbler of milk mixed with barley water: summer and winter, never any change ... To have as much as that distressed him and when he thought of all the people who were starving he could hardly eat it!"

Watts's guilt never drove him to poverty or anything approaching it, but he did manifest some of his concern by parting with some of his money which he accumulated by
selling paintings for an average price of just over £400. On January 23, 1873 Ruskin wrote to Watts to thank him for his donation to *Fors Clavigera*. On July 27, 1875 Watts promised Mrs. Nassau Senior £100 for an orphan fund. In 1895 Watts announced his intention to donate £1000 to the Home Arts and Industries Association. Also in 1895 he donated a drawing to the Cruelty to Children Society Bazaar. In real terms, Watts accomplished relatively little through his donations, but he did go beyond them to participate in several social causes.

He was involved in the Century Art Guild, founded in 1884, which had A.H. Mackmurdo and William Morris, among others, as members. In the January, 1890 edition of *The Hobby Horse*, the magazine of the Century Art Guild, Watts supplied the lead article on "The National Position of Art." In 1886 he offered his services to help raise money for King's and University Colleges; together with Walter Crane and E.J. Poynter by designing *tableaux vivants* for a production of *Aeschylus in Piccadilly*. In 1899 Watts allowed a detail from his *A Dedication, Angel of Pity* (1898–1899; Watts Gallery, Compton) to be used as the frontispiece of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's politically radical *Satan Absolved: A Victorian Mystery*. With reference to the frontispiece Blunt states;

... the hypocrisy and all-acquiring greed of modern England is an atrocious
spectacle - one which, if there be any
justice in Heaven, must bring a curse
from God as it has surely made angels
weep. /9

On May 18, 1900 Watts wrote a startling letter to *The Times* in an attempt to begin a social movement of his own
which would move some of the poor on to naval training
vessels;

Statistics tell us that 270,000 persons
are annually sent to prison; paupers,
many able-bodied, 1,021; tramps,
100,000. What can the children of these,
stunted physically, morally, and
intellectually become? Eventually,
certainly the greater part, a burden,
affliction, and danger to the nation.
Now, by coercion, the most considerable
number might be taken and trained in
national schools, by preference, naval
schools, and still by preference, in
small incomplete vessels round the
cost; small ships readily put into a
state of efficiency to become most
likely a most important addition to the
Navy ....

His wish was to help the poor and eliminate the social
danger of poverty by forcing them into schools at sea which
would have the side benefit of strengthening the navy.
Watts was clearly neither a civil libertarian nor a
pacifist. A militaristic solution suggested itself to Watts
for he believed that war was a fact of life. About this
date, when the Boer War was being widely condemned, he wrote
a letter to the International Crusade for Peace which was
printed in a contemporary journal;

I confess to feeling that nothing will
put an end to war but extermination of the human race or dreadful approximate possibility.

The story of humanity from the beginning has ever been written in letters of blood; even the most spiritual aspirations have been weighted down, stained and clotted beyond every other endeavour. 81

Watts was no idealist, but rather a harsh, pragmatic thinker and a pessimist. He expected that no truly radical reforms could work.

What reforms Watts actively promoted were modest reforms. In 1893 Watts was one of the founding members of the Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery: "The aim of the Company was to apply artistic qualities to objects of everyday use," and by 1894 he became deeply involved in the Home Arts and Industries which had similar intentions. 82

Watts wrote on December 9, 1894;

At this moment I am employed very seriously in an endeavour to develop means which I feel to be of the greatest importance ... The imparting of interest into households here of any sense of the beautiful or indeed of any interest in art at all. This is what is known as the Home Arts .... 83

In an interview in The Westminster of 1896 Watts said that;

... it [The Home Arts and Industries] is not a charity. It is not a question of divine dividend either, or I would have nothing to do with it; and it is not an institution giving technical instruction, or I would have least of
all to do with it ... Now, what is first and foremost among the reasons which make a nation strong and great? Work, not machine work, but work into which the worker puts his pride, his joy, his happiness. Therefore, the sooner we return to handicrafts, the better for us as a nation.  

Watts wanted nothing to do with bringing money to the church or with providing technical instruction for machine work. He expressed his interest in bringing art to common people and in making their work more meaningful and enjoyable. In this respect Watts is similar to his socialist contemporaries William Morris and Walter Crane; but Watts's involvement belied a more conservative sympathy with the poor and never reflected a socialist ideology.

In the last years of his life, Watts's involvement with social projects was devoted mainly to the village of Compton, near Guildford, where he and his wife established an important extension of the Home Arts and Industries Association. Mary Watts wrote on December 7, 1900;

I designed the chapel in Compton (which was my husband's gift) and all the decorations and began the scheme with two objects: to carry out my husband's earnest wish to give our village people interesting work, and to make the field where the dead were to lie, at once a spot of interest to the village.

The pottery at Compton, established by the Wattses, was an outgrowth of this concern for the villagers and it survived Watts by many years.
Despite the considerable interest he took in projects such as the Home Arts and Industries Association, Watts was more concerned with taking his paintings to the poor as a way to benefit the lower classes. At Whitechapel, under the auspices of Canon Barnett, in 1881 Watts began many years of exhibiting in the slums. E.T. Cook wrote in *The Magazine of Art* an article entitled "Fine Arts in Whitechapel" in which he states that "Mr. Watts set the example for his brother artists of lending pictures .... "86) Canon Barnett wrote in 1898; "... it was Mr. G.F. Watts who more than any other artist encouraged us. He lent many of his pictures and his own faith made faith .... "87 These statements reflect the fact that Watts was the artist most responsible for bringing paintings to the poor in Whitechapel.

Cook reports in 1884 that, "*Love and Death* especially appealed to them [the Whitechapel visitors] ... Partly perhaps, Mr. Watts's allegorical pictures have been liked for their very mystery .... "88 Watts's *Time, Death and Judgment* was the best received painting at Whitechapel. It was so popular that, as mentioned in Chapter III, it was converted into mosaic to commemorate the efforts of Canon Barnett. Barnett wrote in April of 1882;

Never in my intercourse with my neighbours have I been so conscious of their souls and their soul's needs as when they hung around me listening to what I had to say of Watts's picture "Time, Death, and Judgment." Never for
anything I have done in my position as
the vicar of this parish have I received
such gratitude as I did for this use of
the schoolroom on Earth.89

Watts sent so many works to Whitechapel that in 1892 he
could write to Mrs. Barnett saying that;

I have nothing in the gallery that has
not been seen in Whitechapel over and
over again excepting two small things
[things which he was proposing to lend]
....

In 1897 Punch published a poem entitled "Watts for
Whitechapel" including the following verse;

Pictures as good as sermons? Aye, much
better than some poor ones.
Where Whitechapel's darkness the weary
eyes of the dreary workers dims,
It may be found that Watts's pictures do
better than Watts's hymns.91

Watts continued to exhibit at Whitechapel as late as
1901 when he exhibited Industry and Greed. Watts exhibited
to the poor what he exhibited to the rich, and in this
respect he avoided the brand of sympathy for the poor which
is weighted with condescension.

Watts's exhibitions to the poor extended beyond
Whitechapel. The Hobby Horse of 1884 reported that he
contributed to a travelling exhibition called the Art for
Schools Association.92 On March 21, 1893 Watts laid the
foundation stone for the lecture hall and library adjoining
the South London Fine Art Gallery where he had been
exhibiting to the poor since at least 1892.93 The Daily
Chronicle of December 12, 1896 stated that Watts's Love and Death received the "popular verdict" when it was exhibited at the Bermondsey Settlement, "situated in one of the poorest and most dismal regions of the metropolis [London]."\textsuperscript{94} Watts also exhibited in the late nineties at the People's Palace which existed for the following stated purpose;

The encouragement of Social Unity, High Thought and Pure Pleasure is the hope of the Founders of the People's Palace. To attain this hope, all classes must work together.\textsuperscript{95}

By 1886 Watts's own gallery at Little Holland House was open to the public on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for no admission so that the poor, or other interested persons, could view his paintings for free.\textsuperscript{96} In March of 1904, Watts opened a gallery in Compton which functioned as part of the rural arts community that he and his wife had established in previous years. The gallery was open six days a week. On three days a week admission was free so that those without money would not be turned away.\textsuperscript{97}

Watts's social record is impressive, but it would be pure fantasy to assume that all of his motives were as pure as they might seem on the surface. What he did brought him fame, praise, money and even reverence; but nonetheless he did devote much of his energy as an artist to serving the lower classes. Whether or not he significantly bettered
their lot materially or spiritually remains an open question.
Chapter V

The Anti-Materialist Paintings

Watts's social realist paintings were an aberration. For him, social paintings needed to offer much more than documentation of particular social problems; he wanted to produce paintings that would be socially provocative whether or not the particular social horrors of the Irish famine or the plight of the seamstress continued to exist. Through painting in an allegorical style, Watts attempted to challenge and stir the broadest possible audience into acting and thinking in ways that would attack such social horrors. Political paintings of the past, such as those by J.L. David and Eugène Delacroix, were often so much a part of the political moments of their day that these works were seen as popular one day and offensive the next. On the other hand, paintings such as Watts's Hope (fig. 27) and Love and Life (fig. 26) were potent images that avoided reference to specific moments in time and thereby they avoided the pitfalls of political painting. As T.J. Clark points out, even a painting as vital as Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (1830; Louvre, Paris) failed to remain so as the revolution of 1830 passed into history:

This is the paradox of Liberty - no picture is more open, more compliant to the ideas and phases of its time, and yet no picture proved more offensive.
In the telling, symbol and anecdote turned sour. Watts's allegories were social, but they were also consciously apolitical.

In Watts's later paintings, the most important device he used to make his works last in the public eye was the device of iconographical and stylistic confusion. The paintings were almost always titled in a completely lucid way, such as *Time, Death and Judgment* or *Hope*, and allegorical figures made a powerful visual impact; but the iconography was rarely made completely clear, and the style, with its disorienting colors and dissolved forms, created an initial sense of ambiguity. Watts presented themes and manipulated his viewer into making his paintings meaningful so that they might glean something personally relevant, and usually that something was personally challenging. By using such devices Watts was able to affect his viewers by engaging them without preaching dogmatically. By depicting Hope as a huddled and blindfolded woman playing a lyre, seated on a globe in a blue haze, Watts was relying heavily on the viewer to make sense of his painting, and Watts was such a master of his own genre of social symbolism that he generally succeeded in persuading his viewer to make the effort.

Watts forced the viewer to make his own meaning from the elements he supplied. He did this not simply to make
his painting enduring, but because this style helped express his most fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of the world. Watts believed that men make reality, and this highly spiritual and subjective outlook finds a stylistic expression in paintings which are not immediately meaningful, but which demand the viewer to make them make sense. This approach applies in philosophical works such as The Genius of Greek Poetry, (fig. 37) in moralizing works such as Eve Tempted, (fig. 63) and in the whole range of Watts's allegories almost without exception.

In general terms, Watts's belief that reality is a function of man was not at all eccentric; it was the belief of the leading philosophers and thinkers of the century. To begin with, Carlyle stated, "The world of Nature, for everyman, is the Phantasy of himself; this world is the multiplex 'Image of his own Dream.'"² This notion Carlyle owes directly or indirectly to Hegel whose enormously influential philosophy held that reality itself is a manifestation of spirit, and whose philosophy held that the physical world evolves as culture evolves. Hegel's spiritual or cultural definition of reality set the tone for the whole century: the materialistic view of the world was in complete disrepute among the most progressive philosophers of the century for the entire century.³ Watts's work was an expression of this progressive
philosophy.

In his anti-materialist studies Watts read Carlyle, came to know Carlyle personally and painted three portraits of him. He also became an amateur scholar of religion and philosophy, owning the introduction to Hegel's *Aesthetics*, and frequently reading and discussing works in *Theosophy*, *Brahminism*, *Buddhism*, *Chaldeanism*, *Zoroastrianism*, *Christianity* and *Judaism*. He also read works by Renans, Emerson, Martineau, Montefiore and Max Müller among others. On October 25, 1895, Mary Watts made an entry in her diary which sums up a variety of religious and philosophical entries over the years; "Signor is quite a Brahmin!"

Relatively little has been done to explain Watts's anti-materialism even though it is fundamental to a sound account of his style and iconography in even his most prosaic allegories. For Watts, the world exists as an extension of the self, and he believed that the great flaw of materialists is that they take the world as something outside the self. In paintings such as *The Genius of Greek Poetry* (fig. 37), *She Shall be Called Woman* (fig. 64) and *Progress* (fig. 65), Watts expressed what he saw as the spiritual nature of man and the world. As mentioned in Chapter III, *The Genius of Greek Poetry* (1878; Watts Gallery, Compton) expresses Greek anthropomorphism: the fusing of the natural world with the human world. He
believed that there is more genius in seeing the sun as a man-like god riding a chariot across the sky than in seeing it as a hot rock or ball of gas that has been objectively understood.

In the sky of this painting Watts places a long arc of wispy paint which nearly takes on the form of a human figure at one end. Behind the arc and above the sea are distinguishable human forms of another three to five figures which echo the warm pinkish tones in the clouds above the horizon line. In the sea and on the shore are more figures which are almost indistinguishable from the surrounding water and air. What Watts had done was to dissolve human forms into his landscape so that the two could not be visually divided. Describing the central figure in the painting, The Victorian High Renaissance catalogue of 1978 correctly points out that;

> Although there are still echoes of Michelangelo, the pose of the figure of No. 25 [this painting] and the articulation of the body are more obviously reminiscent of the pediment figures from the Parthenon in the British Museum. 7

In this respect Watts is indeed conventional, in his handling of form and color in the rest of the painting he is anything but conventional. Even the most shimmering and evocative painting of the Venetian Renaissance rarely, if ever, approached the obliterations of the human form found
in this painting; in Venetian paintings gaseous effects were reserved for clouds and light, not for solid objects and especially not for the human form. Turner, Runge, Moreau and even the Impressionists could be mentioned as precedents, but their paintings seem to have evolved along completely different lines. For Watts, painting clouds as men, and men as clouds, was an effective way to make visually explicit his belief that it is the mind that frames the way we see the world: in this case, the Greek mind.

On November 13, 1894, Watts made the following statement of his spiritual beliefs;

There you see Nature has no outline, but I cannot do without one & that is just what happens in the spiritual worlds. To give anything form you must have bounding lines which do not really exist—Without the definite personal idea, one cannot well grasp it, do what you will the idea slips. 6

For Watts, being spiritual simply meant defining the world and thereby creating the world, and being materialistic simply meant failing to understand that the world is defined and thereby created by humans. 9

The visual sources for Watts's dissolved forms are difficult to trace for although such forms were common enough in the late 19th century among the symbolists, such treatments were rare in the 1850's. He was painting in this general manner as early as the mid 1850's in his murals at Carlton House Terrace, (fig. 66) but such a mixing of
landscape with human anatomy would not have been commonly found in the works Watts would have known. Figures traditionally have been linked with the elements, but they rarely become the elements. In a related style, Rossetti in the 1860's, in works such as *Beata Beatrix*, (fig. 67) softens forms and creates shimmering correspondences between forms in such a way that his canvas takes on the appearance of a dreamscape. But Rossetti's forms are not nearly as dissolved as Watts's in works such as *The Genius of Greek Poetry* (fig. 37). What is more, they differ strikingly in terms of iconography: Watts's style is a response to the Greek mind coming to terms with reality while Rossetti's softening of form reflects an escape into the mind.

*She shall be Called Woman* (1892; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 64) is a remarkable expression of the spiritual Watts. This painting presents a full length, erect woman whose body is blended in with the grass, the ground, the flowers, birds, clouds, and sunlight. There are numerous passages in which her form blurs so completely with the enveloping natural forms that distinguishing between the two is impossible. Her hair becomes clouds, her legs become birds, and her head becomes a great burst of light. The outlines of her hands, shoulders and neck all fade into the surrounding flecks of color which are not clearly definable as belonging to flesh, vegetation or cloud. Color is not
used simply to define form, but rather to break down outlines in some places and define them in others. The painting makes sense only when the viewer defines forms which are not defined in Watts's painting. Watts paints the woman's face as little more than a glowing smear of colors, her entire right hand as a crusty patches of blotches and her upper torso as an undifferentiated block of brightly colored flecks. Yet the viewer is able to read the colors that Watts puts down as tangible forms despite the fact that, in the paintings, these forms are simply not defined. The viewer creates fingers, breasts, birds and flowers, just as, iconographically, Eve is creating the world that explodes from her body around her.

*She Shall Be Called Woman* is an expression of Watts's long held belief recorded on February 20, 1893 "...that the only reality that exists is spiritual," and Watts's stated belief in "the Self in all." 10 Quite significantly, on November 12, 1894 Mary Watts records in her diary the following description of *She Shall Be Called Woman;* "Thoughts power a material existence." 11 The explosion of matter, in the form of birds, flowers, clouds and light, in Watts's paintings is indeed an emanation from Eve. This is not simply Eve newly created, as it is often described, but a modern spiritual Eve. Mary Watts quotes Watts as saying;

*It is not so much, or rather not all, the Eve of Genesis, nor Milton either.*
It is an incarnation of the spirit of our time, and a hope for the future. It is intended to suggest the very essence of life—strong, fresh, vital, electric—an embodiment of the ideal inheritance of humanity from its mother, of the spiritual, the loving, the beautiful. 

Against all conventional expectations, She Shall Be Called Woman is the middle painting in a series of three including Eve Tempted (fig. 63) and Eve Repentant. It was exhibited at the New Gallery show of 1896-97 in this position, as it was at the Tate Gallery. 

On July 3, 1891, before finishing the painting, Watts said;

She is of course The Eve new born, in her first feeling of life & sense of unused power & then she is besides the newly awakened woman, or mind of modern times. 

For "mind of modern times" with Watts it is always safe to read "spiritual." Furthermore, Mary Watts writes that;

He told me he wanted the figure not so much to stand in the light as to emit light. 

Watts's image of a modern woman emitting her own light is deeply indebted to the kind of thinking expressed in nineteenth-century philosophy and certain Eastern religions and Theosophy.

Hegel's and Carlyle's spiritual theories were not readily adaptable to painting, but Theosophy was more easily adapted. Its visual descriptions and illustrations of the
spiritual world became a source book for artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian, and it may be possible that Watts drew on theosophical tracts and illustrations for his paintings such as *She Shall Be Called Woman* and *The Messenger* (fig. 68). To state the matter simply, Theosophists believed that clairvoyants could see colored auras surrounding organic and inorganic matter. By interpreting these colors, clairvoyants claimed to see the spiritual states of the world in such a precise way that they could even visually distinguish between mental states in others. In this theory of spiritual perception, colors seen by the adept have specific contents; "a faint violet, mist-like form represents the Astral Man with an oviform bluish circle, over which radiate in ceaseless vibrations the prismatic colors."¹⁶ This passage from the *Esoteric Instructions* of the Theosophical Society of 1890 is but one of numerous written descriptions of the spiritual content of colors. These *Instructions* also included several color tables spelling out the spiritual correspondences of colors, as well as color diagrams representing the various spiritual emanations of man such as the Auric Envelope. Theosophists had a system for describing the spiritual world through colors, and they had a method for depicting the spiritual make up of individual men. As an artist devoted to the visual representation of the spiritual nature of
"true being," it would be had to imagine that Watts had not taken a close look at Theosophy.

Madame Blavatsky, the spiritual leader of the Theosophists, moved to London in May of 1887 while Watts was on his honeymoon in Egypt. Shortly after his return to England in June of 1887, Watts was investigating Theosophy. As early as 1889 Mary Watts records that he was discussing Theosophy. On July 13, 1890 he said, "Their [theosophists] ideas are far more Christian than many...."

In August of 1891 Mary Watts was quoting Laurence Oliphant whose writings were pseudo-theosophical in nature. On November 1, 1891 she writes, "1st mention of Sir Oliver Lodge," another important pseudo-theosophical figure.

In August of 1892 the diary twice mentions Alaric Watts, a Theosophist who appears to have been visiting the Wattses. On November 19, 1892 she records:

Speaking of the theosophical & other so called miracles of today he said "Of course it is an illusion, but if you [illegible] that almost everything we see is an illusion, the very colour we see is not the same to other eyes, it is a matter to bear in mind for till we do we shall never understand a truth spiritually. The longer I live the more the spiritual conditions of humanity becomes interesting to me- so much so, that though I wont (sic) say they extinguish other interests they do overlie them. For the time the scientific* seems at war with & overpowering the spiritual but they must ultimately be found to reconcilable for men cannot get without them."
The entry for December 27, 1892 reads simply "Indian religion - all religion science," after which numerous direct references may be found to Buddhism and Brahminism. By 1894 Watts had sought out Friedrich Max Müller, a man well versed in Theosophy who published *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* in 1893 and edited *The Sacred Books of the East* of which the first Buddhist volume was among Watts's favorite books. On July 21, 1894 Watts asked Max Müller to sit for a portrait which Watts later included in his gift to the National Portrait Gallery.

Shortly before Watts's death Christopher Turnor, who had just completed designing the Watts Gallery at Compton, wrote:

I was surprised to find how intimately he [Watts] knew the teachings of the Theosophists. I had never before heard him talk about their theories before or Oriental mysticism but found he was quite as deeply versed as the ardent young Roman Theosophist I had lately been having conversation with.

*Theosophy* fits perfectly with the iconography of *She Shall Be Called Woman* (fig. 64) in which the material world is shown as a spiritual emanation, and *Theosophy* also agrees perfectly with what Watts said of the painting. It is also highly interesting that the painting that exists today was reworked in ways that make it understandable as a Theosophical work. The original version, documented in a photograph (fig. 69) taken before the painting was donated.
to the Tate Gallery in 1897, shows Eve without a surrounding cloud of gases, without dissolved body parts and without light streaming from her head. It seems likely that Watts employed Theosophical principles here to rework the painting. Such principles would have been difficult for an artist to ignore who was trying to find ways to express visually a belief he shared with Theosophy: that physical reality is an emanation. The rush of gold light emitting from Eve's head and the glowing envelope of clouds around her is not unlike theosophical descriptions of the spiritual appearance of spiritual men. To quote:

In the yogi, the "principles" of the lower Quaternary disappear entirely. Neither Red, Green, Red-Violet nor the Auric Blue of the Body are to be seen; nothing but hardly perceptible vibrations of the golden-hued Diana principle and a violet flame streaked with gold rushing upwards from the head.

The plate illustrating the spiritual man (fig. 70) may have inspired the hazy aura around Eve and the rush of light from her head; Theosophy does parallel Watts in a general way in its visual images of the spiritual world and in its theories. Nonetheless, there is no evidence to suggest that Watts was a dogmatic Theosohist: he was so opposed to elaborate metaphysical theories that it seems extremely unlikely that he could have been one, but he appears strikingly theosophical to one not initiated in the fine
points of the movement. Mrs. Barnett mentions a conversation with Watts about his *Messenger of Death* (fig. 68) which suggests he might have been using theosophical color theory which identifies blue with the deeply spiritual;

The background behind him [a dying man] is brown the brown of the earth; the background behind the Messenger is blue, the blue of the heavens; and "So much larger is the world behind the veil, that great as is the man here, he will be but as the little embryo babe carried in the Messenger's arms, when he has passed from brown to blue." These were the artist's words as he told me the meaning of his picture. 28

Despite the fact that Mary Watts records that Watts was complimented on having a blue soul, 29 an obvious Theosophical reference, the brown-blue color scheme need not be seen as Theosophical. If such a color scheme is applied, Watts's paintings such as *For He Had Great Possessions* (1894; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 71) and *The Sower of the Systems* (1902; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 72) become more interesting, for blue is placed in iconographically significant places; but in other contemporary works this color theory breaks down. If Watts used Theosophical color theory he did so only as it suited him.

Despite the seemingly logical tendency to see them as such, Watts's spiritual beliefs were not at all anti-scientific nor was the iconography of his paintings.
Progress (1888-1904; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 65) is one of Watts's most spiritual paintings, yet, as Turnor documents, it was painted in appreciation of science;

I once asked him why he was wearing a black band round his arm - he replied that he was in mourning for his countrymen - for their stupidity - for their apathy and their want of appreciation of Science! One of the most powerful pictures was painted to this end - to show how little appreciation of science there was in this country. "The Bowman on the White Horse - The Spirit of Progress - the old man poring over a book of past traditions - another gathering in gold from the mud, & dust yet another fast asleep and only a working man aware that the spirit of Progress was in the air."30

Science for Watts is the spiritual endeavor to redefine the world in better and better ways and therefore it has an integral part in spiritual progress. Progress is perhaps not so much an allegory as it is a painting of something Watts believed to be extremely real but not materially visible: that is simply the spirit of progress, painted as a rider on a white horse. This rider on a white horse, which is visible to only one of four men below, is not a specific theosophic symbol, but it is a manifestation of a similar spiritual notion.

Much of Watts's spiritual art consisted of attacks on materialism. He wrote in a letter dated June 18, 1891;

...the poetic gift is really of infinite value too often exercised in the direction of abstract generalities. I
should like to see it brought to bear like an Armstrong gun against our mammon worship especially.\footnote{31}

In his mature paintings, Watts also set his art consciously against what he saw as the materialism of realism, for he believed that nineteenth-century realists treated the world as an independent fact and not as an extension of the self. Watts rejected realism in order to produce a style which reflected what he saw as the fundamental, spiritual mystery of the world.

As early as 1849, Watts's anti-materialism is in evidence. *Life's Illusions* (1849; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 8), painted at the time of his social realist paintings, reflects not only a condemnation of greed, but a pessimism concerning the value of all human endeavors. Through his sumptuous and luxurious, Etty-like style he depicts nude women floating over a landscape littered with jewelry, gold coins, human bones and a crown.\footnote{32} A knight chases a bubble over a cliff, a scholar reads his way over the same cliff, and behind them a man is wooing a woman. This painting does not simply reflect anti-materialism, but is in fact completely misanthropic; and in this respect it differs from Watts's later, more propagandistic paintings. Rather cynically, Watts makes visually attractive the very things he treats as illusions, and as in Gleyre's *Lost Illusions* (1843; Louvre, Paris), Watts's painting is
visually appealing despite its morbid iconography.

Watts's attacks on materialism became more focused in the late sixties, after the collapse of his marriage to Ellen Terry. During this period his art aggressively acknowledges and attacks the power of sensuality. In this phase, his iconography draws from the traditional Puritanical conviction that the pleasures of the flesh are inherently materialistic and therefore of no value. His Eve Tempted (fig. 63) fills such a traditional role. Eve's face dissolves as she presses it into a mass of flowers and vegetation that surrounds her in such a way that her flesh is being absorbed by the bush into which she plunges. Unlike the Eve of She Shall Be Called Woman, who creates matter as a spiritual emanation, this Eve is literally consumed by matter. What is more, by obscuring Eve's face, washing out her breasts, and sprinkling her body with muscular growths that look like small tumors, Watts has produced a highly sensual subject but undercut the erotic appeal.

In terms of composition and subject, this painting is based on Choosing (1864; National Portrait Gallery, London, fig. 15), a portrait of Watts's first wife, Ellen Terry. As Wilfrid Blunt points out, Choosing "...shows her [Ellen Terry] trying to decide between the rival merits of a showy, scentless camellia, and the humble but fragrant violets in
her hand...." To read the iconography, she presses the "showy" but superficial, unsatisfying camellia to her face. Her head is turned to the left, her right arm is raised and her left arm is cocked creating a striking posture unmistakably duplicated in Eve Tempted which was conceived shortly after Watts's separation from Ellen Terry. Eve Tempted presents sensuality as a materialistic pitfall.

Clytie, Sans Merci (or Mischief) and Ophelia, all begun during the late sixties, address the dangers of sexual attraction but in ways not so directly linked with the issue of anti-materialism. Watts's Wife of Plutus of 1885 (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, fig. 73) reintroduce the theme of sex. Eroticism is by no means uncommon in Watts's work. As David Loshak correctly points out, through Watts's art "...there runs a persistent current of eroticism..." and Roger Fry believed rightly that "noble sensuality" was "the fond of his temperament," and Chris Mullen and Marilyn Board agree.34

The basis for such an interpretation lies not only with the paintings but within his writings. Watts wrote;

No feeling is so universal, so absorbing so powerful for good & evil as that which draws the two sexes together, the selfish unselfish of Love, what an absorption, & illumination of being.35

This quotation reveals not only that Watts recognized the power of sexual attraction; but that he recognized that it
was not necessarily evil and that it could have the power for good.

The *Wife of Plutus* (fig. 73) is Watts's most carnal painting. He presents a sensual, nude woman whose head falls back dramatically to expose the full line of her neck and breasts, and rather than being washed out her breasts are erotically displayed to the viewer. This nude is framed by a sensuous envelope of shimmering pillows, glistening jewels, richly painted sheets and a full head of sumptuously curled hair. These sensuous and sensual elements recall Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia* (1864-68; Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth, fig. 74), but the effect of Watts's painting is profoundly different: Watts's painting turns out to be highly disturbing and not at all attractive for he has depicted the wife of Plutus as ill. She has no erotic appeal but rather appears as a woman who is about to vomit, as her pained face twists into shadow and her wrist falls limp. This figure expresses nausea and despair.

Watts explained the meaning of his painting in a letter dated April 11, 1890 to the painting's buyer, "In the Wife of Pluto (sic) I wish to suggest the disease of wealth." When the painting was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1896-97 the catalogue entry included a verse from Eccles. vi 7, "And yet the soul is not filled." The visual and iconographic message is simply that the life of pure
sensuous pleasure is not enough, and that it is in fact diseased.

As with Hunt’s *Awakening Conscience* (1854; Tate Gallery, London), this image depicts a moment of spiritual change. Hunt’s woman rises from her lover’s lap and rejects her life of sin and crass materialism for the religious purity of her youth. Watts’s woman simply indicates that her luxurious life has made her sick.

This is a *vanitas* image but it functions in terms of posture and lighting, and not in terms of traditional symbols such as skulls, extinguished candles, and hour glasses. Watts conveys his meaning through pictorial devices. He cleverly uses deeply sensuous imagery to lead to a sense of revulsion and angst for the viewer. Furthermore, the painting reflects the personal side of Watts. As Barrington states;

> In 1886, I remember his saying, “It is a strange thing, but as soon as anything belongs to me, I feel inclined to think little of it.”

Watts believed the life of luxury leads to a life of want, and to address such an issue as a painter was, for Watts, to play a social role.

*Mammon* (fig. 29) is Watts’s most dogmatic and propagandistic anti-materialist painting. It was exhibited for the first time in 1885 with the following catalogue entry;
"Mammon. Dedicated to his Worshippers" is the righteously scornful title of a singularly powerful work. Here is the god of wealth, robed in gold and scarlet: brutal, coarse bull-necked, loathsome. See how he crushes down, with his clumsy foot and vile unsparing hand, whatever is weak and gentle and timid and lovely. Note that this being is not wantonly cruel. It is mere brutal indifference; utter heedlessness of things on which he treads or which his vile hand bruises.39

When exhibited in 1896-97 the description in the catalogue listed more of its striking features;

The god, his face expressive of avarice, cruelty and insolence, and his head flanked by asses ears, seated towards right, and decked in gorgeous but ill-fitting draperies; his right hand rests heavily on the head of a crouching woman, and his left foot is placed on the prostrate figure of a man; in his lap are money bags.40

Watts said of Mammon in his prefatory note to the 1896-97 catalogue; "'Mammon' speaks for itself."41

In fact the message is presented as blatantly and obviously as possible so that the accompanying text is made into an unnecessary reiteration. Unfortunately, the bulk of the criticism generated by this painting, and other similar paintings, consists of painstaking descriptions of what is baldly obvious: this is a propagandistic painting which portrays greed, or mammon, as a brutal and dehumanizingly indifferent force.

Watts achieves the power of this image by using bold,
conventional pictorial devices. The skulls, money bags, and asses' ears are immediately obvious conventional symbols. The slack muscles in the face of Mammon are exaggerated to the point of caricature to express his utter indifference, and the attractive male and female nudes brutalized by Mammon obviously call for pity. The composition of *Mammon* derives from a highly traditional formula used for allegorical figures such as "Charity" in which the idea is conveyed by showing a woman hold or nurse infants. This traditional form of allegorical composition was not common in the nineteenth century in British painting, but it could be seen in France especially in allegories of "Liberty," "The Republic," "France," and so on. In England it persisted, though, in another sphere: in political cartoons and pub signs.

It may be the case that the simple power of this painting does draw in part from contemporary advertisement. Watts wrote in an undated note

...the modern system (detestable) advertisement might be applied in its fullest force, with every means taken to impress upon the public the meanness and danger of the idea that has taken possession it is to be feared of every class that cheapness is the first great object alike unjust, uncaring and suicidal.

In *Mammon* Watts is forming a kind of modern advertisement against unjust, uncaring, and suicidal cheapness; and it is
not unreasonable to assert that he was drawing on contemporary advertisement such as shop signs to make his message more effective.

**Sic Transit** (fig. 76) is more sophisticated in terms of iconography and yet when read on the lowest level conveys a simple, powerful message. It is a painting of a shrouded corpse, material human possessions, and a tapestry upon which is embroidered "What I spent I had, what I saved I lost, What I gave I have." Set above a corpse, these words carry the same force as a highway sign, such as "Get right with God," on a hair pin turn next to a cluster of which crosses. Even so, Watts's meaning operates on a higher level, too.

Barrington makes some very important observations upon this painting.

So in Watts' painting. Behind the sensuous glory of colour, the richness of texture and quality, and the serenity of Pheidian form, we find a weird melancholy note. In his greatest pictures, that note belongs to the theme as well as the feeling. In the 'Sic Transit' we have the triumph of his art. Here there is no rift in the sky-nothing to lift off the brooding melancholy of the theme, no hint to lead the thought upwards from the transitory to the eternal.  

Barrington's visual analysis seems to neglect the inscription within the painting, for "What I gave I have" is far from a melancholy thought; and yet Barrington's visual
analysis is entirely sound. What is obvious in a superficial reading is mystifying upon reflection.

The words of Watts and Mary Watts on this painting are helpful, as is a consideration of the painting in relation to Watts's oeuvre and his ideas. Mary Watts stated;

During the winter the picture 'Sic Transit' was completed, and he gave it that title, preferring to use these two words only, without the addition of 'Gloria Mundi'. His intention in the picture was not so much the passing of the glory of the world but rather the end of all human existence. When I read a letter to him from a preacher who had used this picture as the text for a sermon, Signor remarked, "He makes the mistake of imagining a person, and not taking the shrouded figure as the symbol of human life ended, and with all its possibilities laid away." 45

Watts stated elsewhere;

'Sic Transit' is an illustration of a noble medieval inscription, having a general application; not symbolical of either individual Life or Death. 46

Set at a time after the end of all human existence, this is a painting, most of all, of an inscription. What Watts had done was to pose for himself a very strange question: When mankind is gone, what of value will remain? What can be admired?

Everything in the painting is heaped up as refuse except for the tapestry inscription, which assumes an ironic but nonetheless sentimental position in the painting. This embroidered platitude is no longer of use to any man, and
yet Watts gives it a place of honor that suggests that its value is in some way eternal. For Watts, such ideas are the only things that last; in fact they are the only things that are real. As discussed in Chapter I, art and literature were for Watts undying products of the spiritual side of man. As an expression of this belief, Sic Transit is one of Watts's most innovative and thoroughly anti-materialistic paintings, for in it he has made an idea more real than the physical world. By painting this idea as a tapestry rather than as an allegory, such as Mammon, Watts has visually expressed the notion that ideas are concrete, in fact more concrete than material reality. The viewer is allowed to look in on the world after the death of all men to be confronted nonetheless with words and their meaning: the words survive as all else passes away. The validity of the spiritual over the material is expressed visually in Watts's art in many ways, but never again with such intellectual genius.

For He Had Great Possessions (fig. 71) illustrates the following passage from the New Testament, Mark X, 21, 22:

Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing though lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions.

This man had refused Christ's request that he give his
riches to the poor.

In this painting, the rich man turns his back, drops his head and hides his face, but Watts makes the viewer seem quite close to him, so close that his feet lie outside the canvas creating the effect that they lie beyond peripheral vision. The viewer presses in upon this man who is seeking privacy, yet the sense of shame and vulnerability in the man's posture leads to a sense of empathy. The most conspicuous feature in the painting is the great white sleeve which is painted in Watts's most sumptuous style. It contrasts strikingly with the crudely painted flesh along the man's neck and head and with the flat, dark brown colors of his massive robe. The effect is to link luxury with gloom. It is significant that Watts is using flashy brush strokes, almost in the manner of Sargent, to portray the cause of this man's spiritually dead life. As Spielmann correctly argued:

That he could be as dexterous as any, we may ascertain from the study of his early pictures. But he has long since cast it aside, and forsworn it as a vanity; despised it, as all vanity should be despised ....

However, in this unusual case, Watts does demonstrate his dexterity but he makes it into part of his iconography of vanity. In this sense, this painting is an attack not only on possessors of luxury, but on painters who produce luxury.

Industry and Greed, (figs. 61 and 62) discussed in
Chapter IV, is yet another painting in which wealth is shown as unfilling. In *Can These Bones Live?* (1897-98; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 77) wealth is shown as a crushingly destructive force to England, if not to the planet as a whole. In contrast to most of Watts’s paintings, this painting is littered with symbols. J.E. Phythian rather accurately describes the symbols in the paintings as follows:

A heavy pall of gold has weighed down some of the branches of England’s oak, on the stem of which the words “Alfred me planted” are well-nigh effaced. Beneath the pall are human skeletons; and the drunkard's cup, the gambler's dice, and the assassin's knife, witness to the evils that have accompanied Mammon worship, dragged men down to earth and threatened the nation with decay; while implements of labour lie broken and disused.

This is a black and desolate landscape that is far from subtle in its iconography. Absorption with material goods is presented as bringing absolute devastation.

On May 7, 1896 Watts wrote a letter to Gladstone expressing the kind of outrage which produced this painting.

I wonder what Hosea and Ezekiel would say now in our England, of our mammon worship, drunkenness, gambling and appalling difference between the very rich and the very poor! and want of sympathy which has made us through many generations so frightfully unjust to Ireland, cruelty and injustice whose bones do live and will live returned to us in the rotten machinery for which we have forsaken precious human
endowments....

The "rotten machinery" mentioned in Watts's letter may appear in *Can These Bones Live*? as a cause of ruin rather than as a symbol of abandoned labor as Phythian suggests. The cog wheel that lies among other pieces of metal and tools seems to symbolize what was for Watts another great ill: industrialized labor. This highly conventional painting is reminiscent of Hogarth's print, *Bathos*. It similarly depicts the end of time, but in Watts's work destruction is caused by Mammon worship and greed, or to put it more philosophically, destruction is caused by materialism.

In a letter dated February 6, 1875 Watts wrote one of his typical laments;

> Perhaps the love of art is not quite the only reason which induces me to relinquish the idea of making money or saving it, I grieve to see how strongly these considerations influence almost everybody. I think it a most serious fault and one that will bring most serious consequences and most signal punishment upon the Nation, love of wealth and love of Drink! We want a Jonah!

In 1894-95 Watts tried to become a Jonah by painting one. His *Jonah* (1894-95; Tate Gallery London, fig. 78) is undoubtedly one of his most jarring images. It is based on Noel Paton's *Vision of Ezekiel* of 1893 (location unknown, illustration in the Witt Library) and Salvator Rosa's *Jonah*
Preaching at Ninevah, (Copenhagen, fig. 79) but it is much more startling than either. As with For He Had Great Possessions, Watts crops the legs of this nearly life-size figure so that it seems to be extremely near the viewer. Jonah's arms are radically foreshortened and extended towards the viewer so that they appear to move into our space almost as a 3-D Frankenstein. This horror movie analogy is by no means excessive as Jonah's fingers, muscles and face are contorted to produce a highly theatrical, monstrous image: Watts is pulling all the stops to shock the viewer.

As Blunt points out, Watts produced this painting in response to an article he had read that outraged him.

> He had just read with horror an article in The Spectator which Richard Hutton its editor ('who was, he believed a religious man'), had allowed to be published and in which it was stated that gambling - 'a habit [said Watts] which was known to be often the cause of suicide, of forgery, of ruin' - was not in itself immoral.51

For Watts, gambling was one of the most pernicious forms of materialism for it destroys the spiritual side of man. In low relief on the wall behind Jonah are etched in a Persian style scenes of gambling and scenes of men kneeling before bags of gold. Spattered on the wall is blood or red wine.

Jonah is a remarkable painting for its sheer ugliness and its power of holding the eye. The sight of Jonah's face
is extremely unattractive. Watts tips his face back so that the viewer sees into the roof of his opened mouth, into his flaring nostrils and into his enormous, distorted right eye.

In his most visually interesting paintings, Watts's style, not only his subject matter, was consciously anti-materialist. He had painted in a Pre-Raphaelite style on occasions in the 1850's, but he resisted the realism of the Pre-Raphaelites in part because he saw it as a materialistic approach to nature, and one which ignored the role he believed the mind must play in relation to reality. Watts wrote that;

Profoundly deep in the human exists a spiritual yearning dependent on no special creed, questionings by Nature left without response, yearning the most perfect knowledge of material things will never stifle. The true prophet, be his language prose or poem, art or music, can transport to regions where earth takes its place among stars and something beyond of heayen's infinity seems borne upon the air.\(^{52}\)

Clearly, the "perfect knowledge of material things" presented in the style of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood offered for Watts little opportunity for spiritual transport, and so he rejected their style as materialistic.

His allegories, or "symbolic suggestions"\(^{53}\) as he preferred to call them, generally operate as rebuses or puzzles that become meaningful only through the efforts of the viewer. The viewer is called upon to formulate his own
interpretation rather than being presented with anything obvious. Watts wrote that:

My desire is not to make the thing seen but felt, not an existence but a consciousness. A great work of Art should seem to be an emanation rather than a construction.54

In this way Watts's art was designed to function as an extension of the viewer and not as a distinct object. The viewer spiritualizes the painting by making sense of it. In his article, "The Aims of Art," in The Magazine of Art Watts suggested a way to create works of art that would be heavily dependent upon the viewer for meaning. In this way works of art would be made explicitly spiritual;

Where the expression of these is vague, as in music the utterance will be differently construed, and in the art that would be suggestive rather than representative of material fact, very various emotions and definitions may be conveyed.55

Watts's interest was to make paintings that would convey very various definitions, or to state it in a less tortured way, Watts's interest was to make paintings that would be interpreted differently by different people. Oddly enough, Watts's approach can be seen as a kind of realism. He believed that the world itself has meaning only through people who define it and thereby give it meaning; so by painting works that seem raw and undefined, Watts is painting the real world: the world which man makes
meaningful. Through his paintings, Watts attempted to spread such modern, spiritual notions to all those in society who could understand, and at the same time he believed that those who disagreed with his ideas and those who objected to his style ultimately remained signs of a healthy, diverse culture. Watts was determined not to become dogmatic.⁵⁶
Chapter VI

The Anti-dogmatic Paintings

Watts's interest in anti-dogmatism led him to produce paintings which in terms of style alone sparked much praise from critics including John Ruskin, Algernon Swinburne and Roger Fry and which sparked much scorn from critics including Harry Quilter, George Moore and Robert de le Sizarrane. At the turn of the century, Richard Muther wrote with unqualified enthusiasm,

There is a mark of style about everything in Watts, and it is no external and borrowed style, but one which is his own, a style which a notable man, a thinker and a poet, has fashioned for the expression of his own ideas. That is what makes him a master of contemporary painting and of the painting of all times.

On February 26, 1893 Watts said, "I know that from my earliest days I have felt Theology to be the death of religion—all doctrine and dogmas are its very negation." As quoted in Chapter I, on July 13, 1890 he said, "The two inventions most disastrous to man are theology & Metaphysics." Watts's strong anti-dogmatism pervaded his conversations and his paintings. In works such as Justice: A Hemicycle of the Lawgivers (fig. 14) Watts extolls the virtues of all civilizations, in The Daughter of Herodias (fig. 80) he condemns the notion of the absolute authority
of governments, in *Faith* (fig. 81) he attacks religious fanaticism, and in *The Spirit of Christianity* (fig. 21) he calls for religious tolerance. Iconographically, all these works undercut the conventional foundations of everyday life by treating culture, law, government and religion in a highly relativistic manner. Despite the fact that Watts had great sympathy with Christianity, his anti-dogmatism frequently drove him to reverse or to alter conventional iconography for his Biblical subjects and thereby to challenge and even to attack the Bible. Given the fact that Watts painted and exhibited hundreds of works as part of his scheme for social betterment, it would seem inevitable that the result would be an oeuvre embodying the dogma of G.F. Watts, but, in fact, his works were almost never dogmatic. This fact reflects a conscious effort as he wrote in the New Gallery Catalogue of 1896-97:

> Whatever type may have been used, classical, medieval, or other, the endeavour has been made to impress distinctly the direction of modern thought, and in all, except two cases, reference to spiritual dogmas has been purposely avoided....³

Watts's figures, Love, Death, Time, Aspiration, Hope and the like, were created, in part, for the very reason that they do not reflect narrowly defined spiritual beliefs. Similarly, Watts's rich style of distortion, obscurity, haze, mystery and suggestion was created, in part, in
response to the stylistic dogmas of realists and of academicians.

The anti-dogmatism that greatly influenced Watts's later paintings was not a factor at all in some of his earlier works. His paintings and drawings of Christ stand as striking examples of sectarian art. They include his painting, *The Head of Christ* (c. 1840; sold Sotheby's Belgravia, 30 March 1982); his drawings, *Christ on the Cross* (undated; British Museum) and *Christ with the Virgin Mary* (undated; sold Sotheby's Belgravia, 27 July 1981, fig. 82); his fresco, *Christ in Majesty* (1861; St. James-the-Less, Westminster, fig. 18); and his design for a mosaic for St. Paul's Cathedral, *The Transfiguration* (1863; The Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 44). Watts's *The Red-Cross Knight* (fig. 7) painted for the Houses of Parliament is both strongly nationalistic and strongly Christian, as is his *Alfred Inciting the Saxons* (fig. 5). These works reflect the iconography of most of the Houses of Parliament paintings as typified by works such as Maclise's *The Spirit of Chivalry* (fig. 35) of 1845. Even so, with the exception of a handful of works, Watts's art is strikingly non-sectarian, non-nationalistic, non-dogmatic and non-factional.

*The Guelphs and Ghibellines* (fig. 51) of c. 1846, discussed in Chapter IV, shows Watts to have been aware of
the destructive power of family alliances. This painting vigorously condemns family conflict as vicious, as did Millais’s *Lorenzo and Isabella* (1848; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) which similarly uses for its subject a romantic episode which sparked family hatred and murder. Millais's painting was stylistically revolutionary while Watts's was highly conventional, but iconographically the two did share this common theme. As John Christian points out this theme was much in vogue in these years, so Watts's adaptation of it may have simply been a matter of fashion. If there was a specific relevance to 19th-century England of Watts's adaptation of this theme it remains lost.

Conceived in the late 1840's in the spirit of Chenavard's plans for decorating the Panthéon in Paris, Watts's "House of Life" would have been a monumental homage to cultural diversity. In this early project Watts hoped to undercut religious and national bigotry by treating all ideologies evenly. His approach to Christianity would be no different. He wrote of that part of the scheme with wilful disinterest; "Founding of the Christian era treated simply as a matter of history setting up the cross...." This phrase is symptomatic of the relativism of the whole program which was to include the earliest beginnings of man, the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the mythologies of India and Africa, sections devoted to Mahomet
and to the Popes and much more.

Watts was unable to obtain a commission for this enormous project, but he did produce parts of it in easel paintings. Works such as *Time and Oblivion* (fig. 17) c. 1849, which came from his original conception of "The House of Life", were painted in a style he hoped would suit his anti-dogmatic themes. This painting is highly abstract and generalized, in part, to avoid association with any contemporary civilization, religion or philosophy, and even though this painting does draw on the sculptures of Pheidias, the prints of Flaxman, and the paintings of Michelangelo, it represents a significant departure from them. It is far more extreme in simplification of form, color, and detail than anything even England's most austere painter, William Dyce, had produced. For instance, Dyce's *Virgin and Child* (1845; Royal Collection fig. 83) is more elaborate not only in terms of detail but also in terms of composition: the background of Watts's painting consists of nothing more than two unshaded areas of color. Watts's simplified allegorical figures are similar to the bold simple figures of Puvis de Chavannes in works such as *Hope* (c. 1871, Louvre, Paris), but while Puvis flattens his figures and his space, Watts emphatically projects his figures into the viewer's space. Watts was striving to paint something so basic that it would strike a responsive
chord with all viewers, or, at the least, he was trying to produce a painting that would not stand as a symbol for only one group. Time and Oblivion are civilization destroyers: the forces that sweep away the values and products of every age, but they are not the embodiment of the kind of malevolent natural forces seen in Turner’s paintings such as The Angel Standing in the Sun (1846; Tate Gallery, London) exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1846.8 Interpreted in their original context in “The House of Life”, Time and Oblivion are the destroyers of Greece, Rome, and the medieval era; and they will be destroyers of Watts’s era. Time and Oblivion allow for the birth of unexpected new civilizations with new cultures, ideologies and dogmas, so Watts attempted to paint them in a style that would, if possible, place them outside of time.

When Ruskin first saw this painting and other works such as Satan (c. 1848; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 84) he believed Watts was not only a genius but the only man in England qualified to paint murals.9 If support had continued, Watts might have continued painting in this style, but, unfortunately for Watts, Ruskin abandoned him in favor of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Critics scorned Watts’s works, and for better or for worse the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was seen as the most innovative movement in England. Watts lost courage, largely removed
himself from public exhibition rooms for the next ten years, produced some consciously Pre-Raphaelite works such as his portrait of Mrs. Nassau Senior (1857-58; Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton), and began to rethink his style. Nonetheless, during these years, he realized a powerfully anti-dogmatic and original work in his mural scheme at Lincoln's Inn. As discussed in Chapter III, Watts manages to present antagonistic civilizations without indication of hierarchy. This is a painting of cultural toleration, if not a painting of cultural relativism, and it set the tone for a lifetime of work devoted to undercutting the power of dogmatism.

Anti-dogmatism was such an important feature in Watts's allegorical paintings that when his most important patron, Charles Rickards, requested that he include a cross in one of his allegories he rejected the idea and wrote in return on May 28, 1876;

... in these suggestive pictures such as Time and Death, Angel of Death, Love and Death I have a strong idea that they should appeal purely to human sympathies without reference to creed or dogma of any kind.\(^\text{10}\)

There would be no crosses in Watts's allegories. He was so adamantly opposed to any narrow or dogmatic interpretation of his allegorical works that he even rejected calling these works allegories; he insisted that they were suggestions. The notion that there could be one
correct interpretation of modern allegories sickened him, so he set out to break down the traditional structures of iconography, thereby deliberately leaving meaning in the hands of the viewer.

The Spirit of Christianity (fig. 21) exhibited in 1875 at the Royal Academy as To All Churches: A Symbolical Design is one of Watts's suggestions and it is also his most pointed attack on dogmatism and intolerance. This strange painting baffled the critic of the London Quarterly Review into a rather brilliant analysis;

Let us take, for instance, such a picture as that entitled To All Churches: A Symbolical Design. What does it mean? To what facts, truths, dogmas, opinions does it bear witness? A large sexless figure sits on a cloud canopy in mid air. At its feet, in the folds of its dress, are huddled some four or five rosy babes. Behind the sky is gold. Below a wide champaign with a city and gleaming mere, and blue belts of distance, stretches to the horizon. There is the symbol, not, indeed, presented with any great completeness — for the picture is unfinished, as if the artist himself had grown dissatisfied with his work — yet still presented definitely enough, so far as its outward sign, its body, so to speak, is concerned. But what does it symbolize? What message does this figure wish to convey, with its one hand out stretched and the other laid on its heart? Some message, doubtless, of kindness and tolerance; but what?

The critic was struck by this image of kindness and tolerance but unable to determine "What facts, truths,
dogmas, opinions does it bear witness?". The lack of precise iconography which this critic saw as the painting's greatest deficiency Watts saw as its greatest virtue: it is anti-dogmatic by being open ended. Albert Moore, in works such as Shuttlecock (1869-70; private collection, illustrated in Victorian High Renaissance 145) had achieved a quite different sense of open-endedness by incongruously placing a shuttlecock and racket in the hands of a woman dressed in antique robes.\(^12\) While Moore paints a costume piece that disturbingly challenges the viewer's sense of time and place, Watts paints a religious allegory that disturbingly challenges the viewer's notions of religious certainties, for he believed that religion is demeaned when it is narrowly defined. Moore creates a sense of ambiguity to undercut the subject matter and to raise aesthetic concerns to a higher level; while Watts creates a sense of ambiguity to undercut the morality of dogmatically held religious beliefs.

Watts wrote of the painting that he was,

...anxious to finish my picture of the Spirit of Religion for such is the direction of the intention of my picture that you call the Sacred Heart, the Spirit in contradistinction to the extreme importance attached to dogmas which appear to me to be mostly unimportant, and not seldom detrimental to the purity and perfection of the original structure.\(^13\)

This difficult passage states simply that this painting
expresses Watts's belief that dogma is bad: a belief that he expressed through a careful manipulation of iconography and style.

It is significant that this is not only Watts's first aggressively anti-dogmatic painting, but that it is his first highly unattractive allegory. Despite the fact that the horizon and some of the drapery folds are reminiscent of Venetian color and texture, this painting departs radically from any Venetian standard of beauty, or any Renaissance standard of harmony. The face of this androgynous central figure is unattractive, slate grey, asymmetrical, jagged and unsettling. It is with this painting that Watts introduces distortion, confusion and ugliness as captivating and evocative forces, effectively challenging Renaissance stylistic canons adopted by artists such as Leighton, Poynter, and even Moore and Burne-Jones; and it is in this painting that Watts challenges the notion that iconography need be narrowly defined. This painting is not an allegory of any thing that can be clearly defined, at least it is not an allegory of anything that Watts would have wanted to be clearly defined, rather it is suggestive.

Watts makes this painting powerful and yet evocative by deriving the central figure from a Madonna Miseracordia yet making it into an androgynous, open ended allegorical figure of religious tolerance. It retains the power of its
iconographical source, but strangely alters its meaning. In his pendant *The Creation of Eve* (fig. 85) and *The Denunciation of Adam and Eve* (c. 1886-92; Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University, fig. 86) Watts gains impact by actually reversing conventional iconography. Adam and Eve are portrayed as virtuous, God is portrayed as evil and the angels are portrayed as shocked.

In *The Creation of Eve*, an angel pulls Eve from Adam's side. This is a significant departure from traditional iconography, for it is nearly always God who plays this role. This angel lifts Eve and points heavenward where there is a great upward rush of spiralling angels gesturing to Adam and Eve to follow them into the heavens. One angel attempts to lift Adam up, but these mortals clearly are going nowhere. Another of the angels halts in mid air and spreads its arms, abruptly breaking the upward spiral. This angel, with its theatrical gesture of alarm, sees that man, created in the image of God yet left on earth, is to be envied little more than birds without wings.

In the pendant, *The Denunciation of Adam and Eve*, God makes a violent appearance by towering over Adam and Eve like a mushroom cloud or tornado. This is certainly a departure from conventional Denunciations in many ways. It is almost always the Archangel Michael who denounces Adam and Eve. It differs further from other Denunciations in
that there is no snake and no evidence of sin to justify this punishment. What is more, God's wrath is made to appear more unreasonable by a group of angels clinging to God's side and praying as if to calm him. To create a powerful sense of irony, Watts conveys God's anger through a gesture that is conventionally reserved for the act of blessing: God's wide spread arms and open palms threaten immediate destruction for Adam and Eve. This irony is increased by the fact that Adam throws his body between God and Eve in an act of self sacrifice, while Eve cowers on the ground and covers her head. God is depicted as an all powerful, enormously hostile brute played off against an image of human sympathy and compassion which enlists the viewer on the side of man against God.

The Death of Cain (1885; Royal Academy of Arts, London, fig. 88) is another painting in which Watts tampered with the story of Genesis, in this case to make the story more Christian. This work is a sequel to his Denunciation of Cain (1872; Royal Academy of Arts, London, fig. 88) which is iconographically quite conventional and closely related to Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's Justice and Vengeance Pursuing Crime (1808; Louvre, Paris) which Watts discussed with Lord Holland long before beginning this work. In The Denunciation of Cain, Cain is chastised by a bolt of lightning and shower of angels as he stands over the slain
body of Abel. In The Death of Cain Watts invents his own biblical story by reversing the Old Testament version in which Cain is eternally condemned to an endless life devoid of any form of human intercourse. For God to have denied Cain both death and human contract was, for Watts, to be unspeakably cruel; so he simply rewrote the story. Cain is given the gift of death for repenting his sins. This painting will be discussed in Chapter VII, but for now it is sufficient to point out that this painting is openly challenging doctrinal religion.

Watts's Faith (1896; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 81) is an attack on militaristic religious fanaticism. Its single figure and one-word title link it to innumerable late century paintings such as Simeon Solomon's Dawn (1871; City Art Gallery, Birmingham) and Frederic Leighton's Solitude (c. 1890; Mary Hill Museum, Goldendale, Washington), but its aggressive didactic message implies different concerns. E.T. Cook aptly explains the painting:

A symbolic figure, novel in conception and modern in sentiment—breathing the toleration of a Faith which no longer trusts the power of the sword, and has learnt to recognise the good in the creeds and lives of others.

Watts also explained the painting as anti-dogmatic in his preface to the New Gallery Catalogue of 1896-97;

... in all except two cases, reference to spiritual dogmas has been purposely avoided; the two exceptions being,
'Faith' and the 'Dedication to all Churches [The Spirit of Christianity]'

In the first, 'Faith,' wearied and saddened by the result of persecution, washes her blood stained feet, and recognizing the influence of love in the perfume and beauty of flowers, and peace and joy in the song of birds, feels that the sword was not the best argument, and takes it off.16

Despite the fact that Faith, according to Watts, has been moved to take off her sword through the "beauty of flowers" and the "song of birds", Watts has given the viewer nothing of "beauty" and nothing of "peace and joy". Rather, as with The Spirit of Christianity (fig. 21) Watts has made a virtue of anguish and conveyed it through distortion. Faith's eye twists strangely and unattractively in its socket and stares directly at the viewer even as her head is in virtual profile. Her mouth is open and bent down, her head is strained back, and her body is in a posture of great unrest.

The subject of this painting is not simply faith and religious toleration, but it is also confusion and mystery. The open endedness of the iconography was of such importance to Watts that he believed that by explaining it in the New Gallery Catalogue he had in fact contradicted his first intention: to present an image of mystery. He criticized his own preface to the New Gallery as follows:

Words endeavouring to define precisely and yet preserve mystery are all wasted
it is impossible for us to have both.\textsuperscript{17}

Watts's catalogue might leave little to mystery, but Watts's painting is highly mysterious. His androgynous Faith is set in a hazy, horizonless, indeterminate landscape. The overwhelming stylistic effect he creates is that of shimmering colors randomly breaking through a prevailing murk and forming sporadically into glistening clouds. Despite the undeniable evidence of Venetian color and texture, Watts has departed from a Venetian approach in making his style more suggestive through discord. Watts owes a great debt to Rossetti's evocative, fuzzy, shimmering images such \textit{Beata Beatrix} (fig. 67) of 1864, but Watts uses mystery, confusion and wonder for social reform.

For Watts, mystery, confusion and wonder have everything to do with religious toleration. Watts's belief in the fundamental mystery of the world is the most important reason for his rejection of any one creed. As mentioned in Chapter I, Watts wrote;

\begin{quote}
The one thing which is more than ever clearly perceived is the density of the veil that covers the mystery of our being, at all times impenetrable, and to be impenetrable, in spite of which conviction we ever passionately yearn to pierce it.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

By presenting images of self-doubt and mystery Watts hoped to woo his viewers away from fanaticism, dogmatism and certainty. It should be understood that, in part, Watts's
intense dislike of theology drove him to produce images such as *Faith* that would breed self-doubt by being impenetrable, disorienting, unattractive and unsettling.

Perhaps surprisingly, mystery was, for Watts, a vehicle for change. He held that;

... the necessity, or perhaps better the love of them [mysteries], was an essential and valuable part of the human mind, far from being all disadvantageous or an impediment to progress, it had been in the main stimulus towards something transcending man's best efforts. 19

Mystery helps progress because it is a reminder of the limitations of man's best efforts. That is, the love of mystery precludes complete trust in any dogma, and thereby leaves the way open for change or progress. As in his painting, *Progress* (fig. 65), mystery and science go hand in hand. Therefore, Watts saw paintings such as *Faith* as highly important in his program for social improvement, and it is not at all surprising that this painting was included in his gift to the nation in 1897.

*The Daughter of Herodias* (1870-80; private collection, fig. 80) is an attack on a different kind of dogmatism, that is governmental dogmatism. The central figure is Salome who is presented with a fierce sensuality that finds echo, later, in the haunting works of Franz Stuck; but Watts's *femme fatale* is a political phenomenon, not an exotic one. In this way Watts's Salome also differs from Gustave
Moreau's orientalizing fantasies on the same theme, but as with Moreau and Stuck, Watts's woman is sensual and dangerous, and, when the painting was first exhibited, she was so described in the Birmingham catalogue of 1885:

The creature here is voluptuous with latent ferocity in her nature, and a great deal of mere animalism... 20

What sets Watts's femme fatale apart is that she disgusts rather than seduces. In this painting, as with The Wife of Plutus (fig. 73), and For He Had Great Possessions (fig. 71), luxury and enticement lead to revulsion. The seductive face of Salome, her low cut bodice, and her sumptuous cloak present an image, as Phythian writes, rich in "... the splendour of sensuality and pride...", but this gives way to a powerful image of murder, and a smug, pompous display of governmental authority. 21 Salome is dangerous, not because of her feminine wiles, but because she is the daughter of Herodias, step-daughter of Herod, and possessor of the royal signet. The following description of the painting was printed in 1904 in the catalogue for the Watts Gallery;

Salome, a princess born of a proud and cruel race. She received the trophy she has demanded at her revengeful mother's pleasure. Her conscience tells her she is guilty, but she holds up the royal signet as a defense against her better self, and against the criticism of the world. 22

If Watts intended to suggest that Salome felt guilty,
it is difficult to discern from this painting. At the center of the painting, Salome displays the signet ring to the viewer to explain why the head of John the Baptist is being presented to her. Mary Watts writes:

The action of Salome in holding up the ring of Herod indicates the responsibility for the death of John the Baptist is not hers but the King's.23

Ironically though, the head-bearer does not notice the ring but looks to Salome. Watts turns an image of female seduction into one of smug governmental murder. In painting this work, Watts is bitterly attacking the whole notion of the impersonal, self-proclaimed legitimacy of the state. This is a pointed, anti-authoritarian work. Stylistically, it is worth noting that Salome's luxurious cloak, like the cloak of the man in Watts's For He Had Great Possessions, is the kind of clothing which Watts reserves for his most morally flawed characters, and it is no accident that the style he uses to paint her clothing is conventional, elegant and, for Watts, shallow.

The relation of style to anti-dogmatism was of great importance to Watts. He not only used his style powerfully to present anti-dogmatic subjects, but he developed an anti-dogmatic style and frequently, aggressively undermined stylistic canons. Watts most directly tried to undermine the powerful movement in art led by Sir Frederic Leighton by pointedly working against Leighton's art both stylistically
and iconographically. His attitude toward realism was not so aggressive, he simply chose to paint in a different style, but Leighton's classicism he directly attacked.

Publicly, Watts argued for the importance of imperfection, mystery, and suggestiveness and the unexpected in art, but he never publicly condemned Leighton's style; in private he did. On May 3, 1892 he said;

... He [Leighton] treats his work much as Andrews does his fret-carving. There is never anything unexpected and consequently nothing appeals to you. I deplore it for tho' imagination is not his strong point he possess it, and this painting by recipe is the negation of it.24

Watts did indeed deplore what he saw as Leighton's lack of imagination and his dogmatic insistence to paint by recipe. On the same day in 1892 Watts said;

He [Leighton] takes me round the Academy, and says "There look at that! is not that good work" and as far as it goes it is good I only regret that it is as good as it is. For it is bringing up so many young people to paint while it can never make artists of them.25

Watts's complaint with Leighton and with the Academy was over the value placed on technical excellence. His aversion to formularized perfection led him to criticize Leighton on other occasions. On February 1, 1897 Mary Watts records the following;

My love [Watts] talking about Leighton this morning said his very accomplishments, the power of dexterous
mastery was a limitation to him he ceased to seek and strive and there were no birth pangs before the picture sprang full grown and ready dressed into the world - "He does not move one" alas Signor [Watts] sadly confessed.

In an undated note M.H. Spielmann records that Watts stated that;

Leighton's perfection was too great - like himself. His successful search for beauty produced results that were necessarily apart from humanity.

For Watts, beauty realized is not beauty worth having, perfection attained is not perfection at all, and art without pain is dead.

What Watts does in his paintings is to undermine conventional beauty, eradicate the appearance of formalized perfection, and introduce a sense of "birth pangs". His approach can best be seen as distorting and reversing conventions, rather than simply departing from them. For instance Peace and Goodwill (1888-1900; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 32) and in The Slumber of the Ages (1901; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 34) Watts's clear starting point is the sleeping draped classical, female figure that appears in works such as Burne-Jones's The Sleeping Princess (1873-90; Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, fig. 89), Moore's Jasmine (c.1879; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 90), Leighton's Summer Moon (1872; private collection, illustrated in Bendiner 127) reflecting
a widespread ideal, defined by Kenneth Bendiner as "a sensuous, perfumed life without action, where dreams can breed, and where sleep and death are reinforcements of stasis." Watts was deeply opposed to such an ideal as Mary Watts records;

Life he [Watts] said has something more than a dream for its object. There is work which is what we have to live for — not sitting amongst flowers by a stream.29

Watts's disgust with the dream ideal of his fellow artists is reflected in his perversion of that ideal in paint. In The Slumber of the Ages (fig. 34) sleep is shown as painful, sensuousness is replaced with decay, flowing lines become jagged, and precision dissolves into mystery. Seated on the lap of Watts's sleeping mother is a baby. This image of an alert child on a sleeping woman in a hellish landscape is a startling reversal of its sources.30 Watts achieves this reversal not only by challenging the ideal of inaction, but by attacking conventions for the use of line, color and brushstroke; and thereby he aggressively challenges conventional expressions of beauty so as to provide a higher respect for it.

Roger Fry asserted;

... it was certainly not incompetence that led Watts to finally adopt that rocky, dry, and crumbled quality which had given rise to the curious legend of his incompetence. Even in those later works, unsympathetic though their
surface may be, he shows incomparable skill using these dry rubbings and scumblings of pigment so as to produce colour which has mystery and infinity, and most wonderful of all, transparency ....

Fry is correct to claim that Watts did achieve a remarkable sense of mystery, infinity and transparency; qualities which were perceived by others as evidence of incompetence. Robert de la Sizeranne wrote:

His [Watts's] figures are like trees blown into strange contact by the wind. They bend and sway and recover themselves in sudden jerks ... There is no knowing where all these lines of crude colour are going, where they come and what they mean ... The colours are all out of harmony. Sometimes the violence of one tone diminishes that of another, and a Venetian harmony is the result, but that never lasts long ... the whole produces the effect of a discord ....

George Moore writes even more harshly of Watts's lack of harmony and lack of beauty;

With what Mr. Watts paints it is impossible to say. On one side an unpleasant reddish-brown, scrubbed till it looks like mud-washed rock; on the other a crumbling grey, like the rind of Stilton cheese. The nude figure in the reeds - the picture purchased by the Chantry Fund Collection [Psyche] - will serve for illustration. It is clearly the work of a man with something incontestably great in his soul, but why should so beautiful a material as oil paint be transformed into a crumbly substance like - I can think of nothing else but the rind of Stilton cheese. 

These observations are accurate and should not be
ignored. Watts's work is an affront to conventions of beauty and harmony. Watts was trying to stimulate the viewer and broaden his mind rather than present him with a beautiful thing. For Watts, beauty was unattainable, so it became essential to him that he should attack canons of beauty. As early as 1852 Watts wrote;

Beauty and Truth I do not forget, but they in their perfection, are too distant and too much obscured by human conditions to be profanely thought of even, in fact, they are deities of the supreme order.  

Beauty obscured, not beauty profanely formularized was Watts's subject. M.H. Spielmann, in addition to Roger Fry and others, understood why Watts painted as he did;

There are qualities in his pictures to be looked for other than the purity and range of colour and the variety of texture which is needed to support the movement of light and atmosphere, the broken surface, which other artists so carefully avoid, the outline which is never insisted on, and is only lost to be found again, and above all, that mystery which as a quality in painting is the one vital superiority which modern art can boast over that of the great masters of old.

As Spielmann states, Watts violates convention to produce mystery, and mystery for Watts was the touchstone of anti-dogmatism.

Watts's violence against beauty is not the exception in his work, but his trademark. From *The Spirit of Christianity* (fig. 21) in 1875 to *Evolution* (Watts Gallery,
Compton, fig. 91) of 1900-03, it is more or less constant. One has only to look at the line of the back of the figure in *Hope* (fig. 27), his most famous work, to see that Watts is creating no arabesque. This line abruptly breaks and starts again and again to produce a most disconcerting effect. *Evolution* (fig. 91) is virtually a monument to ugliness. In it, a huge, completely nude female figure sits before the viewer as an impossible collection of misshapen body parts. This is the mother of humanity, the bottomless pit of imperfection, and the driving force for change. Imperfection is the only reason that evolution is ever desirable, and appropriately Watts made imperfection the most conspicuous feature of this figure: the mother of progress.

It might be suspected that the bile affecting Watts's paintings was raised only by his contemporaries, and that Watts maintained unqualified admiration for the grand old masters, but this is not true. Watts admired Pheidias and Michelangelo beyond all others, but he criticized them deeply and labeled their style "worn out". On April 9, 1897 Watts said of Greek art;

> The best measured refinement and noble delicacy of best Greek art not compatible with the spiritual impulse.

This remark is even better understood through what he wrote in a letter dated August 16, 1886;
... Michel Angelo aimed at Spiritual qualities the Great Greek [Pheidias] did not dream of. A conscious effort instantly evidences weakness, but we must appreciate the strength of the intention, in the weakness of the achievement. Mortals cannot command success.\textsuperscript{38}

For Watts, the perfection of Pheidias’s art made it gravely flawed, unspiritual and inhuman. Of Michelangelo Watts was equally harsh. He summed up what he saw as the fundamental failing of Michelangelo's art as follows;

Dissatisfied with the known, he yet did not attempt to penetrate to the unknown.\textsuperscript{39}

For Watts, Michelangelo's art reflects a kind of apathy which was a function of his ready acceptance of Christian beliefs. Comparing his own art to Michelangelo's he said;

My attempts at giving utterance and form to my ideas, are like the child's design, who, being asked by his sister to draw God, made a great number of circular scribbles, and putting his pencil on a soft surface, struck his pencil through the centre, making a great void. This is utterly absurd as a picture, but there was a greater idea in it than in Michelangelo's old man with a long beard.\textsuperscript{40}

The fact that Watts could criticize even Michelangelo for accepting convention is symptomatic of Watts's deep aversion to any form of dogmatism. He constantly devoted his energies to breaking down conventions in style, and his energies are documented in the great number of styles in his oeuvre. In an extract from her diary, Mary Watts records on
June 12, 1903 that the compliment Watts most liked to receive for painting was that he had achieved "something one could say was not like his work." It should come as no surprise that Roger Fry praised the variety and accomplishment of Watts's style. In 1905 in *The Quarterly Review* he wrote;

The fact is that no one of our time has known so much as Watts of the technical possibilities of paint, or mastered more various and more difficult manners.

Watts's late style is marked not only by an antipathy to other styles, but a love of mystery which pushed him to produce works which challenge his own paintings and open doors to much that is radical in art. His *The Sower of Systems* (1902; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 72) is so close to being a non-representational painting that it was published upside down in the Victorian High Renaissance Catalogue. In a letter dated June 23, 1903 Watts wrote;

I want you to come and see some things that will surprise you and which probably suggest the outlook of the future, as far as Art is concerned.

He reached this point in his career not by embracing the various artistic movements that evolved over the course of his career, but by distancing himself from these movements. His styles reflect his belief that fanaticism is not the only road to change.
Chapter VII

The Anti-Pessimistic Paintings

In *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, Walter Houghton states that Thomas Carlyle delivered England from "the mood of Byronism,"¹ but well into the century various aspects of a pessimistic Byronic state of mind pervaded many English paintings such as Turner's *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846; Tate Gallery, London), Landseer's *Man Proposes God Disposes* (1864; Royal Holloway College, Egham), Danby's *The Deluge* (c. 1840; Tate Gallery, London), Henry Wallis's *Death of Chatterton* (1856; Tate Gallery, London) and Stanfield's *The Abandoned* (1856; unlocated). On the Continent a wide variety of paintings affected by pessimism were created such as Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827-28, Louvre, Paris), Friedrich's *The Shipwreck* (1821; Kunsthall, Hamburg) and Gleyre's *Lost Illusions* (1843; Louvre, Paris). Watts's *Life's Illusions* (fig. 8), *Found Drowned* (fig. 10) and *Love and Death* (fig. 23) belong to this outpouring of gloom, but it was Watts's paintings produced in the spirit of Carlyle such as *Hope, The Happy Warrior* (fig. 28), *Love Triumphant* (fig. 92), *Death Crowning Innocence* (fig. 93) and *The Court of Death* (fig. 25) which helped to undermine the mood of Byronism in English paintings. Barrington put her finger on it when she wrote
of Watts, "In the carrying out of his work lay the truest and best help he thought he could give to a sorrowing world."\(^2\)

Through the iconography of his later paintings Watts hoped to neutralize the horror of Death and the sorrow of grieving, not by promising a better hereafter, but by sentimentalizing death into a welcome release from the pain of life. Even so, Watts's sentimentality is not nearly as escapist as it might seem. It reflects Carlyle's belief, stated in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* that "Difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death are the *allurements* that act on the heart of man,"\(^3\) so that iconographically Watts's paintings turn difficulty, abnegation and death from being Byronic objects of disgust into being sources for strength and action. This was not a movement that set optimism against pessimism, but rather a movement that upheld the value of action even in the most wretched circumstances.

Chapter VIII will analyze the ways in which Watts's iconography comes to treat death as a consolation and as a release from the demands of the life of frustration. By raising a life of pain to an exalted state and by neutralizing the fear of death, Watts hoped to counter Byronic pessimism and to inspire action in society as a whole.

The iconography of Watts's early paintings is anything
but anti-pessimistic. The Wounded Heron (fig. 1) of 1837 treats death as brutal, cruel and agonizing in a manner that, as is frequently written, derives from Landseer's Hawking in Olden Time (1832; Kenwood, Iveagh Bequest). Landseer's painting is almost certainly an important influence for it treats a similar hawking scene in a style that is extremely close to Watts's painting in terms of detail and finish, but Landseer's influence runs much deeper than painting technique and general theme. Painted four years before The Wounded Heron, Deer and Deerhounds in a Mountain Torrent (1833; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 94) is an excellent example of a Landseer painting that treats the moment of death as cruel by exaggerating the play of twisted necks, strained eyes, open jaws, and gesticulating limbs. The Wounded Heron employs just these devices to present death in a way that is pure Landseer. The heron is lying on the ground as its neck twists violently around, its wings strain open and its long beak gapes apart as one claw draws in and the other stretches out. Death has made this bird into a gnarled and twisted heap that begs for pity.

Watts's Life Illusions (fig. 8) of 1849, discussed in Chapter V is an essay on the futility of all human endeavors that treats death as a horror unheeded by the living. A knight chasing a bubble and a scholar reading his book are made into fools for failing to see that their actions will
take them over a cliff to their deaths: both action and death are treated as among the many pointless facts of life. *Found Drowned* (fig. 10) of 1850, discussed in Chapter IV, similarly shows death as tragic, but in contrast to *Life's Illusions* death is tragic here because it has destroyed something of real value; it has destroyed the life of an attractive young woman. This painting marks a step in the evolution of Watts's iconography of death which when traced over the years steadily becomes less and less pessimistic. Iconography based on the tragic reality of death in *Found Drowned* is expanded in *Love and Death* (1877; Whitworth Institute, Manchester (fig. 23) which gains pathos as death triumphs over love. Here another step is taken to make death less of an ogre for death is used as a foil for love. Despite the emotional reserve of the figure depicted in Watts's painting, this painting shares the iconography of works such as Puvis de Chavannes's *The Poor Fisherman* (1881; Louvre, Paris) and Octave Tassaert's *The Unfortunate Family* (fig. 55) of 1849 in which love and death are played off against one another so that the preciousness of life and the cruelty of the world are thrown into relief, and indeed it is remarkable that Watts was able to treat such a subject without begging the outpourings of emotions that are found in such paintings.

As early as his *Court of Death* (fig. 25), which dates
back to the mid 1850's, Watts treats death as something other than a horror. In this painting, which appears to have been conceived as a design for a pauper's cemetery or mortuary chapel, death is presented as the inevitable equalizer of all men, and one that brings an end to the pain of life. The theme of death as an equalizer is an old one, but a contemporary source might be Alfred Rethel's *Also a Dance of Death* (fig. 95). In contrast though, Watts's equalizer is not a jester but a figure to be revered.

There is no doubt that Watts's iconography of death as an equalizer was conceived, in part, to offer consolation to the bereaved poor, for, as discussed in Chapter IV, it gave them equal status with knights and kings. In later years, when Watts's attitude toward death has changed from death as something to be hated to death as something to be welcomed, he came to see this painting as iconographically relevant not only for the poor, but, in a much different way, for society as a whole. It appears he considered it to be among his most important works when he gave it to the Tate Gallery in 1902.

The composition he employs is that of the adoration of the Magi: representatives of all ages and classes assemble before a woman and child to pay homage, but the woman is not the Madonna, but Death, and the child is not Christ but simply a dead child. Watts was consciously drawing on
traditional Christian sources for he told August Hare, "I have given her [Death] wings that she may not seem like a Madonna ...." and on May 14, 1864 Ruskin wrote to Watts, calling the painting the "Trionfo della Morte Madonna." By compositionally and iconographically elevating Death into a position reserved in Christian paintings for Mary and the Christ Child, Watts is creating a non-Christian religious hierarchy with Death as the supreme being. He is also challenging the presentation of death as an enemy, for as Watts said of the painting late in his career, "... the central idea, and the central fact, is the joyous, benignant mother; a goddess, and more than a goddess, calling her children home." In contrast to works such as Rethel's Death as a Friend (fig. 96) in Also a Dance of Death, Watts's death is not presented with Christian overtones in which death is depicted as a friend who brings a bright light into the room of the faithful old man who dies with his cross and pilgrim's shell nearby, but death is depicted as the sovereign of all men, commanding the deference that her complete authority warrants. By painting death with respect rather than despair, Watts has altered his iconography significantly and he has begun to paint in support of another of his social schemes which he described in his introduction to the new Gallery catalogue of 1896-97; "... the object has been to divest the inevitable [Death] of
its terrors .... 9 His approach is unlike that of artists such as Arnold Böcklin who in the Isle of the Dead (1880; Museum of Paintings, Leipzig) makes the state of death appear haunting and deeply disturbing, and Watts's approach is strikingly different from that of Paul Gauguin in the Spirit of the Dead Watching (1892; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo) which includes an image of death as a frightening specter.

Watts is trying to divest death of its terror, but he gives no indication death will bring any reward other than death. In writing about the painting in 1896, Watts said simply that "Silence and Mystery, guard the entrance of the unknown."10 As usual, Watts leaves as much as possible as open ended as possible. His approach differs drastically from artists such as Roddam Spencer Stanhope's in works such as The Waters of Lethe (1880; Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester, fig. 97), John Melhuish Strudwick's in The Ramparts of God's House (1889; sold Christie's 29 November 1985) and William Bouguereau's in Une âme au ciel (1878; Musée du Périgord, Périgeux) which depict death as a wonderfully extravagant party with angels in attendance. Far from treating death as a utopian land of pleasure, Watts treats death as an end to life which makes the pain of life more bearable. As he wrote in 1896, " ... the mendicant and oppressed seek relief. Sickness lays her head upon the knee
of Death, old age comes for repose ...." 11 This image of death as consolation differs considerably from that of Leighton which treats death as a beautiful, ideal state of dreams. Leighton's dead show no signs of having been freed from the suffering of life, rather they appear to have been unblemished by life, then preserved by death in a state of languorous perfection. For instance, in his Hercules Wrestling with Death for the Body of Alcestis (1869-71 Collection of Mr. and Mrs. J. Tannenbaum, Toronto), Hercules is shown violently trying to disturb the perfection, peace and grace that the pristine young Alcestis has realized through her death. Leighton's approach to death as a state of bliss is found again and again in works such as The Reconciliation of the Montagues and the Capulets over the Dead Bodies of Romeo and Juliet (1853-5; Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia) in which the dead Romeo and Juliet embrace before their warring families. As Kenneth Bendiner argues, death as an ideal state is strongly implied not only in many other works by Leighton, but also in many of the works of Burne-Jones, Albert Moore and others. For Watts, death is not an ideal state, but simply a guaranteed release from life, which when lived to its fullest is full of suffering. For Watts, suffering and the cessation of suffering are dual gods, and for Watts, these two forces make actions possible. Watts's view of death is that of
physical collapse, not daydreams, and his *The Happy Warrior* (1885; Neue Pinakothek, Munich, fig. 28) is a case in point in which the reward of death comes in combat.

In this painting a medieval knight in full armor is shown from mid torso up as he falls backwards, loses his helmet, closes his eyes and dies in battle in a moment of ecstasy. Above the fatally wounded warrior is a beautiful female vision who is about to kiss him. By fusing death with eroticism and suffering, Watts presents the viewer with a scene of almost religious ecstasy on the battlefield.

Mary Watts explains the painting as follows:

It should be understood that the vision granted to the Happy Warrior was an embodiment of the ideal for which he had striven: Many years later Mr. Watts found to his surprise a like belief in Zoroastrian Poetry. The Warrior questions the Vision thus; "Who art thou?" and the lovely Vision replies "I am thyself, thine own deeds have made me." Indeed this woman is treated as a vision for she appears as a thought balloon over the warrior's head. She is a projection of his imagination and not a divine creature, so again Watts has left the issue of the hereafter open, in this case by treating it from a sentimental, but explicitly subjective, point of view: that is, from the point of view of this orgasmic dying warrior.

John Singer Sargent appears to have adapted Watts's painting for his murals at the Widener Library at Harvard
University, but he changed it into something far more conventional. In Sargent's painting a dying WWI soldier is embraced by a nude woman bearing a martyr's palm and gold laurel leaves as she and Death lift him up to the heavens. Above the group is written "Victory and Death." The iconography of Sargent's painting is that of a Christian, nationalistic apotheosis, while Watts's painting is simply a broad call to action which, as in The Court of Death, divests death of its terror.

Perhaps Watts's most powerful image of consolation is The Death of Cain (1886; Royal Academy, London, fig. 87) in which Cain is released from life after years of punishment. An angel in shimmering clothes with golden hair sweeps a cascade of form-dissolving light over Cain as his grossly contorted, brutalized and aged body collapses to the ground. The death of Cain is presented here as a gift of divine compassion. In a letter probably dating from the mid 1880's Watts discussed the painting as part of a unified series of paintings;

If I were a poet and musician like Wagner, I could make a fine cantata or oratorio of the subject .... The denouncing spirits, as I have painted them [The Denunciation of Cain], represent the voices of conscience reproaching him with the many sins that culminated in the murder. The brand is set upon him, he is shut out from contact with all creation .... The brand forbidding human vengeance ('No man may slay him'), constitutes the most
terrible punishment; he is driven from all contact with created things - unseen, unacknowledged, unknown ... he returns to Abel's altar, there to give himself up a sacrifice; and there the angel removes the curse and he dies forgiven The Death of Cain. 13

As Watts states, in The Death of Cain, death brings an end to the most severe part of Cain's punishment: his unbearable sentence to eternal life. The iconography is Watts's own just as the story of the death of Cain is his own invention. Nonetheless, Watts has created his composition from images of martyrdoms such as The Death of St. Peter Martyr ascribed to Cariani (National Gallery, London), but Watts had made an angel do both the slaying and the redeeming. No doubt, this painting is about sin and redemption, and it follows a standard Christian pattern that presents life and sin as inseparable, so that freedom from sin comes only with death. This highly traditional view of sin and salvation is reflected in Watts's painting with one important deviation, Cain does not look to heaven nor do angels receive him; he simply falls to the ground. Cain is not reformed to live a life free of sin in heaven or on earth. Death is shown as a divine blessing not because it takes Cain to heaven, but because it takes him out of life.

This moment of death is presented with a dazzling display of color as intense shades of pink, yellow, gold and white complement the great energy created by the steep
straight diagonal line which runs from the angel's raised right hand across its shoulders and to its left hand where this line intersects a horizontal sweep of drapery that rushes across the full width of the painting. The high sense of action, combined with stunning color calls to mind Tintoretto's works such as The Miracle of St. Mark (Accademia, Venice), but Watts's work is anatomically and coloristically his own. The lumpy, knotted muscles and the pits and angular projections that expressively cover Cain's body share nothing with the Venetians, nor does the glowing, almost gaseous face of the angel that emerges as the head of a comet from its torch-like hair and from the clouds. The intense, fragmented, almost prismatic, unmodeled colors owe something to Tintoretto and Titian, but by contrast Watts creates an effect that is less harmonized and more jarring, confusing and visually intoxicating. Watts's crumbly looking bright flecks of red, next to yellow, next to white break down form and allow light to mesh with clouds, drapery and flesh so that, in passages, the viewer is presented with no object, but rather with a vibrating coloristic effect. This painting presents the cessation of life as highly attractive, rather like Rossetti's Beata Beatrix (fig. 67) which presents Beatrix as welcoming the white dove that announces her release from life, but by contrast, while Rossetti treats death as an escape from action, Watts treats
death as a reward for action.

For Watts, death was a welcome end to a life fully lived. In a letter to a grieving friend Watts wrote;

I will not attempt to offer condolences on your bereavement excepting that it seems to me Death is one of the least of human misfortunes, rest in the calm of which I not doubt and long for very often.\textsuperscript{14}

In a similar letter dated February 9, 1875, Watts wrote,

Death is nothing: but the slipping away of the power of doing is a thing I cannot contemplate without the greatest pain. My time for several weeks has been slipping away in an unusually disgraceful manner. I have been a fortnight all the time laid up with influenza not able to go out of the house or do any work.\textsuperscript{15}

That is, intense activity is much better than diminished activity, but death is nothing at all to be feared. In this way, for Watts, the guarantee of death makes the frustration of living to the utmost not only endurable but also desirable. Watts took comfort in the fact that no matter how badly he ran his life it would come to an end, and he believed that such a principle was a great impetus for action. For Watts, it is the thought of death that makes acting or living a tolerable burden. Death is presented as a gift or reward for action in the \textit{Death of Cain} for Cain is released from life for his conversion, for his offering a sacrifice, and for his repentance. Despite the peculiarity of this invented scene of compassion, Watts makes it fully
accessible for anyone aware of the title, and aware of the
barest outline of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel.

The Messenger (1884-85; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 68)
dates from the same pivotal period when Watts conceived The
Happy Warrior and The Death of Cain and again it presents
death as a gift. A man seated before his sculptor's mallet,
violin, palette, a celestial globe known as an
astronomical armillary sphere and a book, is so weakened by
age that his arm lies twisted awkwardly at his side, unable
to move. The neck and face of this old man are shockingly
emaciated, demonstrating extreme signs of the kind of
physical deterioration that one witnesses in those for
whom life has become an unspeakably cruel hardship. Without
raising his head from the chairback where it lies strained
to one side, this man looks to Death as she extends her arm
to him. The death of this man is treated as a blessing.
Here, Watts's approach to death is that of an advocate of
euthanasia, for as quoted earlier, for Watts, "the slipping
away of the power of doing" was a thing he could not
"contemplate without the greatest pain".

The violin, book, scientific device, palette and mallet
in this painting call to mind traditional vanitas paintings
such as Harmen Steenwyck's Still Life: An Allegory of the
Vanities of Human Life (National Gallery, London), which
portrays temporal concerns as inconsequential in the face of
death, but Watts reverses this iconography. Death is depicted as the power that alleviates the tragedy that is depicted here, the tragedy that is the loss of temporal power which comes with old age. Rather than condemning human endeavors in the face of death, Watts extolls such endeavors by extolling death for relieving the cruelty of aging as it forces languor and paralysis on its victims.

Watts's depiction of infant death in *The Court of Death*, *The Messenger* and in *Death Crowning Innocence* (1886-87; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 93) offers a different kind of consolation. In each of these paintings, Watts places a baby in the arms of death who shelters the infant from living and from suffering. In a letter dated May 15, 1888 Watts wrote of the subject of his painting *Death Crowning Innocence*, "The subject was suggested by a real event, an accident which caused the death of a dear nephew of Mary's a delightful and monumental relief to be carried out by Mary some day to be done I hope."\(^1\)\(^6\) As in *The Court of Death* and *The Messenger* this image is designed explicitly to offer consolation but it does not imply the child will be received into heaven as do paintings such as Ary Scheffer's *Christ the Consoler* (Historisch Museum, Amsterdam) which depicts a great crowd of thankful dead at Christ's feet, nor does it treat infant death as entwined with a joyous event as Hunt does in *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1870-1903; Fogg Art
Museum, Harvard University) in which dancing babies in bubbles playfully display their martyr's palms and spear wounds. Death in Death Crowning Innocence protects the child from suffering and even though Watts saw suffering and aspiration as the great virtues of life, he could not help but see a certain consolation in being free from life. Nonetheless, for those using such an image for consolation, this painting sentimentally begs the viewer to leave death to death, and therefore it is most certainly a painting designed to encourage the living to get on with life.

The paintings discussed in this chapter were produced to make life and death tolerable, not only for those who believed in the guarantee of a better life beyond, but for those who could see in life nothing but suffering ending in death. These paintings were produced to change suffering and death from being foundations for pessimism into being the two most positive facts of life. The fact that these paintings appealed strongly to many Christians should not obscure the fact that these works treat death as benign without invoking the hereafter, and despite the fact that these paintings treat death as a gift, they strongly imply that action is the greatest virtue.
Chapter VIII

The Powerful Image

In *Time, Death and Judgment* (fig. 24) three powerfully three-dimensional figures fill the canvas so fully that they appear to spill outside the frame. They are placed in an extremely shallow space with nothing before them, and they are set before a backdrop that allows no vistas and includes only a flat disc and blackness. Watts's figures project powerfully into the viewer's space through radical foreshortening, extremely shallow placement and cropping so that the effect is often startling. It was this facet of Watts's style that particularly attracted Roger Fry to Watts as one of the great nineteenth-century masters of significant form. The simplicity of Watts's composition and his use of bold outlines are other elements which add to the visual power of his paintings. A highly important source for this use of outline and simplified composition is John Flaxman. As pointed out by Barrington, Mrs. Watts, Staley, Blunt and Board, Watts held Flaxman in very high regard.¹ As early as 1853 he wrote of the adaptability of Flaxman's drawing for mural projects;

...his [Flaxman's] designs painted on a large scale, either in chiaroscuro or in a mono-chromatic style, would do more to form a pure taste and correct judgement than any works perhaps that have ever appeared.²
In the fifties Watts painted several copies from Flaxman (fig. 16) on a large scale, but these copies differed from Flaxman's designs in significant ways. Watts uses chiaroscuro and he chops Flaxman's compositions down to the point that there is virtually no space around the figures. The result is that these copies from Flaxman are strikingly similar to Watts's own composition in terms of strong modelling, formal simplicity of outline, the simplicity of composition and absence of background. As Staley points out, Ary Scheffer also "...acknowledged a great debt to the designs of John Flaxman," but Watts sets his paintings radically apart from Scheffer and the drawings of Flaxman by dissolving his outlines out into areas of complete haze. In paintings such as Hope (fig. 27), for instance, the globe upon which the central figure rests is a bold formal element that dissipates to the right and left into areas where there is no outline at all. This technique of creating powerful outlines and then dissolving them is one that Watts uses repeatedly to make his works suggest more than they depict.

Barrington describes one aspect of this formal approach:

He had found, he thought, the cause why a "good" line in any work of art is composed of a series of flattened curves joined together, whereas a "bad" line lay in the fact that each flattened curve is a section of a large circle which, if continued, would find its completion far away out of the actual
design, whereas the line which is a part of a small circle, suggests a form contained well within a limited space. The mind in the one case is started with a sense of spring and size, whereas in the other it is restricted within the limits of design which is before the actual eye. Whatever suggested growth in the imagination was to Watts the keynote of interest in all works of art.  

This technique for making line suggestive of more than is actually painted was achieved not only by the bend of the line but by dissolving the line so that it would be suggested within the composition as well as beyond the composition. For the viewer, the figure of Hope is seated on a globe despite the fact that Watts gives merely the suggestion of a globe. As discussed in Chapter V, it suited Watts philosophically to cast the viewer in the role of creator, but for visual impact his compositional device of suggesting forms rather than presenting forms gave his paintings a sense of breadth that exceeded the boundaries of the picture frame.

Bold outline, projecting three-dimensional forms, and a suggestion of a greater scale existed within the dimensions of the canvas gave Watts's paintings a commanding presence which he heightened through his use of color. In an approach analogous to that which he used for line, Watts used colors to define form in some areas and to dissolve it in others. In _She Shall Be Called Woman_ (fig. 64), _Olympus on Ida_ (1885; Watts Gallery, Compton), _Iris_ (1904; Watts
Gallery, Compton), Progess (fig. 65) and other works, Watts blurs out modeled forms so gradually that it is impossible to say with any precision where a form gives way to an area of undifferentiated color, yet in all these works there is a powerful suggestion of three-dimensionality. The effect is rather disorienting, but it is nonetheless visually rich and stimulating: in paintings such as Time, Death and Judgment (fig. 24), Love Triumphant (fig. 92) and Progress, the combined effect of these strong formal devices created effective icons dedicated to action.

Watts's most famous painting, Hope (1886; Tate Gallery, London fig. 27), is a key example of a painting that reflects his mature iconography for it powerfully treats suffering and action as moral virtues. The hunched and blindfolded figure, Hope, is seated alone on a globe as she plays that one unbroken string of her lyre in an inhospitable, indefinite cosmic waste land of murky haze. The back of Hope rises in awkward stages to a small concavity, to a lump at the shoulder, and then it drops in two steps into a highly ungainly neck that extends horizontally from her upright torso. Watts further brutalizes the body of this figure by turning her right arm and hand into the bottom half of a parallelogram that reflects the shape of the lyre. These distortions produce a sense of strain and intense concentration in a scene of
enveloping adversity. The use of distortion in Hope is significantly different from the distortions employed by Leighton and other contemporaries such as Burne-Jones and Moore. Kenneth Bendiner argues, "The languid form of Flaming June (fig. 33) by Leighton suggests détente, but the pose in literal terms is knotted and agonizing." By contrast, in Hope, Watts uses such a pose to create an effect that is knotted, agonizing and quite removed from the state of languor depicted in Leighton's work.

The sense of angst conveyed through this posture seems oddly out of place for a work entitled Hope. Nonetheless, for Watts and for many who purchased reproductions of this painting, Hope addressed hopelessness only in that it was an antidote to hopelessness, an answer to despair and a call to action. In a letter dated December 8, 1885 Watts explains the painting: first he expresses his pessimism concerning almost all human endeavors, then he states that he finds value in "consistent efforts", and he then describes Hope as a painting which embodies his belief that striving makes hopelessness worthwhile:

What a serious thing life is! You ask me for my thoughts, they are more confused than I can say, it seems to me that I see nothing but uncertainty, contention, conflict, beliefs unsettled and nothing established in place of them. You are glad you are not Atlas; I think each one is Atlas! learning of the self, perhaps if that is carried as evenly as may be it will be enough.
There seems to be neither peace, nor prosperity or happiness, what is best worth having is I think only to be found in ourselves, in ardent desire and consistent efforts to do right and individually we know pretty well what is right. After that: What? why should we enquire, there can be no answer, for myself I am not always sorry that the end of my time is not so very far off. I am painting a picture of Hope sitting on a globe with bandaged eyes playing a lyre which has all the strings broken but one out of which poor little tinkle she is trying to get all the music possible, listening with all her might to the little sound, do you like the idea?

Watts's description of Hope as "trying to get all the music possible" and "listening with all her might" is a description of Hope gaining "what is best worth having" through "ardent desire and consistent efforts". In the New Gallery Catalogue Watts wrote, "Hope' strives to get all the music possible out of the last remaining string."9 Again, for Watts, striving, not simply despair, is the key factor in his interpretation of the painting but striving did not imply achieving. As the time of the New Gallery Exhibition Mary Watts records;

...he [Watts] found people confused Hope with expectation and he said the difference was that expectation was definite and hope indefinite, "I was [sic] made Hope blind so expecting nothing."10

For Watts, the important aspect of the iconography of the painting was that failure could be redeemed by striving.
Hope was conceived to inspire action in the face of despair. For most critics, and for most of those who purchased prints of the painting, Hope was an image that inspired. For Chesterton it was certainly inspirational:

...though Watts calls his tremendous reality Hope, we may call it many other things. Call it faith, call it vitality, call it will to live, call it religion of tomorrow morning, call it the immortality of man, call it self-love and vanity; it is a thing that explains why man survives all things and why there is no such thing as a pessimist.\(^1\)

For Julia Cartwright in 1891, Hope implied Watts's confidence in a divine plan.

...we are all of us familiar with the wonderful vision of Hope - the saddest and weariest Hope that was ever painted...hope is the spring of his [Watts's] teaching. Sad, unutterably sad, as his deepest thoughts are, oppressed as he is with the common burden of humanity and "the sense of the tears in mortal things," his sadness never sinks into despair... Mr. Watts has never lost his faith and trust in the future, his serene confidence in that "Far off, divine event To which the whole creation moves."\(^2\)

Such religious interpretations abound, but they are not well supported by the painting nor by Watts's oeuvre, and when Cartwright wrote of the painting again in 1896 she deleted her words on Watts's faith in the future and included a description capturing the action in the painting;

...bending down, she tries, with
passionate longing, to catch the faint sound of the music for which she yearns. 13

The public at large, which bought reproductions of this painting in great numbers, seemed to treat the work as a household icon. No doubt, interpretations varied from print owner to print owner, but something of its significance might be gleaned from a colorful story told by Mary Watts about a letter received by Watts from one who was down and out;

It [a letter] was written by a stranger to tell him [Watts] in the simplest language that in a dark hour of life in a grimy Northern town a photograph of his picture of "Hope" had arrested attention at a moment of extreme crisis. The photograph had been bought with a few remaining shillings, and the message pondered, and so for one life the whole course of events had been changed. The letter concluded with these words; "I do not know you, nor have I ever seen the face of him who gave me my 'Hope', but I thank God for the chance of that day when it came to me in my sore need." 14

This popular icon had a popular message that called for persistence when beset by despair.

In contrast to a work such as Rossetti's A Roman Widow (fig. 98), in which a bereaved woman languorously plucks two lyres as she retreats into a world of music and reverie, Watts's Hope depicts a woman who expressively contorts her entire body as she plays a lyre that is so damaged that it is incapable of producing a melody, let alone a chord. The
intense concentration of Watts's figure recalls Poynter's enormously popular painting, *Faithful unto Death* (1865; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, fig. 99), in which a Roman sentry, illuminated by the lava descending on Pompeii, stands at his post clutching his spear firmly and awaiting his death. Poynter's secular hero, like Watts's Hope, is heroic because he carries on despite the fact that he can achieve nothing. Even so, Poynter's hero is a martyr to the cause of military discipline while Watts's heroine is an allegorical figure struggling for the sake of struggling itself.

A painting from later in the century helps to distinguish more clearly the meaning of Watts's iconography. Evelyn de Morgan's *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1892; sold Sotheby's Belgravia 1 July 1975) depicts Hope and Despair as two different allegorical figures. Despair in a contorted posture turns her back on the placid figures of Hope above whom is a low relief sculpture showing two figures embracing. The iconographic message is simply that the peace of hope can ease the suffering of despair, but in Watts's painting suffering, hope and despair are indivisibly linked. Striving, for Watts, is what gives life value and there is no better opportunity for striving than in the midst of despair.

The early iconography of Watts's paintings showed no
reverence for striving and in works such as Life's Illusions (1849; Tate Gallery, London) and Fata Morgana (1849; Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester) the quest for the unattainable is treated as pointless and the fates are depicted as literally laughing at man. Human endeavors are treated not only as futile but they are treated with contempt. Even so, when Watts painted his doom and gloom painting, Time and Oblivion (1849; Eastnor Castle), he included the painted words from Eccles. 11, 4-5, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest."¹⁵ This phrase, painted in a band at the top of the composition, makes the painting doubly pessimistic for the figures of Time and Oblivion represent the destruction of all that is human while the phrase expresses the impossibility of reward in the grave. Yet, that portion of the phrase that reads "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" seems to imply some virtue in doing. Nonetheless, this portion of the painted phrase finds no echo in this painting nor in the other paintings of the period. Action is treated as action wasted and certainly not as a thing worth pursuing with all one's might.

In his later paintings, Watts's expression of the futility of action does not diminish, but, on the other
hand, his expression of the importance of action increases until it becomes the focus of his iconography. *Love and Death* (c.1868-75; Bristol City Art Gallery, fig. 23) is an example of a transitional painting. Here, futile and rather pathetic action is treated with respect as Death overwhelms the noble efforts of Love to stop her way. *Clytie* (c.1869; Watts Gallery, Compton) and *Orpheus and Eurydice* (c.1868; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, fig. 100; 2nd version, Fogg Museum of Art Harvard University) are also transitional for in each painting Watts's sensuous depiction of physical and emotional pain creates a strong sense of empathy for vain struggles. No doubt, Michelangelo was an important influence for Watts in these works and in particular *The Bound Slaves* seem to have figured in Watts's conception.¹⁶

*Orpheus and Eurydice* (1872; Aberdeen Art Gallery, see fig. 101) marks a change for it is vertical and full length, in contrast to the version of c.1869 which is horizontal and shows only head and torso. There is an extremely powerful sense of energy and animation, which, rather than simply depicting angst and creating empathy, treats Orpheus as explosively charged with life. The twist of his torso, the spring of his legs, the lunge of his head and shoulders, and the power with which this nude Orpheus supports the lifeless body of Eurydice makes this into a monument to physical
aspiration. In contrast to Leighton's *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1864; Leighton House Art Gallery and Museum, London), discussed by Leonée and Richard Ormond in the *Victorian High Renaissance Catalogue*, in which Eurydice's attempt to make Orpheus look her in the eyes becomes a moral on the consequences of impetuosity, Watts's *Orpheus and Eurydice* creates an ideal of action which is heroic and tragic. The shift in his iconography since painting *Life's Illusions* (fig. 18) in 1849 is such that action has gone from being scorned to being praised. When *Orpheus and Eurydice* was exhibited in a retrospective show in 1881-82 it is not surprising that critics singled out only that painting for the "violence of the action."¹⁸

This painting reflects Watts's belief in the virtue of action in itself. His maxim that "there is no law more distinctly divine than that which says, 'Onwards!'",¹⁹ his motto "The Utmost for the Highest"²⁰ and his statement that "Religion is action"²¹ all demonstrate his obsession with striving. As Houghton points out, for many other Victorians striving or aspiration was also of great importance; "Aspiration with all its fine sense of intensity and greatness thus became an end in itself..."²² Like many of these Victorians, Watts believed that aspiration need not lead to success, and as Rowland Alston wrote, he believed Browning's tenet that "A man's reach should exceed his
grasp."\(^{23}\) The result of this belief is that aspiration and failure became of the utmost value. In 1900 Watts wrote, "Failure is present in all highest endeavours...."\(^{24}\) On August 26, 1880 he stated that "It is not for mortals to command success, all we can do is try to deserve it..."\(^{25}\) In writing of the short-comings of his own works he held that "...its aspirations shall at least save it from meanness,"\(^{26}\) and of his paintings in general he hoped they would "...secure success when they fail."\(^{27}\) For Watts the trying is all and failure is inevitable. Iconographically, the vertical Orpheus and Eurydice embodies these beliefs with great visual intensity in all its five versions including the Watts Gallery version (73 x 43 inches, fig. 60) which was completed between 1900 and 1903.

It is in the mid 1880's with works such as Hope and The Happy Warrior that Watts as an extoller of action comes into the fore. It is worth noting that his sculpture, Physical Energy, not cast until 1903, was mentioned in the Art Journal of 1884 as Active Force.\(^{28}\) This title finds an echo in most of the works Watts produced over the rest of his career such as Progress, Jonah, Evolution, Industry and Greed and the Sower of the Systems which are all monuments to action.

Sun, Earth and Her Dead Daughter the Moon (1899-1902; Watts Gallery, Compton, fig. 102) is another such powerful
work. As the title indicates the composition includes three figures. At the bottom is a nude, dead, vaguely defined and sexless figure that slumps into a mass of dark draperies; rising above this figure is a nude female figure who sensually arches her back and projects her breasts forward in a manner quite similar to the female nudes in Life's Illusions (fig. 8) of 1849; and towering above and projecting a golden glow is a muscular male figure who seems to be firing an arrow upwards. This composition creates a dramatic diagonal upward movement as it ascends from death and decay, to sensuality, and then to thundering physical action. Despite the fact that this painting takes one of its figures from Life's Illusions, it does anything but ridicule action as many of Watts's early paintings did.

Fragmented color, dissolved forms, and shimmering haze give this painting a glowing attraction and a sense of mystery. As in works by Odilon Redon, mystery conveyed through fragmented color and obscured form is used to bring the imagination into action. In many of Watts's late works such as Iris, Olympus on Ida, and The Sower of the Systems (fig. 72) he employs this treatment of color and form to produce powerful visual effects. Even so, for Watts, it was not enough to spark the imagination of his viewer through the use of mysterious passages, he was determined to stimulate his viewer into action. He designed his paintings
to counter both paralysis and withdrawal from the world.

Despite Watts's rather generalized promotion of action in works such as Progress, he did not promote all pursuits equally. Sympathy was of great importance to him. As Mary Watts records on April 22, 1887;

To him [Watts] the great use of suffering was the bond it became with all sufferers. A wider sympathy learnt thro' disappointment sorrow and pain.  

For Watts, the pain, suffering and chaos of the world gave meaning and purpose to life, for he believed that great worth could be found in easing pain and suffering, or at least in the failed aspiration to do so.

Watts's Love and Life (1882-85; Tate Gallery, London, fig. 26) expresses quite positively the value of sympathy, love and aspiration in the midst of torment. This painting, a monument to Love, portrays Life as a young nude female who is sick, emaciated, exceedingly weak, and desperate. The severe angularity of her buttocks, her shoulder and all her other joints make her features unattractive, but she is supported by the handsome male figure of Love who leads this near dead figure onwards. Somewhat similarly, Burne-Jones's Love Leading and Pilgrim (c.1871-1897, Tate Gallery, London, fig. 103) presents love leading the Pilgrim out of brambles and into a sunlit field. He treats Love as a force that resolves the pains of life, for Love leads this Pilgrim from a landscape of darkness and into a landscape of harmony and
light. A complete resolution is reached in the painting, The Heart of the Rose (1889; sold Sotheby's Belgravia, April 1980), which is a sequel to Love Leading the Pilgrim and part of a series based on Chaucer's Romaunt of the Rose. In The Heart of the Rose the Pilgrim reaches his goal as he is presented to the object of his love, a classic Burne-Jones stunner. As in Burne-Jones's King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid (1884; Tate Gallery, London), beauty and love are depicted as mesmerising and arresting forces. Although Watts had painted in this manner, after completing the last of five versions of Paolo and Francesca in 1884 he ceased to treat Love as a refuge. By contrast, in Love and Life, Love makes the struggle against difficulties possible: it is love which allows the aspiration and suffering of life to continue until the inevitable moment of death.

In describing Love and Life Watts wrote; "In 'Love and Life' the slight female figure is an emblem of the fragile quality in humanity, at once its weakness and its strength...." 30 Elsewhere he wrote,

The picture is often cited as a failure, especially with reference to the fragility of the figure of Life. I may have pushed this slightness too far, but I wanted to insist on the weakness of human existence far down among the lower creatures but for the vivifying uplifting impulse of sympathy. 31

In promoting this notion of the importance of Love, Watts went so far as to paint Love Triumphant (1899-1902; Tate
Gallery, London, fig. 92) which treats love not simply as a kind of crutch but as an explosive power. In a position reminiscent of the erect figure in She Shall be Called Woman (fig. 64), Love, a male figure, stands as the supreme power over the dead bodies of Time and Death. The composition is almost certainly based on Burne-Jones's figure of Amor in The Triumph of Love (1871; Watts Gallery, Compton fig. 104) in which Love stands over the dead bodies of Oblivion and Fame, but Watts's iconography is quite different. As John Christian points out, The Triumph of Love was conceived as part of the predella of a planned triptych which exists only as an unfinished oil (1870; Birmingham City Art Gallery). In this scheme, Love is depicted as an undeniable force that brings complete destruction. The tragic attraction of Love is captured in the beautiful, languid posture of the figure of Amor and in the melancholy expression on his face as he stands before the bodies of his slain victims, Fortune, Fame and Oblivion. No sense of tragedy or melancholy is present in Watts's painting but rather Love is treated as a highly charged figure that radiates a great burst of light. Love becomes an unbridled, unlimited power. Barrington's comment on this painting is worth quoting for it not only helps to explain this work, but it helps to distinguish it from the bulk of Watts's paintings;

After the first "Love and Death" was painted I often pleaded for the further
theme, "Love Triumphant." It came at last, but compared to "Love and Death," "Love Triumphant" was a failure. The Love who was defeated, overpowered by the stride of Death, was a glorious, passionate, pathetic Love; and Death, the inevitable, was solemn and grand. The unanswered question, the mystery of existence, had more power to stimulate the imagination of the Celt than had the glory and the joy of a fixed faith.  

Love Triumphant, Love and Life, Hope, Time, Death and Judgment, Jonah, Mammon, Eve Tempted, She Shall Be Called Woman, Eve Repentant and a great many other works by Watts are virtually billboards. In each of these paintings one or two, nearly life size figures confront the viewer with a powerful image that expresses Watts's propaganda: "Movement is life, stagnation is death." The effect of these paintings is realized by overwhelming scale, shallow pictorial space, bold three dimensional figures and central iconic placement. In contrast to Leighton's hermetically sealed dreamscapes, Watts's paintings such as Time, Death and Judgment (fig. 24) creates a strikingly bold impact by having figures crash out at the viewer in displays of "significant form" that are often jarring.

In addition to the compositional devices Watts used to rouse his viewer, he employed symbolist devices such as distortion, ambiguity, confusion, mystery, and imperfection to stimulate the imagination into action. Such symbolist devices were essential for Watts not only for his anti-
dogmatic program, but because they increased the impact of his paintings. He wrote:

If a picture which is unquestionably well painted and well designed would fail only in that quality which makes another work of art seize and hold the spectator...I should say that this is due to the method of the painter. He has given you the whole intellectual idea at once and too completely. A suggestion of something much larger and better can be given a far less good thing.34

The power of Watts's paintings depends on suggestion, through presenting "a far less good thing." As Claude Phillips wrote in 1888.

...the doubts, the despair, the earnest strivings for light of the present century are most strongly reflected even in the technical qualities, and especially in the technical shortcomings and hesitations which would appear well-nigh inseparable from the most earnest art of the period.... This perfection of technique cannot even, by their most devoted worshippers, be claimed either for Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Burne Jones, Watts, or Frederick Walker... for Puvis de Chavannes, or Gustave Moreau, or Arnold Böcklin...35

For Watts, imperfection of technique was a powerful stylistic device that did embody "the doubts, the despair, and the earnest striving for light" and which begged the viewer to strive to make sense of his paintings.

Watts's symbolism was a social symbolism. Unlike James Ensor's The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (1889; Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp) of 1888 and Edward Munch's
Evening on Karl Johan Street (1893; Rasmus Meyers Samlinger, Bergen) of 1892 which depict society as far too decadent to be redeemed, Watts's paintings are designed to reform. Les XX did not appeal to Watts nor did The Rose & Croix, and when Peladan asked Watts to exhibit with the Rose & Croix he refused for he believed that they had little of social value to offer. Watts believed that mystery "had been in the main a stimulus towards something transcending man's best efforts," so he painted his strange allegories to stir the imagination and to stir humanitarian action in the face of confusion, suffering and conflict.
Chapter IX

Watts's Use of the Museum

Watts developed a style and program for his art long before he found a satisfactory way to put his paintings before the public. He spent the first thirty years of his career trying to find a patron for his public mural schemes before he abandoned the effort and devoted his energy to putting oil paintings before the public in group shows, in one-man shows and in museum collections. In February of 1886 The Magazine of Art announced "Mr. Watts has 'retired from the profession, and no longer works as a professional man'; whatever he is doing and may do is for the nation."1 From that date forward he produced his most important paintings for one destination: the museum wall.

In the 19th century the museum became a treasure hoard, hall of fame and forum for art that replaced the drawing room, the government hall and the church wall in significance. Among others before Watts, J.W.W. Turner understood the significance of the art museum for living artists: it would become the most important setting for contemporary art. Living artists slowly came to understand that they would take their place in museums, where the works of old masters were migrating, or they would cease to exist. Turner took matters into his own hands when he bequeathed
The Sun Rising through Vapour (1807; National Gallery, London) and Dido Building Carthage (1815, National Gallery, London) on the condition that they be hung between two paintings by Claude Lorrain, and when he made his massive bequest of paintings to the national collection which was to house his works in a building named "Turner's Gallery." For Turner, this was not simply a matter of insuring fame. He believed that the museum was the only setting suited to make his works comprehensible, for he believed that his paintings made sense only when seen together.² For Turner, the museum offered the possibility of a permanent one-man show, and despite the fact that his was quite the master of the annual Royal Academy Exhibition, it was the museum which he believed was the proper setting for his work. Nonetheless, the only 19th century British painter who succeeded in using the museum as his platform in his lifetime was Watts. Aside from Mariane North's gallery of botanical illustrations which she opened in 1882 at Kew Gardens, other living artists had only the odd painting on display in museums; but by the end of his life Watts had donated over seventy works to public museums. All these paintings were on display, in addition to the great many works by Watts on exhibit at his own public gallery.

The use of museum settings by painters certainly extends beyond Turner and Watts.³ In Brussels, Antoine
Wiertz avoided the problems of patronage by refusing to sell his major works and instead spent his career painting the future collection of the Musée Wiertz, which opened in 1865. He convinced the state to build a large studio for him in return for his allegories condemning the vices of modern society and extolling Christian virtues, but Wiertz's protected status vis à vis patrons and public turned him loose to produce some of the century's most bizarre works. As early as 1854 the "Salle Ingres" was established at the Musée Montauban and when in 1868 Ingres bequeathed a large collection of drawings and assorted works to his museum it became the Musée Ingres. Late in his career Gustave Moreau believed that the prospects were bleak that his works would be represented in sufficient number in public collections for them to be understood. His failure to get more of his paintings exhibited in the Musée du Luxembourg drove him to make a museum of his home in Paris which he bequeathed to the state in 1898. By the turn of the century the museum was fast becoming the most important platform for art, and Moreau did what he could to have his works presented on museum walls.4

The establishment and growth of the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris and the Chantrey Purchase in London contributed to the status of the museum as an exhibiting hall for living artists but with poor results. The unevenness of these
collections, in terms of both quality and theme, presented artist's works in a manner nearly as jumbled as the annual exhibition. The one-man show, the one-man museum and the one-man room in a museum made more sense of 19th-century paintings and, not surprisingly, these were becoming institutions of consequence.

At the outset of Watts's career, such a state of affairs did not exist. Public commissions at the Houses of Parliament, St. Paul's Cathedral and elsewhere seemed to offer promising conditions for the serious artist, and the Royal Academy exhibitions were bringing commissions to artists of real merit such as Landseer and Turner. When in 1843 Watts won a first prize for his Houses of Parliament cartoon Caractacus he believed he had a future as a muralist. His prospects dimmed when he exhibited his ambitious paintings Life's Illusions and The Good Samaritan at the Royal Academy for he learned that his brand of art was not wanted. Even so, he did manage in 1853 to donate The Good Samaritan to the Manchester Town Hall where it was publicly exhibited as a monument to the good deeds of Manchester's Thomas Wright. On November 12, 1853 Watts wrote a letter published in The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon which stated:

There is no reason the young artist should not paint pictures for exhibitions and sale on the walls of the Royal Academy; but there is every reason

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he should be emancipated from unconditional dependence upon the incongruous competition and hasty judgement to which the annual exhibition subjects him. 6

Rather than adjust his style to public tastes Watts withdrew from public exhibitions for nearly ten years. During this period he pursued mural commissions with only limited success. The one mural of consequence which he produced took him seven years to complete and was painted at his own expense for Lincoln's Inn. This highly praised painting was not the springboard Watts desired. About 1859, Euston Station authorities refused his offer to decorate the main hall of the train station, and all that Watts was able to produce elsewhere amounted to a very limited number of rather traditional works on church walls.

Over twenty years after he exhibited his first painting, Watts was failing to bring his art to public notice. For Watts this meant that he was failing completely in his art since he held firmly to the belief that art of the greatest merit was art that played a social role. His art was not wanted in public settings, but rather than abandon his aims he began to think of the museum as a possible outlet.

By 1861 Watts saw that the national collection could be his public setting. Just as Turner and others had done, he saw that he could bequeath works to the state. The
Athenaeum of May 25, 1861 announced;

Mr. Watts has expressed his intention to leave to the nation, at his death, the valuable and interesting collection of contemporary portraits he has been for some years, and is still forming. Among the persons who have sat to him from time to time may be named Mr. Tennyson, Sir John Lawrence, Mr. Layard, Mr. Holman Hunt, The Duke of Argyll, Mr. Gladstone, and the Lord Chancellor.\(^7\)

Watts was discovering that the private commission was no way to reach a public audience and as early as 1863 he gave his first portrait to the national collection.\(^8\) In 1883 he donated two more portraits and in 1887 he exhibited two more at the South Kensington Museum as part of a larger gift which was yet to be formally accepted.\(^9\) In 1892 another portrait was donated followed by fifteen paintings and two drawings which were donated in 1895 to the newly housed National Portrait Gallery.\(^10\) In Watts's lifetime, the National Portrait Gallery put thirty of his works on permanent display. After his death his bequest increased the number of donated works to forty-two and today roughly half of these paintings continue to be hung on public walls.

Despite the undeniable fact pointed out by Roger Fry that "Watts's portraits are coloured by this sense of public function,"\(^11\) Watts was far more keen to set his subject pictures before the public and this was a far more difficult matter. It was one thing to convince the trustees of the national collection that they needed portraits of the great
men of the day, and quite another to convince them that they needed *The Court of Death* (fig. 25). Almost from the start, Watts's portraits were well received at public exhibitions but, by contrast, his subject pictures excited almost no interest for over thirty years, and his sales of subject pictures were initially extremely low. When in the mid 1860's Watts began to exhibit his subject pictures more actively, his frustration with the Royal Academy exhibitions resurfaced in another way, for it is a fact that he began to exhibit the paintings he found most interesting at the Dudley Gallery and elsewhere. In 1880 Watts summed up his view of the annual exhibition, a view which had not changed significantly since his statements of 1853;

> Art is treated as a plaything nothing more. While this is the case, artists will employ themselves in making toys, and the annual exhibition will be cared for by the nation pretty much as a Christmas tree is, not so important an institution by half as the Maypole formerly was.12

The solution to Watts's dilemma was not clear in the early seventies. Murals seemed to be the ideal way for him to present his paintings but he could not find public walls where he would be allowed to paint his subjects. Failing at this, he was also failing to generate any real interest in his subjects at the annual exhibition. When he told his first important patron of subject pictures, Charles Rickards, on June 6, 1873 that his six Genesis designs and
The Angel of Death and Time and Death were to be left as a group at his death Watts must have wondered whether these paintings would ever find a home on public walls. In the following years he made use of a scheme that would put his art before the public and eventually allow him to utilize the museum.

Writing to Rickards on February 21, 1874, he first expressed an interest in exhibiting in a way that would be more effective than the competitive exhibitions at the Royal Academy.

And now I have come to a very different conclusion and feel very strongly that the best way to create interest in a more solemn and serious character of art would be to get together a sufficient number of pictures of a class and exhibit them together.

Later that year eight of Watts's most important paintings were displayed at the Exhibition of Modern Artists at the Royal Manchester Institute, including The Angel of Death, Love and Death, Eurydice, Daphne and The Rider on the Black Horse which made this show by far the most powerful display of Watts's work to date. Most of the reviews that followed were not only quite favorable, but they were long and rather carefully considered. In 1878, Watts widened his audience by sending twelve paintings to the Universal Exhibition in Paris. In 1880 Charles Rickards exhibited in Manchester his collection of Watts's paintings and
sculptures numbering fifty-six works, and then in 1881 Watts began in earnest to use the one-man show. In 1881 he sent 205 works to the Grosvenor, in 1884 he sent 136 to New York, in 1885 he sent 79 to Birmingham and in 1886 he sent 55 to Nottingham. From that date forward virtually every painting in Watts's large studio collection circulated among regional and metropolitan galleries. In 1896 Watts had another massive one-man show, this time at the New Gallery where he displayed 158 works.

The effect of these one-man shows should not be underestimated. By 1880, after nearly forty years in the public eye, there had been only two articles published solely on Watts with the exception of announcements of his admission to the Royal Academy and reviews of his mural at Lincoln's Inn, but by 1885 there were dozens. What is more, in 1885, after the enormously successful Grosvenor show of 1881-82 and the international success of the Metropolitan show of 1884-85, Watts was offered a baronetcy, but most significantly, on the basis of this offer Watts began receiving positive responses to his formal offer to donate subject pictures to the nation. It was in February of 1886, after four one-man shows, that the newspapers reported that all his work was to go to the nation except for one work for Canada and one for the United States. Watts wasted no time in getting his paintings into South Kensington Museum.
In 1887, F.G. Stephens wrote an article in the Portfolio stating;

The first installment of a noble gift (the greatest made to the country since Turner died and Mr. Wynn Ellis enriched the National Gallery with scores of pictures), the quality of which, as it were a mass of golden ore, I am permitted to assay, has been placed on the walls of the staircase leading to the Art Library at South Kensington. Nine masterpieces of a peculiar strain are now hanging there ....

After fifty years of frustration, Watts had a public setting for his most important works.

In 1897 the Tate Gallery formally accepted his gift of nineteen paintings including Mammon (dedicated to his worshippers) (71 1/2 in x 41 1/2 in), The Dweller in the Innermost (43 3/4 in x 27 1/2 in), "For He Had Great Possessions" (55 in x 23 in), Dray Horses (119 in x 159 1/2 in), The Minotaur (46 in x 36 3/4 in), Death Crowning Innocence (49 in x 31 1/4), Jonah (60 1/2 in x 35 in), The Spirit of Christianity (dedicated to all churches) (107 1/2 in x 59 3/4 in), "Sic Transit" (40 in x 80 1/2 in), Faith (83 in x 34 3/4 in), Hope (55 in x 43 3/4 in), Love and Life (86 1/2 in x 47 3/4 in), "She Shall Be Called Woman" (100 1/2 in x 44 3/4 in), Eve Tempted (100 1/2 in x 44 3/4 in), Eve Repentant (100 1/2 in x 45 1/2 in), Love and Death (97 1/2 in x 46 in), The Messenger (10 1/2 in x 58 1/2 in), Chaos (41 in x 119 in), and then in 1899 The All-Pervading (84 in
x 44 in), in 1900 Love Triumphant (116 in x 66 in), and Time, Death and Judgment (91 in x 65 1/2 in), and finally in 1902 Watts added The Court of Death (167 in x 108 in).

The scale alone of these works indicates that they are museum pieces which were painted as a consequence of the arrangement reached in 1886 which allowed that such a group of paintings would be accepted and exhibited. Watts achieved a nearly permanent one-man show in a completely public setting. Here the viewer could be affected by a group of paintings that could have been brought together in no other permanent setting. This setting, the Watts Room at the Tate Gallery, lasted from 1897 to the Second World War when most of these paintings went into storage where they remain today. Richard Muther wrote in 1902 that he believed the Watts Room at the Tate Gallery to be a profoundly important place. He described it as a church in which Watts was laying the foundations for a new religion which could be embraced by literally everyone in "our belief-less time."\(^{19}\)

Watts made efforts to spread his art beyond the national collection when in 1886 he donated Time, Death and Judgment to the Royal Academy where it would accompany his diploma painting The Curse of Cain. In 1887 he donated Love and Death to the Whitworth Institute in Manchester, in 1889 he donated Fata Morgana to the Municipal Gallery of Leicester, and in 1893 he donated versions of Love and Life
to both the United States Collection and to the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris. In 1897 Watts gave Sir Galahad to Eton College and in 1898 he gave Time, Death and Judgment to St. Paul's Cathedral, London. In 1901 he presented Tennyson to the South Australia Art Gallery, Adelaide.

An interview with Watts in The Pall Mall Gazette of May 9, 1885 documents another of Watts's schemes to bring his art to the public;

... my [Watts's] pictures hang in my gallery here at Little Holland House, where anyone who likes is free to come any Sunday afternoon and see them ... I think, that not half the use is yet made that might be made of art as a means of influencing ... and people hardly realize how great a wrong is being done by shutting up our galleries on Sunday afternoons.20

By 1887 Watts's Gallery at Little Holland House was open free two days a week21 and by 1893 Watts was refusing to sell certain paintings which he believed should remain in this gallery.22 On February 29, 1896 Watts wrote to his best patron James Smith;

I am a good deal troubled about what to do with my pictures, in the way of selling I have so many claims upon & appeal to me that some money would be very useful, but the Gallery at Little Holland House has become such an Institution that I don't know how to take some of the interesting pictures out of it feeling it would be a sort of injustice to the very numerous visitors who now look upon it as public property. I have been refusing lately to part with some a purchaser greatly wished to
have.23

The gallery at Little Holland House had indeed become an institution which did in fact keep Watts from selling certain works, despite the fact that it occasionally helped him to justify a high price for others.

In 1896, a reporter wrote of Watts's Gallery as follows;

There is no bric-a-brac, no picturesque corner, no artful disposition of light. The visitor sees pictures, one or two on easels, most hung on the walls, a good many standing on the floor. Yet there is art in the apparent artlessness, for the absence of everything that leaves us free to gaze with untrammelled mind on each picture, for it seems that Mr. Watts wants us to look at his pictures and interpret each to his own and whole heart and soul .... The mental attitude engendered is not one of repose .... It is rather one of striving and unrest, like that which comes with reading a difficult work.24

This Gallery offered a radically different setting from the annual exhibition in which sensational paintings, grasped in a moment, tended to capture the public eye; and it appears that Watts believed that this setting was a success. He wrote on January 10, 1893; "... reason is given me to think that many find pleasure and some from letters received by me, profit."25

Even so, Watts decided to close his Gallery at Little Holland House and sell his house in London. He wrote on August 30, 1903;
... we [Watts and his wife] have made up our minds to sell the house as it is an absurd expense ... so Gallery and everything must go to the country....

In April of 1903 Watts had laid the foundation stone of a new complex which was to house workers for Mary Watts's pottery and which was to become his new picture gallery at Compton. In March of 1904 The Surrey Advertiser announced the opening of the gallery;

... it will be thrown open free on Wednesday (early closing day in Guildford, Godalming and other places), Saturdays and Sundays, while on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays a charge of one shilling will be made for admission, which will be donated towards the expense of a caretaker.

In the same year a catalogue to the Watts Gallery was published. The weekend gallery at Little Holland House was transformed into a one-man museum in the Wattses' arts and crafts village of Compton, but it was immediately in jeopardy.

On July 1, 1904, Watts died and, unlike Wiertz and Moreau, he had made no provisions for the state to take over the building that housed his paintings. Rather than bequeath his Gallery to the state, his will of November 21, 1899 bequeathed his paintings, with the exception of a handful of personal gifts, to "any Provincial Gallery or Galleries in Great Britain or Ireland ...." Watts's will went a very long way toward fulfilling his commitment
announced in 1886 that all his works would be for the nation. Mary Watts was displeased by Watts's will because it put the continuation of the Watts Gallery at great risk, and what is more she was made heir to a minute fraction of her husband's art. She went to the Attorney General and came to an arrangement that established the Watts Gallery as a Charity Trust with her finances so that Watts's paintings could be displayed together permanently near her home at Compton. Whether or not Watts envisioned the Watts Gallery as a permanent home for his paintings is certainly open to question. Richard Muther did write that Watts's studio collection should and would become the Watts Museum, and what is more, the scale of the gallery, designed by Christopher Turner, might indicate the wish of an 86 year old man to leave a gallery of his works behind him. Even so, the fact that Watts never attempted to address the financial issue of perpetuating the gallery brings the matter again into question. His will allowed his executors, Mary Watts and her brother William Theodore Fraser-Tytler, to decide what gallery or galleries should receive his works. A few paintings were dispersed to regional galleries but most were housed in one gallery, the Watts Gallery, and Mary Watts footed the bill. Mr. Watts left the matter up to Mrs. Watts, and one has the suspicion that he knew what the outcome would be, and since the closure of the Watts Room at
the Tate Gallery, the Watts Gallery at Compton has become the setting of the best public display of Watts's work.

In his lifetime Watts managed to embody some of the most progressive ideas of the 19th century in his paintings and he was able to set these paintings before the public. This achievement was such that, for some such as Muther, Watts appeared to have reestablished a genuinely communal role for art. That is, he appeared to have realized what in a century as fragmented as the 19th century seemed wholly impossible: he appeared to have embodied the communal ideas of his time in public art. He used the museum brilliantly for his aims and for this especially Muther saw Watts as the founder of a new religion and as one of the most important artists of the 19th century. He wrote;

And his art offers the guarantee ... that we will regain an art which is the proud undivided expression of this new world view.3

Watts's own gallery and the Watts Room at the Tate Gallery were places in which visitors were surrounded by Watts's admittedly literary works. Even so, Watts did make his viewers think: his works were viable. As Muther pointed out this was no small achievement;

What do we say of Greuze and Hogarth? What do we say of Wiertz, the Belgian rumbler or the peacetime apostle? The sermons they hold bore us. We hold literary painting as barbaric. Do we believe that Watts achieved more than his predecessors? Had he not wasted
life's strength on a completely theoretical aim? With this sceptical feeling one enters the Tate Gallery ... However the result is odd. People are so still in the Watts Room, so earnest and solemn, as if they were in a church. They don't laugh and they don't walk past his works in a distracted apathy. They stand for long times before them. Then they sit down and think.32 To have a chance of provoking such a reaction Watts needed the museum. Almost no other public building offered a place for a viewer to contemplate contemporary art, except for the Royal Academy exhibition and other rather commercial forums.

The museum also suited Watts because it was far more neutral ground than a church or a government hall, and since Watts refused to ally himself with dogmas he was left with virtually no other place to show his art. Since museums in general functioned as secular places, art housed there was treated somewhat as an artifact, so works such as 14th-century icons were completely divorced from their original context. Nonetheless the museum, devoted to the secular contemplation of art, could not have been more appropriate for Watts's paintings. The art museum, for viewers of Watts's paintings, became a place to examine fundamental elements of contemporary society through works such as Mammon (dedicated to his worshippers), Hope and Love and Life, and thereby to come to terms with a range of essentially modern values. However, in the 20th century Watts's work began to seem hopelessly out of place in
museums. The content of his paintings simply could not be ignored, regardless of whatever remarkable aspects of style his works might contain, and literary painting had ceased to be fashionable. Though in the long run Watts failed in using the museum as a temple for his art, for some years he had succeeded. Perhaps as significantly for us, he helped to establish the modern art museum as a place to come to understand the works of modern artists.
Chapter X

Conclusions

For Watts, and for many others in the 19th century, truth and religion had vanished: creeds were seen as artificial institutions and the science of the day was seen as little more than a passing myth. In fact, to a great extent, the history of 19th century art can be written as a series of attempts to find vestiges of truth in a 19th century wasteland. Pastoral and savage nature offered transcendence for some, subjectivity and personal mythology offered a kind of truth to others, the concrete reality of visual facts seemed an answer to others, and the artifice of style itself translated into honesty for others; yet Watts saw in these approaches no more than a series of fragile, artificial options which offered no escape from living a lie, and which offered no good reason for living at all. This is the context in which Watts painted.

His art offered an unusual kind of transcendence. Watts did not carve out his own brand of truth, rather he embraced a different kind of god: failure. This obvious common denominator of all human endeavors was made by Watts into an object of celebration. In his paintings we bathe in ignorance, inadequacy, suffering and all that separates us from the dead. Watts's art is a profoundly optimistic
expression of his love of the frustrations of the human condition, but more significantly, his embrace of failure marks a decisive step away from the 19th century obsession with finding truth.

Watts's attempts to deal with the death of religion and truth linked his art with innumerable painters, but his approach isolated him. For Watts, the god of failure ruled over all artistic schools without exception. He was no Pre-Raphaelite, no disciple of the High Renaissance, no decadent, and no aesthete. If he had accidentally formed a school he would have attacked it.

In Watts's iconography, the trying was all. He rejected the desirability of communal truths, but nevertheless he found ways to produce communal art by using symbolist devices to involve the spectator in his social symbolist paintings dedicated to action. Watts's paintings of aspiration and wonder make him a crucial figure in the history of 19th century style and iconography, and his paintings offer an aesthetic and intellectual depth that could well appeal to modern sensibilities.
Chapter I

1. Mary Seton Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life*, 3 vols. (New York: Hoddler, 1912) 3:255. Watts's philosophy, as it appears in this chapter, is his mature philosophy gleaned from the extensive number of documents preserved by Mary Watts, Watts's second wife. Much more is known of Watts's thinking after this marriage in 1886 than before, but it appears that the core of his mature ideology dates back to c. 1848 when he conceived his project, "The House of Life". A more precise understanding of the evolution of his philosophy is far from being established.

2. Watts 3:39. As with many of the documents collected by Mary Watts, this is undated.

3. Mary Seton Watts, From Diaries 1886-1895, ms, M.S. Watts Papers, Watts Gallery, Compton. This entry for the date of July 13, 1890 is a quotation from G.F. Watts of a type repeated in the Watts Gallery ms. extracts from Mary Watts's diaries. For instance, the following; "1893 Feb. 26 I know that from my earliest days I have felt Theology to be the death of religion—all the doctrines and dogmas are its very negation—."


7. M.S. Watts, Watts 3:166. This quotation is from an article Watts published in 1880 in Nineteenth Century and After entitled "The Present Conditions of Art."


13. Watts's mural, Justice: A Hemicycle of the Lawgivers, at Lincoln's Inn documents his admiration for these men. This mural is discussed at length in Chapter III.


15. M.S. Watts, From Diaries 1886-1895.

NOTES

Chapter II

1. The facts relating to Watts's early life mentioned in this paragraph and subsequently are taken from M.S. Watts, Watts 1: 3-37 and Blunt 1-13. These facts are also to be found in most of the numerous biographies on Watts.

2. Watts's copy of Mortimer is illustrated in M.S. Watts, Watts 1:xiv; a painting after Velasquez was sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, September 22, 1981; a painting after Bellini was sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, October 20, 1981; watercolors in the style of Morland exist in the collection of the Watts Gallery, Compton; and the influence of Etty and Haydon is evident in drawings of military subjects at the Watts Gallery, Compton.


13. To appreciate fully the extent to which Watts was known as a muralist in these years, see J.


20. G.F. Watts, letter to Miss G. Duff Gordon, 27 January 1847, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 40, F11. In another letter to Miss G. Duff Gordon 15 February 1847 Watts wrote "... you are all too wise to think the good path too narrow to be trodden by a Roman Catholic ... ", microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 40, F13.


22. Blunt 38.

23. Mullen catalogue entry 7.


27. Chapman 33.


34. Ruskin 11:36.
36. Blunt 52.
37. Blunt 55.
38. Board 105 and Chapman 80.
40. M.S. Watts, From Diaries.
42. Chapman 162.
43. G.F. Watts, #6, Ruskin etc. 6.
44. Blunt 77.
45. See Blunt 76-95.
51. Barrington 82, 98, 100, 101, 106, 112, 118 and
122.


54. Boase 323.

55. Boase 342-345.

56. Chapman 78-79.


60. There is no documentation that even one article had been devoted to Watts.


66. Felix Summerly, "Fine Arts at the Railway Stations," Athenaeum 9 January 1847:


69. Since c.1848 "The House of Life" scheme was Watts's greatest interest, but he had not yet found a promising way to put it before the public. Later, he exhibited sections of the scheme as easel paintings, such as Time and Oblivion.


72. G.F. Watts, letter to Julia Margaret Cameron, n.d., microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 34, F11-F13. This letter also includes the following; "I am indeed grieved about Major de Vere it is a shocking calamity." The calamity is Major Francis Horatio de Vere's death which occurred August 22, 1865. The fact that the letter also mentions Cameron's photography further establishes the date since she did not begin photography until January 1864. This letter must be taken as written in late 1865 and not written in 1861 as M.S. Watts implies (M.S. Watts, Watts 1:207).


74. Blunt 118-119.

76. Richard Ormond 17.

77. Blunt 191-192.

78. Art Journal 6 (1867) 93.


80. See G.F. Watts, correspondence with Charles H. Rickards, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiches 4-12.


82. Atkinson 65-70.

83. For South Kensington, see Physick 72; for Manchester Town Hall, see G.F. Watts, letter to Charles H. Rickards, 4 March 1877, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 9, D10-D13.

84. See Chapter III for an expanded analysis.


86. See Chapter III for documentation.

87. Haydon 836; Here, writing in 1853, Watts stated, "There is no reason the young artist should not paint pictures for exhibition and sale on the walls of the Royal Academy: but there is every reason he should be emancipated from unconditional dependence upon the incongruous competition and hasty judgement to which the annual exhibition subjects him."

88. G.F. Watts, letter to Charles H. Rickards, 21 February 1874, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 7, A14. See also Chapter IX.

89. Board 174-175.


92. Ruskin 33:287-305.

93. See Blunt 152-153. The following letter from Watts to Edward Burne-Jones also throws light on the subject: "I think that it is a pity to give Baronetcies to Artists and literary men not because in the case of yourself and Millais the distinction is too great I would suggest something greater; but because Knighthood may be felt in some cases as indicating distinctly a lower professional place." (G.F. Watts, letter to Edward Burne-Jones, 17 April 1896, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 18, A2).


95. Forsyth 135, 143, 152.


98. M.S. Watts, *Watts*. This work is the most important single source of documentary evidence. It offers numerous valuable insights into Watts and into his work: but it sets a sentimental tone which drowns out the more interesting aspects of Watts's style and iconography.


100. Blunt 169-170.

101. Edward Burne-Jones, letter to G.F. Watts Apr. 1888, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 17, C4-C5. "... if there are any shops or marts of merchandise in Mentone, I beseech you, by all that is wise and experienced in in (sic) the sayings of the ancients let your wife have full license to traffic, barter,
chaffer and cheapen in those same marts - it is a
natural, reasonable and necessary desire, which will
unfailingly bring happiness to the household - that
is a bitter story she told me, and I cannot forget it
or cease to mingle a little blame in my otherwise
unqualified admiration for you."

102. These points are documented and discussed at
length in Chapter IV.

103. M.S. Watts, From Diaries 1886-1895, 22 January
1892. For this date Mary Watts cites the following
topic of conversation: "A blast furnace that would
dispel all our fogs and cook all our dreamers."

104. Kenneth Bendiner, An Introduction to Victorian
Painting (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 139.

105. "Notes on a visit to Mr. Watts, at
Limnerslease, Guildford. Shiere, September 27,
1898," Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 27, B8.

106. All the points mentioned here are documented
and analyzed in Chapter IX.

107. For a discussion of Watts's sculptural
projects, see R.E. Gutch, "G.F. Watts' Sculpture",

108. G.F. Watts, letter to Charles H. Rickards, 17
August 1866, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 4, B13.

109. G.F. Watts, letter to Mrs. A.T. Bryans, 28
April 1899, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 34, E1.

110. See H. Dagnell, Postman's Park and its
Memorials (Queensbury, Eng.: privately printed, 1987)
and Blunt 218.

111. Roger Fry, Letters of Roger Fry, Ed. Denys
1:113.

112. See Bibliography. As well as writing articles
on Watts, Fry gave Watts's paintings numerous good
reviews when they were exhibited in competitive
shows.

113. Roger Fry, Introduction, English Painting in
the XVIIIth-XXth Centuries, Vol 1 of A Record of the

114. Roger Fry. Cézanne: A Study of his Development (New York: MacMillan, 1927) 72. "When one thinks of all the attempts that were made in the nineteenth century by Chassériau, Puvis de Chavannes and Watts to attain this monumental quality, we get a measure of Cézanne's greatness when we see that he alone really succeeded. He alone was sincere enough to rely on his sensations and abandon all efforts at eloquence or emphasis."
NOTES

Chapter III


2. Chapman 16.


4. Boase 324.

5. Staley 58.


7. For an extended treatment of Watts's respect for Flaxman, see Chapter VIII.

8. Boase 328.


10. Sketchley 30.


15. G.F. Watts, #6 Ruskin etc. 14: "Having completed my Fresco ... I will paint some other space instead of repainting the Red-Cross Knight if Her Majesty's Commissioners will give me permission and this I should consider a very great favour indeed ...."

16. Ruskin 11:30; Letter from Ruskin to Coleridge dating between 1848 and 1851: "Do you know Watts? The man who is not employed on Houses of Parliament - to my mind the only real painter of history or thought we have in England."
"The ceiling to be covered with the uniform blue of space, on which should be painted the Sun, the Earth, and the Moon, as it is by their several revolutions and dependence upon each other that we have a distinct notion of, and are able to measure and estimate, the magnitude of Time. The progress of Time, and its consequent effect, I would illustrate for the purpose of conveying a moral lesson - the design of Time and Oblivion would be exactly in its place. To contemplate the design, the Earth should be attended by two figures symbolic of the antagonistic forces, Attraction and Repulsion. I would then give, perhaps upon one half of the ceiling, which might be divided with a gold band on which the zodiac might be painted, a nearer view of earth, and by a number of gigantic figures stretched out at full length represent a range of mountains typifying the rocky structure or skeleton. These I would make very grand and impressive, in order to emphasise the insignificance of man. The most important (to us) of the constellations should shine out of the deep ultramarine firmament. Silence and Mighty Repose should be stamped upon the character and disposition of the giants; and revolving centuries and cycles should glide, personified by female figures of great beauty, beneath the crags upon which the might forms should lie, to indicate (as compared with the effect upon man and his works) the non-effect of time upon them . . . .

Then I would begin with man himself, trace him through his moral and political life; first the hunter stage, gaining, through the medium of his glimmering yet superior intelligence, advantages over the stronger yet inferior animals, almost his equals. Next the pastoral state, his intelligence further developed to the consequence improvement of condition: serviceable animals domesticated, reclaimed by his thoughtful care, the stronger and finer subdued by the force of his will, aided by all conquering intelligence. This is the Golden Age, the age of poetry. Of experience comes tradition, of tradition is born poetry, here performing its natural and legitimate function - instructing. This portion of the work might be rendered most beautifully, since in this period of the history of society it is possible the human animal enjoyed the greatest possible amount of happiness, equally removed from the penalties of ambition, and from the degradation of a precarious and merely animal existence. There
would be a great chance of exquisite subjects to illustrate this epoch, and there might be introduced the episode of Job.

"Next should be man, - the tyrant - the insidious oppressor - the slave, a dweller in cities - the Egyptians raise the pyramids - their mythology - the habits of the people. (Quoted in Mullen, no page, from M.S. Watts, Watts 1: 101-103). The final paragraph reads as follows;

Next should be man the tyrant, the insidious oppressor, and the slave, the dweller in cities, the Egyptians should raise their Pyramids, illustrate its story of Joshep and his brethren, from Egypt we would accompany the Jews of Palestine until the history becomes identified the Assyria, history of that country principal illustration, fall of Nineveh and Sardinapalus, history of Persia, principle illustrations Cyrus and Creasus; - India its mythology animals ... and - Africa, mythology; general history, principal illustration, building of the Parthenon, portraits of the principal heroes. Rome, history; illustrating Scipio, habit, manners, orations, combats of gladiators, and wild animals in the amphitheatre, Architecters, Naval architeceter seafight, Antony & Augustus, - Founding of the Christian era treated simply as a matter of history setting up the cross; - destruction of Jerusalem, General history during the domination of the Popes, Goths, invasion of Rome, Mahomet, - Saracens history of Gaul - France, England, Peter the Hermit, crusades, middle ages," (Blunt 67).


21. G.F. Watts, #6 Ruskin etc. 27.

22. J.B. Atlay, Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, Bart. (London: Smith Elder, 1903) 229-230. The building Watts would have decorated today houses the Taylor Institute which is attached to the Ashmolean.
23. Microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 31, D2-D3.
26. Stirling 308-309; also in Chapman 56-57 and Board 120.
27. Stirling 309.
29. M.S. Watts, Watts 1:183. This quotation dates from 1859 to 1860 for Watts discusses the mural as a recently completed work; "... I would anticipate certain criticisms which I know will be made, and I wish to account for things which will be considered objections ... " (M.S. Watts, Watts 1:184). The draft letter from which M.S. Watts quotes is in the archives of the Watts Gallery (G.F. Watts, #6 Ruskin etc. 12).
30. Sketchley 40-41.
34. Spielmann, Works 4. F.G. Stephens, Artists At Home (London; Sampson Low, 1884) 47 also states that Watts made his offer to Euston Station after completing Lincoln's Inn. Schleinitz 46 also confirms this date. No 19th-century source places the date before 1859, but most 20th-century sources place the date as 1852, and every recent source follows. In the absence of firm documentation Spielmann and Schleinitz should be taken as the authorities. Spielmann is indisputably the most conscientious 19th-century writer on Watts, and Schleinitz's monograph demonstrates that he is the
author with the greatest devotion to chronology to have known Watts. See also O. von Schleinitz, "G.F. Watts," Kunstchronik August 1904: 513 for a discussion of the great importance Schleinitz placed on establishing a sound chronology for Watts's work.


46. M.S. Watts, Watts 3:121.

47. M.S. Watts, Watts 1:225-226, and microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 4, C5-C7.


49. Physick 71: "In May 1865 Cole called on Watts, who promised to have the design ready by 17 June. He managed to complete the sketch before the end of the month, however, and showed it to Cole on 31 May."

50. Physick 71.


52. Physick 72.

54. Richard Ormond, *Leighton's Frescoes* 7. "... the commissioner of Works ... invited the artist [Leighton] to prepare a second design for the companion lunette opposite."

55. Physick 72.

56. Physick 72. "When as late as December 1873, Redgrave eventually wrote to enquire how the work was progressing, he was told that a design was in hand, 'but the matter has not grown very far and I do not feel that I have any claims that need embarrass the new administration at South Kensington.'"

57. Physick 69.


60. See Chapter II, note 72.

61. Staley 55.


64. Harding, ms 25 809-2 part 1, 6.

65. Harding, ms 25, 809-2 part 2, 142.

66. Harding, ms 25, 809-2 part 1, 12.

67. Britten 263.

68. M.S. Watts, From Diaries 1886-1895.

69. Microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 9, C6-C9.

70. Microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 10, C13-D2.
71. Loshak 8. "... he was urged to undertake a project of almost 'House of Life' dimensions, in the shape of the Manchester Town Hall, he turned it down with a lame excuse." See also Staley 65. "His [Watts's] ambitions as a painter of frescoes seems to have evaporated in the 1860's probably because he, like everyone else, had come to realize that fresco was an unsuitable medium for the English climate .... " Also, Staley, 67. "After 1860, when opportunities to undertake monumental commissions in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Manchester Town Hall were offered to him, he turned them down."

72. Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 9, B12-C1.


74. Microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 9, D10-D13.

75. Joseph Thomson, letter to the Chairman of the Town Hall Sub-Committee, 8 October 1878, Rylands Library, Manchester, England.


NOTES

Chapter IV

1. Staley 59; Board 52.

2. Staley 59 sees the scene as related to Léopold Robert.


9. Errington 182. Closer to Watts than Hogarth is the Italian realist painter, Giacomo Ceruti, but as yet there is no sign that Watts's interest in painters ranged beyond the High Renaissance while he was in Italy.


12. Found Drowned was exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1862, at the Dudley Gallery, London in 1875, at the Royal Manchester Institution in 1880, at the Grosvenor Gallery 1880-1882 in two versions, at
the Metropolitan Museum, New York 1884-1885 and at the Birmingham City Art Gallery in 1885 and at Whitechapel in 1903.


16. Errington 207.

17. I have Richard Jefferies, Curator of the Watts Gallery, to thank for identifying London landmarks in this painting. On this occasion, as on many others, his efforts on my behalf were extraordinary and of great consequence.


20. All writers on this painting agree.


23. Edelstein 190.


27. Mullen catalogue entry 13, argues that the connection was with Michelangelo, and Staley 62, concurs. John Gage in Mullen's Whitechapel Catalogue sees the head as Goya-like. (n.p.).

34. George Frederick Watts, "What Should A Picture Say?" (London: privately printed, n.d.)
35. Staley 64; and Mullen Catalogue entry 13.
36. These paintings do not appear to have been conceived as a set judging from their present sizes, but it is not impossible that at one time they formed a triptych. There is evidence that at one time they were close enough in size to have worked as one. The Song of the Shirt has been reworked and appears to have been mounted on a smaller stretcher at one time, so size does not rule out the possibility. Egg's trilogy draws so much from this group of paintings that it is intriguing that it may have also drawn its three part format from this group. Thematically, Watts's three paintings form a tightly related group of subjects on the plight of poor women in London. The triptych format would be perfectly consistent with Watts's adoption of conventional formats from religious paintings for his social realist works. The dead woman in Found Drowned derives its position from deposition and pieta imagery and would serve as an excellent central panel of a triptych with The Song of the Shirt and Under a Dry Arch as companion arms of the triptych. There are no documents to prove that these three paintings were conceived as a triptych, but there is some slight, but interesting evidence to suggest this possibility. Mrs. Twisleton mentions in a letter of 1853 that she saw in Watts's studio at Little Holland House "... an illustration of the Song of the Shirt, and a companion to it, a poor woman cowering under the arch of a bridge by night for shelter ..." (Mrs. Edward Twisleton, Letters of the Hon. Mrs. Edward Twisleton Written to
her Family 1852-1862, (London: John Murray, 1928) 118.) This suggests that at least The Song of the Shirt and Under a Dry Arch may have been pendants. By 1853 Watts had changed studios and had moved on to new styles so what Twisleton saw might not reflect Watts's original conception. When Watts exhibited these three works at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881-1882 as part of his one man show, the Times saw the three as a series but on what grounds is unknown. (Times [London] 26 Jan. 1882: 8). Until more evidence is discovered the interesting possibility that these paintings functioned at one time as a triptych should not be completely dismissed.


40. Microfiche Tate Gallery fiche 1, F7.

41. Haydon 833.


43. H.M. Spielmann, Papers.

44. M.S. Watts, Watts 2:270; Also cited in Board 371 and Blunt 212.

45. Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 61-63.

46. Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 63.

47. Microfiche Tate Gallery, G.F. Watts, letter to Henry Bruce (Lord Aberdare), 21 May 1855, fiche 43, C13. See also Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 63.

48. See Chapter III.


50. Governesses' Benevolent Institution,
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Notice)," Athenaeum 27 April 1901: 537.

63. Spielmann, Papers.

64. Blunt 211.

65. Blunt 224.

66. Staley, Romantic Art in Britain 288.


68. Mrs. Russell H. Barrington, "The 'Kyrle Society','" Good Words 22 (1881): 609. See also Board 372.


70. See Chapman, The Laurel and the Thorn 158, 165.

71. Barrington, G.F. Watts 70.

72. "List of Pictures and Sculpture the property of C.H. Richards Esquire, 1880." Paintings on this list are valued at prices between #200 and #1000. The average price is #433. The list includes 54 paintings.

73. Chapman, The Laurel and the Thorn 159.

74. Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 29, A12.

75. "Miscellanea," The Magazine of Art 18 (1895): 359. This donation is mentioned in most books on Watts.

76. Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 40, E4-7.


79. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Satan Absolved: A Victorian Mystery (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1899) v-vi. On pp. vii-viii Blunt writes, " ... Mr. George Frederick Watts, the first of living painters, with whom while the poem was in progress, it was his
[W.S. Blunt's] privilege to spend many emotional hours in high communings on Life and Death and the tragic Beauty of the World."


83. G.F. Watts, letter to Mr. Horsfall 5 December 1894, fiche 36, C14.


85. M.S. Watts, letter to Mr. Nicol 7 December 1900, ms., M.S. Watts Papers.


88. Cook 346.


90. Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 34, C5.

91. Blunt 145.


Chapter V


3. The materialistic foundation of innovative philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and Proudhon are firmly rooted in the Enlightenment in contrast to the tradition of modern philosophies expounded by Hegel, Carlyle, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

4. Watts's portraits of Carlyle are to be found in the National Portrait Gallery, The Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum. All three were painted 1867-68. Watts's admiration for Carlyle's Sartor Resartus is apparent from the article published by Watts in 1880 in The Nineteenth Century; "Sartor Resartus was so unpopular that many subscribers to the magazine in which it was published withdrew their names. The critic may be right; all that is asked is that he should have the good sense, good taste, and good feeling to admit, while disapproving, that there are difficulties in the way of judgment, and that possibly a longer acquaintance might induce some change of opinion." (M.S. Watts, Watts 3: 177).

5. Professor Benjamin Jowett, a classical scholar at Oxford, sent Watts a copy of Hegel's Aesthetics on 30 October 1887 (microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 3, C9) but Watts would have been exposed to Hegelian ideas through Carlyle and others much earlier. A survey of the extracts from M.S. Watts's diaries in the archives of the Watts Gallery is the most complete source for Watts's religious, philosophical and literary interests.


7. Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 83.
8. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 13 November 1894.

9. In a similar vein Watts wrote, "That anyone should think he alone sees the truth must be a mistake, in one sense there are as many suns as there are eyes to see it ...." (George Frederic Watts, Social & Political 7, ms., George Frederic Watts Papers, Watts Gallery, Compton 67). Elsewhere he wrote: "The lower animals make no objects in their lives, these are supplied by necessities of his existence. They are natural in their artificiality .... " (George Frederic Watts, 8 Miscellaneous Jottings, ms., George Frederic Watts Papers, Watts Gallery, Compton 66-67). For Watts, artificially defined truths make up man's domain. Such an idea was not at all original; to quote Carlyle from On Heroes and Hero-Worship 166: "Are not all dialects 'artificial'? Artificial things are not false, - nay every true Product of Nature will infallibly shape itself; we may say all artificial things are, at the starting of them, true."

10. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 20 February 1893 and 11 April 1894.

11. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 12 November 1894. Here She Shall Be Called Woman is referred to as Lot's Wife. For the anecdote relating to this title see M.S. Watts, Watts 2: 320.


14. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 3 July 1891.

15. M.S. Watts, Watts 2: 139.


18. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 13 July
20. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 1 Nov. 1891.
22. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 19 Nov. 1892.
24. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, on a page titled "Articles read to Signor."
25. M.S. Watts, from Diaries, 21 July 1892.
26. Christopher Turnor, Recollections of Conversations with Mr. Watts by the Donor of this Book, ms., Watts Gallery, Compton.
29. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1896-1904, ms., Mary Seton Watts Papers, Watts Gallery, Compton, August 1899, no day of the week.
30. Turnor.
32. Board makes the connection with Etty; 101.
33. Blunt 110.
34. David Loshak, "G.F. Watts and Ellen Terry," Burlington Magazine (Nov. 1963): 485; Roger Fry (unsigned), "The Glasgow Exhibition. IV.," Athenaeum, 14 Sept. 1901: 357; "The noble sensuality which is the fond of his temperament has never been quite overlaid by speculations extraneous to the immediate business of painting." Elsewhere Fry states, "Mr. Watts, whatever he has been in his ideas, whatever he
may have expressed in words, has never as an artist, been touched by sentimentality; he has been saved by the gift of noble Hellenic sensualism." (Roger Fry [unsigned], rev. of G.F. Watts, G.K. Chesterston and The Life of George Frederick Watts, Hugh Macmillan, Athenaeum, 2 Apr. 1904: 439.). See also Mullen cat. entry number 7 and Board 210.


37. New Gallery Catalogue 38.


42. G.F. Watts, Social & Political #7 29-30.

43. Mary Watts records that the original title of the work was "Epitaph picture," (M.S. Watts, Watts 2: 197) and it appears the source for the epitaph is an inscription in St. Olave's, Hart Street, London. E.T. Cook quotes the inscription of 1584;

As I was, so be ye,
As I am, you shall be.
What I gave, that I have,
What I spent, that I had;
Thus I count (sic - end) all my cost,
What I left, that I lost.

(Cook, Handbook to the National Gallery 502). Mary Watts confirms the connection; "Epitaph in St. Olaves St What I gave," M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 30 July 1891.

44. Barrington, G.F. Watts 46.


49. Microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 1, F7.


51. Blunt 213.


53. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1896-1904, 11 March 1896 records Watts saying, "I don't want my works to be called allegorical - I never mix the real and the unreal." G.F. Watts, extract from a letter to Sir Wyke Bayliss, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 28, C5, "I do not like to have my things called 'allegories' they are really as you describe them symbolical suggestions."

54. G.F. Watts, 2 Miscellaneous Jottings Art, 142.


56. "If throughout the community a brotherhood of sentiment could be established difference of opinion, which must and even possibly should exist, might easily be harmonized ... - A Utopia, not where all think alike, which is impossible, but where sympathy pervades all conditions is possible." (G.F. Watts, 8 Miscellaneous Jottings, 63-64).
Chapter VI


2. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, "Youth" 26 Feb. 1893.


7. M.S. Watts, *Watts* 1: 101 documents the fact that *Time and Oblivion* was one part of "The House of Life" scheme.

8. "It appears then that here even the beneficent power of the sun has been transformed into something terrible, indissolubly linked with its opposite, the 'Angel of Darkness'." (Turner 1775-1851, Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Gallery, London, 1974: 149).

9. Ruskin 36: 122; "I don't understand the new picture, but it is glorious, and Satan has his cheekbone all right." See also Chapter II of this paper and Ruskin 36: 217; "These geniuses are all alike, little and big. I have known five of them - Turner, Watts, Millais, Rossetti, and this girl - and I don't know which was, or which is, wrong-headedest." [10 July 1855].


12. Illustrated in *Victorian High Renaissance* 145.

14. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, "Youth," 20 July 1892; "Lord Holland impressed by Signors (sic) description of Prudhon (sic) picture of a murderer and Nemesis."


17. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1895-1904, 29 Nov. 1896.


24. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 3 May 1892.

25. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 3 May 1892.


27. Spielmann, Papers.

28. Bendiner 139.


30. Max Klinger uses the motif of a child seated on the belly of a dead mother in To Death II Opus XIII (illustrated in Le Symbolisme en Europe, Exhibition Catalogue, Grand Palais and elsewhere, 1976: 79).


35. Spielmann, "His Art and His Mission" 172.


41. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1896-1904, 12 June 1903; "something one could say was not like his work - the compliment he liked best to be given."

42. Fry, "Watts and Whistler" 620.

43. *Victorian High Renaissance* 93.

NOTES

Chapter VII


3. Carlyle 65.

4. Mullen, catalogue entry 2; Staley *Victorian High Renaissance* 54; Board 29.

5. This date is established by Twisleton 118.

6. William Vaughan has pointed out the noteworthy fact that John Ruskin was a promoter of Rethel (William Vaughan: *German Romanticism and English Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 165). Ruskin stated in 1854, "He [Rethel] was not so good as Albert Durer, but he was mighty in his way, ought to be universally known; and the woodcuts of Death the Avenger, and Death the Friend, were worthy of being known to the whole civilised world." (Ruskin 12: 489).


1875, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 8, B3-B4.

NOTES

Chapter VIII

1. Barrington, G.F. Watts 32, 64; M.S. Watts, Watts, 1:141; Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 86; Blunt 87; Board 68-80.


4. Staley, Victorian High Renaissance 86.


7. G.K. Chesterton argues that the initial impression the painting gives suggests the title Despair (G.K. Chesterton, G.F. Watts (1904; London: Duckworth, 1975) 47.).


10. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1896-1904, 16 Nov. 1897.

11. Chesterton 49.


15. Ecclesiastes ix. 10. Reference from Loshak, Tate Gallery 27.


21. M.S. Watts, from *Diaries 1886-1896*, 28 June 1891; "Beautify your principles as much as you like, so long as you remember that Religion is action, not fancy."

22. Houghton 294. Aspiration as an end in itself was certainly not a uniquely Victorian phenomenon but was derived from German sources such as Goethe, in works such as *Faust Part II*.


29. M.S. Watts, from *Diaries 1886-1895*, 22 Apr. 1887.


36. Board 411.

37. M.S. Watts, from Diaries 1886-1895, 22 Aug. 1891.
NOTES

Chapter IX


2. Jack Lindsay, J.M.W. Turner: His Life and Work (London: Cory, Adams and Mackay, 1966) 92-93: "His [Turner's] dislike of selling them [his paintings] developed in time into a scheme for giving them a united home; he even bought his works back. In a codicil to his will he underlined the cherished aim, 'of keeping my works together'. This emotion in turn led to his feeling that any one of his works in separation had little value. He objected to people wanting to buy 'scraps'. Ruskin says, 'When he heard of anyone's trying to obtain this or the other separate subject, as more beautiful than the rest, "What is the use of them," he said; "but together?" The only thing he would sometimes say was "Keep them together"; he seemed not to care how they were injured, so that they were kept in a series which would give the key to their meaning.'"

3. Given the fact that sculptures and paintings pose such different considerations, I have limited myself to discussing the use of museums by painters and omitted any treatment of Canova, Thorvaldsen, David d'Anger and Rodin.


5. G.F. Watts. Letter to Bruce 21 May 1855, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 43, C13; and Staley Victorian High Renaissance 63.


13. G.F. Watts, letter to Charles Rickards 6 June 1873, microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 6, E7-E10.


20. Collected press cuttings 44.


24. Collected press cuttings 64.


26. G.F. Watts, letter to Riviere, 30 Aug. 1903,
microfiche Tate Gallery, fiche 39, B14.

27. Collected press cuttings 97.


30. Muther, History of Modern Painting 3 (1896) 632; "His studio in Little Holland House, which after the painter's death is to pass into the possession of the state as a complete gallery, contains almost all his important creations .... " In 1902 Muther again states that Watts's studio collection will become the Watts Museum (Muther, "Rossetti, Burne Jones, und Watts" 881.).

31. Muther, "Rossetti, Burne Jones und Watts" 881.

32. Muther, "Rossetti, Burne Jones und Watts" 876-877.
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