

A Sign in the Pattern: The Creation of Mary Seton Watts's Ideal Design  
in the Compton Mortuary Chapel (Surrey, England, 1898)

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A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2018

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Art History

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Abstract

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This dissertation addresses the hierarchal categorization and canonization of the arts as influenced by dominant power structures through the work of turn of the century artist Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler Watts and the Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel, project in the Guildford district of Surrey, UK. The built environment of the Compton mortuary chapel and cemetery was largely conceived and designed by Mary Watts. It evades strict categories separating decoration from architectural design just as it also evades stylistic categorization. The chapel project confuses and resists boundaries, demonstrating that categories are often arbitrary and lead to privileged hierarchies.

The Compton chapel project resides outside of the traditional economy of commissioned artwork and participates in the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement through the emphasized use of local materials and a community of labor. Mary Seton partnered with artist husband, George Frederic Watts, in forwarding the cultural philanthropy movement in a belief

that artistic creation is an essential element of human nature within the context of a perceived dehumanization of labor through industrialization and colonization. The Compton mortuary chapel project participates in a social movement through the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) to enable individuals living in rural areas access into the arts and crafts economy while also disrupting commercialization.

The stylistics of the chapel designed by Mary Watts are inspired from multiple sources including Neo-Romanesque, Celtic Revival, “Second Phase” Pre-Raphaelitism, Symbolism and Art Nouveau. The changes from one style to another are understood as communicating an evolution of ideas concerning the economy of labor and gender roles at a moment of transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Mary Watts utilizes an artistic grammar of traditional symbolic types selected and juxtaposed with varying styles to create a new language of images. Decorative motifs are attached to intellectual ideals with social and political implications in what might be called Ideal Design. Through the creation of symbolism drawn from multiple cultures across time alongside powerful, feminized, non-denominational figures within a spiritual space, the Compton chapel provides a vision of human equality across boundaries of gender, nationality, and religious belief.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My time at the University of Washington has happily coincided with the work of inspiring professors. My work is indebted to many mentors from educational institutions and galleries. Much gratitude is extended to my reading committee. Professor Susan P. Casteras's insight into the Victorian period and feminist art history is an inspiration to many students and I am so grateful to be one of those who will carry on her perspective. Her knowledgeable advice and confidence in my work have influenced many areas of my life—inside and outside of academic scholarship. Professor Lingo's perception into art objects and their cultural significance is a motivational example of the power of art historical analysis. Professor Clausen's expertise in architectural art history and women's studies is generously shared and I have benefited greatly from my work with her. It has truly been a privilege to work under this committee of scholars.

I am grateful to the knowledgeable community surrounding the Watts Gallery and Artists' Village at Compton. The gallery staff and their partners are dedicated to education as well as the welfare of the community as intended by George and Mary Watts. I am grateful to Director Perdita Hunt, Curator Nicholas Tromans, and Beatrice Bertram for access to archival materials as well as knowledgeable assistance. My work has greatly benefited from the expertise of Veronica Franklin Gould, Lucy Ella Rose, Desna Greenhow, and Catherine Hilary who each made time to assist with my visit to the gallery archive. Transcription assistance from Desna Greenhow and the Watts Gallery community was invaluable as I learned to read and love Mary Watts's handwriting!

A great deal of patience and support from family has guided my journey. Thanks to my husband, David, and our three children who have grown up with my work. They inspire me, and I hope that my dedication will inspire their work as well. Parents, siblings, and in-laws have been an essential guiding light in inspiring me to finish my work.

## DEDICATION

My work is inspired by and dedicated to the many men and women who knock down boundaries and cross imaginary borders to create a happier vision of compassionate and healthy society.

## Introduction

“My days slip by without a scrap of artistic work being done.  
Why women fail in art is answered to myself  
‘because of the little things in life’”  
--Mary Seton Watts<sup>1</sup>

Scholarship in nineteenth-century art history continues to grapple with issues of canonization and marginalization in the study of Victorian artists and institutions. Linda Nochlin boldly stated the issue in terms of feminism in 1971 by explicitly asking, “Why have there been no great women artists?” In so doing, she made visible the very existence of the “woman-artist” question lurking behind the artistic canon, while also questioning the power structures that compose such questions that then permeate our thought processes. The search for women artists and the definition of greatness has resulted in research that aims “to reveal biases and inadequacies” in the power structures that define culture. By looking beyond issues of gender to languages, systems, and institutions that propel and define greatness, feminist art history seeks to “become a catalyst, an intellectual instrument, probing basic and ‘natural’ assumptions, providing a paradigm for other kinds of intellectual questioning. . . .”<sup>2</sup> As John Stuart Mill stated, “everything which is usual appears natural.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the investigation of the usual players and the powers with naturalized influence on culture is essential to uncovering invisible biases.

In the process of investigating institutional power structures that create the values and hierarchies in artistic culture, language itself has been implicated. Values embedded within the

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Seton Watts (MSW), Diaries, 15 Apr 1893, Watts Gallery Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Nochlin, "From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?: Implications of the Women's Lib Movement for Art History and For the Contemporary Art Scene--or, silly questions deserve long answers; followed by eight replies," *Art News* (June 2015), available online <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/>>, posted 5/30/15, 4pm, retrieved 1/21/16.

<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dryer, 1869, 22-3. This concept is explored in depth in Nochlin “Why?”

structures of language are particularly powerful because they are often invisible. Similarly, artistic language is also called into question as provoking hierarchal divisions influenced by the phallogocentric values of dominant power structures. Artistic quotations, genealogies, and mythologies are culturally proscribed resulting in the saturation of cultural values within the creation of the visual languages of art as well as in its cultural reception.

The question is posed as to whether women artists being trained within a phallogocentric academic system, participating in the same aesthetic movements and utilizing the same iconographic vocabularies as their male peers, can produce distinctive work.<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous argues that not only can language be used to inscribe female experience, but that when a woman writes of “her self,” she cannot help but write from a position of rebellion from the dominant culture from which she has been excluded.<sup>5</sup> She states, “women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse.”<sup>6</sup> In a similar way, women artists might be said to write their own bodies when co-opting an iconographical tradition to envision new roles for women in culture and society. In so doing, women artists create a fissure or a crack in the rational foundation built by dominant power structures. Just as in the “feminine text,” when women produce artwork from their own experience their art “cannot fail to be more than subversive”<sup>7</sup> because as a “she,” the woman artist works from her own perspective and her art is saturated in the experience of being a

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this conversation, see Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996: 64-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Transl. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (Summer, 1976): 875.

<sup>6</sup> Cixous 886.

<sup>7</sup> Cixous 888.

woman. Her alternate perspective cannot be withheld as it has defined her worldview and, in this manner, she inscribes her “self” into her work.<sup>8</sup>

In her book *Women Building History* (2011), Wanda Corn finds that even when women work in stylistically similar ways to their male counterparts, women’s art expresses a unique voice. In her particular case study of the 1893 Women’s Building, Corn finds some women artists using traditional allegorical images of women’s bodies as universalizing virtues to express themes related to the women’s rights movement.<sup>9</sup> The move to utilize traditional aesthetic techniques to emphasize universalist attributes deemed positive and “feminine” by contemporary culture is a device long used by women artists to carve out spaces in academic and professional groups typically composed of male artists. In the eighteenth century, for example, Rosalba Carriera utilized the *Allegory of Innocence* to reflect similar virtues back onto the artist for her submission to the Accademia di San Luca. Angelica Kauffman made a similar move for her academy submission, *Hope*. Like Carriera’s *Innocence*, *Hope* is emblemized in the form of a woman’s body. By co-opting this iconographic language, Kauffman is able to associate herself with the humble hope of a woman artist for success.<sup>10</sup>

Unique to the nineteenth century is the further move to utilize such culturally accepted images to create a representational voice for women in the broader public dialogue in terms of the fight for women’s suffrage. Women artists working at the turn of the century add to the

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<sup>8</sup> In this point, my argument shifts from Cixous’ premise that “with few exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity” (878). Rather, the inscription is considered insuppressible in the work of women as new meaning is created by the very change in the context of authorship.

<sup>9</sup> See the discussion on Alice Rideout’s sculptures in Wanda Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> See Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): 246. Christopher Johns also argues that Carriera used allegory to shape identity. See Christopher Johns, “‘An Ornament of Italy and the Premier Female Painter of Europe’: Rosalba Carriera and the Roman Academy,” *Women, Art and the Politics*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam, (Routledge: Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2003): 29-39.

canon of symbolic types in the creation of positive images of women in new public roles like the “New Girl Student.”<sup>11</sup> Through the creation of these images, women utilize the same grammar of traditional symbolic types to create a new language of images which envision women functioning successfully in public roles previous unavailable to them. This is the artistic heritage to which Mary Watts and the Compton chapel project belongs. Within the chapel project in which men and women of varying ages worked together, Mary Watts designs a space that envisions new roles, not only for women, but for human equality across boundaries of gender, nationality, or belief seen through her use of symbolism and the visual depiction of non-denominational figural bodies which defy traditionally male-gendered images of patriarchal authority.

This dissertation will utilize the Compton mortuary chapel, known as the Watts Chapel, a small community cemetery building southwest of London in Surrey, as a case study for the philosophy of the equality of labor within the Arts and Crafts Movement in the second half of the century and the use of images of material embodiment developed by a phallogocentric visual culture at the turn of the century to communicate a set of ideas coded as feminine and co-opted by women artists to engage in matters of politics and virtue often reserved for male discourse. This study aims to assist in the effort to make verbal and explicit the material work of women artists in engaging with contemporary social issues through aesthetic philosophies concerning the ability of art to ennoble the community, particularly in terms of the social issues of equality that personally concerned the designer of the chapel, Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler Watts.

In 1898, Mary Watts—often referred to as Mrs. G. F. Watts or “the artist’s wife” after her marriage to George Frederic Watts—dedicated the small mortuary church in Compton, Surrey.

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<sup>11</sup> Corn 38.

Working outside of the academic and missionary systems, Mary Watts utilized social connections and a society, the philanthropic Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA), to obtain the knowledge and resources needed to build the chapel as a community project. The Watts Chapel lacks the self-effacement characteristic to Mary Watts's own writing concerning the project. Rather than drawing attention away from the artist's trespasses into public art and architecture, Mary Watts's red terracotta chapel stands like an ensign on a hill to the collective power of the disenfranchised.<sup>12</sup> The chapel speaks to the political as well as spiritual and aesthetic issues prominent at the end of the century for Mary Seton Watts and her contemporaries through an iconographical program, both interior and exterior to the chapel.

This study will argue that Mary Seton Watts developed an aesthetic language to express her ideas at a unique moment in history as these ideas related to her multicultural heritage and interests, her experience as a woman artist and suffragist, and her understanding of aesthetic theory as it related to the human condition and the experience of the community in which she lived. As a built environment designed largely by a woman and built by a local community of labor, the Watts Chapel and surrounding cemetery stand at a unique point in architectural as well as women's history. The year in which the chapel was dedicated, 1898, was an important year in the history of architecture as the year that women were first admitted to architectural programs at two prestigious European institutions. Julia Morgan was admitted into the *École des Beaux-Arts* and Ethel Charles to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel as it is now called by the local community, stands largely outside of the academic system, as a project designed by Mary Watts. It also stands outside of the regular

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<sup>12</sup> I use this term loosely to refer to those working outside of dominant spheres of economic powers, especially those without a political voice through the vote and those native to countries under British rule through colonialization.

economic system of commissions as a philanthropic effort. It marks a period in which women artists often looked to social networking and charitable organizations as entry points into public life as substitutions for the academic systems and professional organizations available to their male peers.

Mary Seton Fraser-Tyler was in her early twenties when the first British art school attempting to offer equal programming to men and women was established in the Slade School. She was among the first entrants to benefit from this training, attending in 1872-3. Twenty-five years later, Mary Seton Watts (now married and in her 48<sup>th</sup> year of age) was putting together the exterior of the chapel as Millicent Fawcett organized the NUWSS in 1897. Mary Watts finished the interior decoration in 1904, the same year that George Frederic Watts died and the year after Emmeline Pankhurst founded the WSPU. Mary Watts would not only be a supporter of women's suffrage, but act as president of the Godalming arm of the NUWSS by 1910.<sup>13</sup> Mary would live to see suffrage for women offered on equal terms to men in 1928, a decade before her death in 1938 at 88 years of age.

This project also addresses the issue of women's success as discussed by Susan Casteras and Linda Peterson in *A Struggle for Fame*. In discussing the academic training and intentional selection of cultural products that went into Mary Watts' planning of the chapel project, this dissertation hopes to work against the messaging of women's artistic success as "the aberrational result of some phenomenal force" rather than "a consequence of her abilities."<sup>14</sup> This struggle is seen as continuing in current treatments of women's art and is particularly relevant to

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<sup>13</sup>LSE, Women's Library holds NUWSS correspondence with Mary Watts as president in the letterhead. See Elaine Cheasley Paterson, "Decoration and Desire in the Watts Chapel, Compton: Narratives of Gender, Class and Colonialism," *Gender & History* 17.3 (2005): 719-20 and footnote 17. See also, Lucy Ella Rose, "A Feminist Network in an Artists' Home: Mary and George Watts, George Meredith, and Josephine Butler," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21.1: 74-91.

<sup>14</sup> Susan P. Casteras, "From 'Safe Havens' to 'A Wide Sea of Notoriety,'" *A Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors*, Eds. Susan P. Casteras and Linda H. Peterson, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994: 8.

philanthropic projects because the economic value of work is less visible, which often makes the artistic value of the work less visible as well.

This dissertation also explores a connection between gender and conceptions of the “other” as demonstrated through Mary Watts’s self-conscious combination of multicultural signs framed within a project that might be coded as feminine: a private chapel, the work of a community, and a philanthropic charitable contribution. The use of Celtic symbols in Mary Watts’s chapel design and the combination of these symbols with selected artistic quotations from a variety of cultures can be understood as a visual reversal of the racial separation and hierarchal organization established by such written accounts as George Comb’s *The Constitution of Man* (1828) and Robert Knox’s *The Races of Men* (1850). Additionally, the gendered hierarchal boundaries between needle arts, design, and architecture are confused and flattened by the overlapping combination of all three domains. In Mary Watts’s book on chapel symbolism, the Watts Chapel public plaque, and in photographic documentation, the chapel is continually framed as a community project with an emphasis on textile design rather than an architectural project spearheaded by individual genius. Furthermore, Mary Watts’s effort to elucidate chapel symbolism in her book and her participation in the HAIA exhibitions demonstrate her awareness of the tools of negotiation open to women artists and a conscious effort to address a much broader public than the small community in which the chapel stood.

The Watts mortuary chapel in Compton provides a unique case study of hierarchal categorizations as an architectural project organized by Mary Seton Watts, who was trained as an artist but known as an artist’s wife, at a moment of optimistic cultural and economic change in modern industrial history at the turn of the century and a groundbreaking time for women seeking training within the academic system. In drawing attention to a lesser-known artist, this

project hopes to open a discussion of the institutions that facilitated and hindered the public project of a woman artist at the turn of the century. As Pollock stated, “the reoccurring shock of discovery” that there have been so many interesting women artists witnessed by art historians “is proof of the reiterating need of this research.”<sup>15</sup> However, this project also seeks out the artificial construction of boundary lines that separate categories and place values that often prove arbitrary. This is particularly relevant in the study of an artistic project that seems to intentionally confuse and resist boundaries of categorization. This dissertation will point to the impossibility of clean margins and categorizations, arguing that the ambiguity of such categories can be considered part of Mary Seton Watts’s iconographical program. Rather than working within the borderlands, Mary Watts works to erase both the borderland and its borders. She utilizes a variety of styles and techniques across art historical movements and genres to formulate an optimistic expression of the future unity of humanity. Her work demonstrates the insufficiency and, indeed, uselessness, of arbitrary categorizations that lead to hierarchies and the privileging of one over the other.

While the Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel, is not established within the canonized art movements with which it dialogues in significant ways, scholars are increasingly turning their attention toward Mary Seton Watts and the Chapel, particularly within the context of cultural philanthropy and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Anthea Callen paved the way for further work on Mary Seton Watts and her placement within the Art and Craft Movement in 1979 through her discussion of “The Lady Philanthropists” in her groundbreaking book *Angel in the Studio*. Callen gives credit to Mary Seton Watts’s development of the chapel as well as her other artistic efforts by describing her as “painter and designer, architect, architectural

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<sup>15</sup> Griselda Pollock *Differencing the Cannon* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999): 23.

ceramicist” in the bibliographical appendix on craftswomen in her book.<sup>16</sup> Such titles, particularly that of architect, are disputed by scholars, but in utilizing this title Callen draws attention to the overwhelming control that Mary had over the architectural idea for the chapel as well as the fluidity of the definition of “architect” at the turn of the century, ideas which are essential to current scholarship.

Veronica Franklin Gould made a pioneering effort to pull the chapel and its creator into art historical discussions with her 1998 book, *Mary Seton Watts: Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau* and published small books with invaluable details geared toward the local art community.<sup>17</sup> A decade after Callen’s book and a century after the dedication of the chapel, Veronica Franklin Gould organized the first exhibition highlighting Mary Watts, who would not be treated again until the 2013 exhibition, “The Making of Mary Seton Watts,” which ran from November until January 2014 at the Watts Gallery in Compton. For the first time, a gallery entirely devoted to Mary Seton Watts was opened as part of the Watts Studios project at the Watts Gallery in January 2016.

Elaine Cheasley Paterson’s thesis, dissertation, and continued academic work on Mary Seton Watts adds to the effort to elucidate the contribution of female artists to the arts and crafts movement begun by Callen.<sup>18</sup> Cheasley Paterson’s 1999 thesis and 2004 dissertation approaches Mary Watts and her pottery from a decorative design perspective. Her dissertation sheds light on two important arts and crafts guilds run by women: the Dun Emer Guild and Compton Pottery.

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<sup>16</sup> Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914* (London: Astragal Books, 1979): 227.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see Veronica Franklin Gould, *Watts Chapel*, Farnham, Surrey: Arrow Press 2005.

<sup>18</sup> See Elaine Cheasley, *Handcrafting a National Industry: The Production and Patronage of Alexander Morton & Company’s Donegal Carpets* (Ann Arbor, Canada: Concordia University, MA Thesis, 1999); Elaine Cheasley Paterson, *Decoration and Desire: Women of the Home Arts Movement, 1884-1915* (Queens University at Kingston (Canada), PhD Dissertation, 2004); Elaine Cheasley Paterson, “Decoration and Desire in the Watts Chapel, Compton: Narratives of Gender, Class and Colonialism,” *Gender & History* 17.3 (2005): 714-736.

Valuable contextual work has also been done by Julie Rahrig for her 2013 thesis, *The Utmost for the Highest*.<sup>19</sup> Most recently, Lucy Ella Rose has placed Mary Watts's work within a feminist network in her dissertation for the University of Surrey, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Creative Partnerships: The Significant "Other."* Rose has continued to work closely with the gallery, publishing several essays and has a forthcoming book on Mary Watts.<sup>20</sup> All of this work has aided in a resurgent interest in Mary Watts and the artistic community in Compton.<sup>21</sup>

Director Perdita Hunt and former Watts Gallery curator Mark Bills have worked to bring attention to Mary Watts and the chapel project through conservation work and publications on both George and Mary Watts' work in Compton. Chapel symbolism is explained within the terms of Mary Watts's explanations in *Word in the Pattern* with updated illustrations and photographs in *Watts Chapel* (2010). The Watts Gallery recognizes the impact of both Mary Seton and George Frederic Watts on the town of Compton in a collection of essays entitled *An Artists' Village* (2011). This volume also includes important essays on the Watts Chapel and Compton Pottery by Veronica Franklin Gould, Desna Greenhow, Hilary Underwood, and Catherine Hilary. The gallery also published a short book on Mary Watts's life, *The Making of*

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<sup>19</sup> Julie Rahrig, *The Utmost for the Highest*, MA thesis, Hunter College, Dept of Art, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> See Lucy Ella Rose, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Creative Partnerships: The Significant "Other,"* PhD Dissertation, School of English and Languages, University of Surrey, 2015; "A Feminist Network in an Artists' Home: Mary and George Watts, George Meredith, and Josephine Butler," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21.1 (2016): 74-91; "The Diaries of Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938) in the Archives at Watts Gallery, Surrey," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 35.2 (Fall 2016): 521-8; and "Subversive Representations of Women and Death in Victorian Visual Culture: The 'M/Other' in the Art and Craft of George Frederic Watts and Mary Seton Watts," *Visual Culture in Britain* 17.1 (2016): 47-74. Rose's book rooted in dissertation research on artistic partnerships active in the suffrage movement was published during the finishing phases of this dissertation. See Rose, *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Additional important resources include Elizabeth Cumming's article comparing Mary Seton Watts and Phoebe Traquair in Elliot, Bridget and Janice Helland, *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1800-1935: The Gender of Ornament*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. Loise Boreham has also published articles on the chapel, particularly concerning its connections to Scotland. See Boreham, "Compton Chapel," *The Victorian: Magazine of the Victorian Society* (2000): 10-13. Boreham, "Louis Reid Deuchars and the Aldourie Pottery," *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History* 2 (1997):1-9. Boreham, "Aldourie Pottery, Dores, Iverness-Shire," *Scottish Pottery Historical Review* 9 (1984-5): 37-9. See also Elizabeth Beazley, "Watts Chapel," *The Architectural Review* 130 (1961): 166-172.

*Mary Seton Watts* by Mary McMahon with valuable illustrations of artwork not on public display from the Aldourie Castle Collection.<sup>22</sup>

Recent scholarship has also found an interest in the Watts Chapel as an example of the power of the Victorian nonprofit or charitable society in negotiating the gendered boundaries of public and private space. Anne Anderson emphasized the role of the society in projects like the Watts Chapel in her 2002 article, “Victorian High Society and Social Duty: The Promotion of ‘Recreative Learning and Voluntary Teaching,’” in *History of Education*. Melanie Unwin’s 1997 thesis on the Watts Chapel addressed Mary Seton Watts within the context of design history. Mary Watts’s work was considered as participating in the “borderland” between private and public spheres and she was compared to Phoebe Anna Traquair and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. Elizabeth Cumming’s article might be considered within this context, as she also compares Mary Watts to Phoebe Traquair in her article on women and the decorative arts.<sup>23</sup> Unwin compiled a list of all known Home Arts and Industries (HAIA) classes in England from a 1901 annual report in the HAIA archives. Her work on Mary Seton Watts draws attention to issues of gender in art historical discourse and understands charitable societies, like the HAIA, as tools to negotiate gendered public space. Unwin’s “Significant Other: Art and Craft in the Career and Marriage of Mary Watts” brings to the forefront the gendered division between “Art” and “craft” and argues that Mary’s chapel project subverts these assumptions.<sup>24</sup> Cheasley Paterson also addresses boundaries in terms of the separation spheres. In her article, “Decoration

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<sup>22</sup> McMahon, *The Making of Mary Seton Watts* (Compton, Surrey: Watts Gallery, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Cumming’s article comparing Mary Seton Watts and Phoebe Traquair in Elliot, Bridget and Janice Helland, *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1800-1935: The Gender of Ornament*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Melanie Unwin wrote an insightful MA thesis in 1997 for the Royal College of Art which included comparisons of Mary Watts and the chapel to Phoebe Traquair and Margaret MacDonald as well as information on HAIA classes across Britain. See *A Woman’s Work?: Gender and Authorship, the Watts’ Chapel and the Home Arts and Industries Association*, 1997, Royal College of Art, M.A. thesis.

and Desire,” she notes that Mary Watts’s “creative use of space, art and craft overlapped, as did production and display, redefining gendered meanings of these spaces and blurring boundaries between home and work.”<sup>25</sup>

In addressing Mary Seton Watts’s intercultural heritage and experience, her aristocratic social station, and her interest in women’s rights, this dissertation attempts to practice Griselda Pollock’s feminist historical materialism. As she explains in *Vision and Difference*, this combined methodology explores the “interdependence of class and gender, as well as race, in all forms of historical practice.”<sup>26</sup> This project seeks out Pollock’s “subject in difference,” recognizing the subject not as part of fixed categories, but as part of a culture that is “socially, historically constituted” and “inscribed on each sexed, speaking person.”<sup>27</sup> The mortuary chapel will be considered as an object with an iconographical program designed to communicate with visitors through its formal elements. However, the building of the chapel and its design will also be seen as a social practice, or “a totality of many relations and determinations.”<sup>28</sup> Pollock warns against the use of iconographical texts and formal analyses which can “easily lose contact with the sociality of a practice.”<sup>29</sup> While this dissertation will be an object oriented text, the formal and iconographical discussion is framed by the social and political movements, particularly by the fight for equality of labor and gender and issues of multiculturalism and religious acceptance during a time of national expansionism. Furthermore, the building process itself reveals that Mary Seton Watts treated the chapel project as a social practice. Her work shows a deep awareness of the political and social issues that shape aesthetic theory.

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<sup>25</sup> Cheasley Paterson “Decoration and Desire” 717.

<sup>26</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988): 5.

<sup>27</sup> Pollock *Differencing* 26.

<sup>28</sup> Pollock *Vision* 5.

<sup>29</sup> Pollock *Vision* 7.

My dissertation will address the separation of spheres, an important topic in Victorian studies, in terms of Mary Watts's personal life and work through her marriage to George Watts and the building of a public project.<sup>30</sup> While the separation between public and domestic spheres was a critical part of Victorian period messaging that reinforced the of qualities of morality and sympathy as feminine while maintaining commercial employment and politics as masculine, recent scholarship has questioned the extent to which women and men were separated into two distinctive spheres in practice and across diverse individual experience. Women artists are often considered as working in the "borderlands" between public and private spheres.<sup>31</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr prefers to use the term "enlarged public sphere" to allow for the discussion of a dynamic public space that was continuously changing for men and women and in which women actively participated in the "enlarging process" that allowed for new voices to be heard publicly.<sup>32</sup> This project argues that Mary Seton Watts conscientiously worked to sabotage the sexualized and politicized demarcation between public and private borders. The chapel project is seen as actively working against categorization, resulting in a fissured gap between the ideological margins of separation and a tumultuous mixing of categories that cannot be tidied into regions of public, private, or borderland.<sup>33</sup>

This dissertation participates in the search for "inscriptions of the feminine"<sup>34</sup> in the work of women artists, not in terms of universalizing and essentializing characteristics considered masculine or feminine, although it does perhaps assume similarities among many women in the

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<sup>30</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr provides a nice discussion of this issue in the introduction to *Women in the Victorian Art World* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995): 3-11. See also, Temma Balducci and Heather Belnap Jensen, eds., *Women, Femininity, and Public Space in European* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014): 1-16.

<sup>31</sup> See Anne Digby, "Victorian Values and Women in Public and Private," in *Victorian Values: A Joint Symposium of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy*, Ed. By T.C. Smout (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Orr 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> In this manner, Mary Seton Watts is imagined as a "new insurgent" as discussed by Cixous "Laugh" 879-80.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 3 in Cixous "Laugh" 877-878.

shared experience of living on the margins of Victorian artistic culture. Rather, it looks for the use of gendered bodies and characteristics coded as “feminine” or “masculine” in Victorian artistic culture as tools to create a space. This search hopes to take part in an interdisciplinary effort to understand the successful creation of space for (1) art that combines characteristics traditionally gendered as either “feminine” or “masculine” created by women and men artists and for (2) women artists, whether their work is described as feminine or masculine in character within the sphere of artistic business and commerce. This line of inquiry is built upon work begun by scholars working on women’s art in eighteenth century aesthetics, Tita Chico, Melissa Hyde, Jennifer Milam, Angela Rosenthal, and Mary Sherriff in addressing the social and political climate surrounding women artists and addressing the transgression of social structures through the performance of the female body using make-up, dress, and masquerade.<sup>35</sup> The move for inclusivity for art described as “feminine” as well as for women artists in a professional sphere organized by men artists and connoisseurs is particularly relevant during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period of agitation for women’s rights.<sup>36</sup>

In this work, the built environment is understood as a semiotic code, or a complex system of signs in which meaning is generated in relation to a changing set of associations. Additionally,

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<sup>35</sup> In particular, see Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture*, Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2005; Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and his Critics*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006; Hyde and Milam, eds., *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Jennifer Milam’s *Fragonard’s Playful Paintings: Visual Games in Rococo Art*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006; Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006; and Mary Sherriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

<sup>36</sup> For work done specifically on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in the realm of women artists in public space, see especially Susan Casteras and Linda Peterson, *A Struggle for Fame: Victorian Women Artists and Authors*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Center for British Art, 1994; Wanda Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011; Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists*, Manchester and London: Manchester City Art Galleries and Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1997 & 1998; Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood,” *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000: 67-86; Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

the “artificially re-ordering”<sup>37</sup> of the environment is understood as communicating a society’s values, presuppositions, and biases in several domains including the political and economic.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, this project does not claim a universalizing meaning to the Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel, but rather understands the building and the artist as creating meaning unique to the environment and time period as well as the subjective experiences of each viewer. However, the intersection of key moments in the history of urbanization and women’s rights with the building of the chapel and the artists’ demonstrated interest in these issues, encourage the study of the Watts Chapel framed by the artist’s connection to the social movements and aesthetic theory concerning the influence of the arts on societal values.

By considering a work that takes part outside of the dominant economic systems of commerce and comparing figural representations of the female body by male and female artists at the turn of the century, this dissertation hopes to take part in an effort to move artists working at the margins of dominant political discourse more firmly into the art historical canons to which they belong and alongside the contemporary aesthetic debates of their more vocal peers. This project will argue that the Mary Watts’s designs for the Compton mortuary chapel utilized existing power structures in its creation, adapting cultural symbols to develop a language that could both communicate and critique its canon of cultural products. Mary Seton Watts’s creation of feminized and androgenized figures for the Watts Chapel participates in the creation of iconic images of women embodying spiritual and cultural power by substituting a feminized sibyl for the traditionally specific masculine prophet on chapel decoration as a device to reach a religiously diverse audience. Furthermore, the chapel project utilized the philosophy of labour in

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<sup>37</sup> Donald Preziosi, *Semiotics of the Built Environment*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979:

1. Preziosi refers to the built environment as the “architectonic code.”

<sup>38</sup> Discussed in Preziosi *Built* 88. See also Terence Hawkes, *Semiotics and Structuralism*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977): 134.

harmony with the environment as an example of noncommercial work that was inclusive to all members in a community building enterprise that sought to improve economic and social well-being as part of the Arts and Crafts philosophy on artistic creation.

Existing scholarship on the Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel, often considers Mary Seton's work from within the Arts and Crafts Movement as a design project firmly within an accepted realm of feminine arts. In her article, "Significant Other," Unwin pushes against this categorization by proposing that the Chapel functions as a tool for the disruption of gendered hierarches like art/craft and male/female, discussing the Watts Chapel decoration in relation to George Frederic Watts and especially his altarpiece painting for the chapel. However, the chapel project is maintained as "socially appropriate" to the domestic sphere through the argument that Mary Watts was able to pull aspects of the public sphere into "her own private realm."<sup>39</sup> In this manner, the project is often still imagined as fitting firmly within the sphere of private artistic work available for entry by upper-class women at the end of the century. However, Mary Watts's effort to expand knowledge and understanding concerning her building designs beyond her borders through the publication of her book, *The Word in the Pattern*, and the subsequent establishment of a pottery business suggest that the artist opened a fissure into the conception of public and private boundaries that cannot be dismissed. Furthermore, her awareness of three-dimensional architectural space and its intentional use within her designs, as discussed in chapter three, demonstrate at least some participation in the architectural design of the chapel building usually reserved for male artists during the period. Mary Seton's work does not function as part of either the masculine or feminine sphere, but rather, takes from one and another, occupying

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<sup>39</sup> Melanie Unwin, "Significant Other: Art and Craft in the Career and Marriage of Mary Watts," *Journal of Design History* 17.3 (2004): 246 and 248.

areas of overlap and areas at gendered edges. The impossibility of placing her work within a single sphere or style of art evidences a self-conscious dismissal of arbitrarily defined categories.

Additionally, this project will build upon Cheasley Paterson's observation that the chapel is "cloaked in femininity"<sup>40</sup> and Lucy Ella Rose's work on the Watts's feminist network<sup>41</sup> by placing the feminine iconography of the chapel into context with other artworks as well as architectural structures. Rather than looking at the chapel solely in comparison to the work of other women in the period, this project aims to understand how the chapel dialogues with aesthetic themes being addressed by men and women artists. The chapel will not be seen as strictly fitting within the Art and Craft Movement or within the boundaries of architectural design, but as confusing these categories and revealing the insufficiency of contained borders. Furthermore, the refusal of boundaries of stylistics is understood as a crucial part of the aesthetic language developed by Mary Watts in which social issues of gender, class, and religion are explored by the artist.

Research into the life of Mary Watts as an artist and the influence of her marriage to famous Victorian artist, George Frederic Watts, will be explored in the greatest detail in chapter one. This chapter sets the foundation for the means used by Mary Seton Watts to design the mortuary space and the chapel iconography at a time when women were just beginning to have access to professional training in the art of design and were not accepted into the formal pathway for professional architectural development. It will discuss Mary Watts's cultural influences, particularly in terms of her Scottish heritage and experience in India, her social connections and family status, and her artistic development. It will address the artist couple largely in terms of a united interest in cultural and social reform through artistic philanthropy.

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<sup>40</sup> Paterson "Decoration" 721.

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 19 above.

The second chapter will consider the aesthetic philosophy of Mary Seton Watts. By looking to Mary Watts's writings in the Watts Gallery archive, her daily journal and notebooks, her publications of *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life* and *The Word In the Pattern*, Mary Watts demonstrates a rigorous interest in aesthetic theory. She questions the value of art, beauty, and the categorizations of genres. She becomes more confident over the years in conveying her own artistic opinions. Furthermore, she expresses a belief in the power of art to create social change. This chapter argues that Mary Watts's aesthetics is tied into political beliefs concerning the value of creative labor to enrich individual happiness as well as societal well-being as part of the philosophy of the Art and Craft Movement. The division of artistic labor along gendered lines by the formation of societies of men separate from societies of women artists is also addressed as an element relevant to the chapel project. Mary Watts later belonged to May Morris's Women's Guild of Arts established as a response to the Art Worker's Guild which only accepted male membership. The separation is understood as an unideal situation, however, as evidenced in the Women's Guild inclusionary efforts. The Compton chapel can be understood as participating in this effort of bringing both genders together in a community project. The Women's Building in Chicago, built just five years previous to the chapel, is an interesting counterpoint as it was commissioned specifically to be a very public architectural project built and designed only by women artists and architects. The chapel and the Women's Building are examples of two opposing directions in the women's rights movement between separating women's work from men's work versus both genders working and being viewed alongside one another.

Chapter three addresses the broader built environment of the Compton mortuary chapel. It understands the chapel as being built at a unique crossroads, begun at the end of the end of the

nineteenth century and finished at the beginning of the twentieth. As such, the chapel project itself participates in contemporary social issues concerning labor, gender, and established religion. This chapter understands the chapel as an important Arts and Crafts edifice, participating in utilizing local labor and resources in an effort of community building to perhaps an unparalleled degree. The chapel participates in an interruption of the commercialized death industry in demonstrating simple and meaningful handmade cemetery memorials in a community-built space. Furthermore, the artistic stylizations developed by Mary Watts bridge several different styles and artistic voices. This is understood as an intentional part of a symbolist movement and an associated effort to develop a language of art that would be free from any specified dogma, retaining a freedom of thought for future generations. The predominant importance of the circle as a nonhierarchical cyclical symbol in the mortuary design is understood as functioning in a participatory three-dimensional extension of cemetery space. As such, it works to erase gender and cultural boundary separations

Finally, chapter four will focus explicitly on the iconography of the chapel. It will bring together social discussions on politics and spiritualism with specific aesthetic choices. In designing a small mortuary chapel and cemetery for a rural population, Mary Seton Watts found a voice to express the power of art and icon. She brought international symbols into the rural town of Compton. Her dedication to finding a symbolic language to communicate to a diverse population through the symbolism of the Chapel and the words of her book demonstrate her intention to reach an audience beyond the borders of Compton and local cemetery mourning. Mary Seton Watts chose decorative patterns, feminized bodies, and multicultural symbols to convey abstract and intellectual ideas through concrete material forms. Her choice of symbols

and her manner of expressing them participates in contemporary debates concerning the ability of the aesthetic to communicate and bring about social reform.

In examining the Watts Chapel project within the context of women's political agitations for a public voice, aesthetic theories concerning the power of public art to shape public identity, and the use of figural bodies as emblems in Victorian art, this project hopes to participate in the effort to pull a small scale architectural built environment into art historical discourse. The chapel participates in an art movement established outside of the traditional channels of commerce and participates with urgent contemporary philosophical debates over labor, gender, and cultural identity based largely on deeds, not words and is therefore rightly fitted to object analysis within these movements. Moreover, by shedding light on the devices used to produce art and create artistic language, the underlying power structures that work to create a nation's cannon of artistic cultural products become more visible, allowing a critique of the cultural values inscribed by them. In the process, artistic hierarchies separating the domains of art are also called into question. In sum, this project hopes to participate in the identification of the "unusual," as "uncustomary,"<sup>42</sup> work completed by Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler Watts and the community of Compton in the building of the mortuary chapel at the turn of the century.

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<sup>42</sup> Mill 22-3.

## Chapter 1.

### Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler Watts: Marriage, Art and Social Reform

“The chief obstacle to a woman's success is that she can never have a wife. Just reflect what a wife does for an artist: Darns the stockings; keeps his house; writes his letters; visits for his benefit; wards off intruders; is personally suggestive of beautiful pictures; always an encouraging and partial critic. It is exceedingly difficult to be an artist without this time-saving help. A husband would be quite useless.”<sup>43</sup> --Anna Lea Merritt, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, 1900

“She sat on [Signor's] bed & read in *Pride and Prejudice* to him and laughed because she said that I was Elizabeth & he was Jane!”<sup>44</sup> --Mary Seton Watts, *Diary*, 1887

Anna Lea Merritt's tongue-in-cheek definition of husband and wife resonates humorously today as it must have in 1900 when printed in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. The value of “wife” to husband's ambition is clear; but, what is the valued asset of “husband” to wife's ambition? Anna Lea forces an issue that might be termed the “husband question.” In the passage, Merritt identifies the “chief obstacle” to women's success in having a career as domestic. The problem of a rigid separation of sexes in the domestic sphere is turned on its head by Mary Seton and George Frederic Watts' late Victorian marriage in an anecdote recorded in Mary's journal in which both Mary and George might be said to take feminine roles—perhaps with George in the more subservient position! The extent to which George Frederic and Mary Seton's marital roles escaped stereotypical conventions of husband and wife are evidenced in a friend's playful comparison of the couple to conspiring sisters. In April, during their honeymoon travels, Mary Seton's close friend compared the couple to the characters of Elizabeth and Jane Bennett in George Frederic Watts's favorite novel, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mary Seton described her friend laughing as they read “because she said that I was Elizabeth & he was

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<sup>43</sup> Anna Lea Merritt, "A Letter to Artists, Especially Women Artists," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 65 (Mar 1900): 467-8.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Seton Watts (MSW), *Diaries*, 23 Apr 1887. The couple were in the middle of reading the novel at the time. “No novelist delights him more,” writes Mary on 20 Apr 1887.

Jane!”<sup>45</sup> According to her diaries, Mary Seton often played the outspoken role while George Frederic was fitted for the angelic goodness of supporting character, Jane Bennett.

This chapter will address Mary Seton Watts’s biography in terms that seem most relevant to her later work on the Compton mortuary chapel, or Watts Chapel, and is concerned with her marriage and relationship to the successful Victorian artist, George Frederic Watts, as a defining event in the life of her work. Although a Victorian marriage to a famous artist risked the independent career of Mary Watts, this step was deliberately taken by Mary Seton and understood by both parties as a means of forwarding their artwork and its influence. Because both parties shared the same urgent hope to change British society through the voice lent to the couple by artistic fame, the sacrifice of melding the lives of two into one was made in the optimistic belief that a united voice would be stronger and longer lasting than two independent voices. Both George Frederic and Mary Seton demonstrate an awareness that the marriage meant crucial sacrifice by Mary, particularly in the early years of her marriage as her priorities made a violent swing from strictly personal work to a united philosophical worldview which focused physical labors on George Watts’s work and his success. This makes the Compton chapel project a compelling chef d’oeuvre as the product of a moral and aesthetic dialogue worked throughout and made possible by the marriage, but which was produced at the end of George’s life at a time when the artistic output was more completely owned by Mary Watts and became an outpouring of her unique and mature aesthetic voice. This chapter will work through biography in terms of Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler’s adjustment from a single woman and aspiring artist born into a Scottish heritage to her marriage and life as wife to George Frederic Watts, their common concern with social issues and participation in charitable societies, and finally, a brief discussion

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<sup>45</sup> MSW Diaries 23 Apr 1887.

of the artwork produced by both parties to forward a social agenda of equality of substance and freedom of thought.

### 1.1 Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler: A Brief Biography of the Artist

Although Mary spent her most artistically productive years in London and nearby Compton, Mary's identity is tied to her roots in the Scottish Highlands which is where her biography must begin. Mary's great grandfather was Alexander Tytler who took the title Lord Wodehouselee for his work in the Scottish court system. Alexander made a providential match in marrying Anne Fraser, who inherited the Aldourie estate from her father, a wealthy landowner. Alexander Tytler took Anne's surname and added it to his, beginning the Fraser-Tytler line at Aldourie. Anne Tytler is, therefore, an important matriarch in Mary Seton's story. It is because of Anne Tytler that Mary Seton Watts develops her love for Celtic art which will be important in the design of the mortuary chapel. This is because Anne Tytler's oldest son is Mary's grandfather, William Fraser-Tytler, who will also act as a father figure for Mary when she and her sisters stay at Aldourie after the death of their mother. This short time at Aldourie became essential to Mary and her identity as a Scot with a deep cultural connection to the Celtic art in the region that influenced much of her work. Her love for her home in Scotland would only be matched by her love for Compton and her home with George at Limnerslease, which she described in her most intimate terms as an "Aldourie love."<sup>46</sup>

Charles Edward Francis Fraser-Tytler would be father to Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler, the third and last daughter born to his first wife, Etheldred St Barbe. Mary was born in India as her father worked in the civil service for the East India Company. Many Scottish aristocratic families found good fortune in British Imperialist efforts in India, particularly those with large families

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Seton Watts (MSW) Diaries 18 Feb 1891.

who needed an additional source of income besides inheritance. Etheldred (St Barbe) Fraser-Tytler, passed away in 1851 when Mary was only three years old and the three Fraser-Tytler girls spent some of their formative years at Aldourie with their grandparents, William and Margaret Grant. By the time of Mary's birth on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1849, the Fraser-Tytler family had owned Aldourie for two generations and turned the comfortable mansion home into a castle evidencing their position of power and influence in the area. Mary was able to spend much of her youth roaming the Scottish countryside educated by governesses with her two elder sisters, Etheldred and Christina.<sup>47</sup> Christina was only one year older than Mary and the sisters shared a similar interest in the arts, which explains their close relationship that lasted into adulthood.

In 1861, Charles retired and moved the family to Sanquhar, only about thirty-five miles East of Aldourie. By this time, Charles had remarried. Mary gained three half-brothers and a little sister, lovingly called Nellie.<sup>48</sup> As the fourth son in line, Mary's father did not inherit Aldourie. However, once again, Mary Fraser-Tytler benefits from the family matriarch. Charles inherited Sanquhar from his mother, Margaret Cusans Grant.<sup>49</sup> Mary Seton's family was, therefore, the beneficiary of maternal lines of the family on two important occasions: first, the marriage of Anne Fraser which resulted in the Fraser-Tytler name and the inheritance of Aldourie and, secondly, the marriage of Margaret Grant and the inheritance of Burdsyard.

The Scottish countryside would remain home in Mary's mind and was the site of wistful visits and memories as well as the location of one of her later business ventures in pottery. The

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<sup>47</sup> Gould *Heroine* 18.

<sup>48</sup> Mary McMahon, *The Making of Mary Seton Watts*, 12. Charles and Harriet Jan Pretzman and had Charles William, Edward Grant, and William Theodore, and Eleana Dora.

<sup>49</sup> Genealogical information on Margaret Grant can be found at "Margaret Cusans Grant" in Eleanor Harris, The Episcopal Congregation of Charlotte Chapel Website (online, [archive.stjohns-edinburgh.org.uk](http://archive.stjohns-edinburgh.org.uk), 2011).

family home in Burdsyard is no longer standing, but Aldourie castle remains along the shores of Loch Ness and retains some of Mary's artwork.<sup>50</sup> Mary's two older sisters, Etheldred and Christina, and little sister, Nelly, remained close to Mary Seton and appear in Margaret Cameron's photoshoot for *Rosebud Garden of Girls* (1868).<sup>51</sup> Mary is shown in the center with her eyes cast downward (Fig. 1). Young Nellie stands at the upper left next to Christina while Ethel stands to the right of Mary. The image was taken at the Isle of Wight, also evidencing the overlap of social circles by this time, as George Watts had found artistic success. George Frederic's success might also be considered, in part, due to the financial success of the British colonies and some of George Watts's important patrons. The British civil service in India played a part in bringing Mary and George together as Thoby and Sara (Pattle) Prinsep, with whom George lived at Little Holland House,<sup>52</sup> both came from families working in the service and probably served as a point of contact with the Fraser-Tytler family. In fact, it was through Julia Margaret (Pattle) Cameron that the Fraser-Tytler sisters first met George Frederic Watts.<sup>53</sup>

Somewhat at a contrast to Mary Seton's more affluent upbringing, George Frederic Watts was born to a humble English piano-maker. Born on the date of George Frederic Handel's birthday, George may have been named after this famous composer. However, in her biography

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<sup>50</sup> Margaret Cusans Grant was the heiress of George Grant, Esq., of Burdsyard in Sanquhar.

<sup>51</sup> Cameron was illustrating Tennyson's *Maud* in this photograph and two others from the same sitting, one of which edits Mary Seton out of the scene, on 20 June 1868. The affair is also briefly mentioned in the diary of Irish poet William Allingham, "...Meet girls going up the stairs in fancy dresses, Mrs. C. has been photographing a group, and appears carrying glass negative in her collodionised hands. 'Magnificent! To focus them all in one picture, such an effort!'" Qtd in McMahon 15. Eds. H. Allingham and D. Radford, *William Allingham; A Diary* (London: Macmillan, 1907): 182.

<sup>52</sup> George's friendship with Lord and Lady Holland helped to secure the Little Holland House for Thoby & Sara Prinsep in Dec. 1850 and George lived with them there until 1875. Sara Prinsep was fond of saying, "He came to stay three days, he stayed thirty years." For more on this, see Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1999):23.

<sup>53</sup> McMahon *Making* 16-18. McMahon writes that Mary's sisters met Watts through Cameron in 1867, but Mary does not visit until after her move to study art in London in 1870. Mary Seton records her first meeting in Mary Seton Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life (Annals)*, Vol. 1 (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912): 287.

of his life, Mary simply writes, “They christened him George after his father and grandfather, and Frederic after a brother of his mother....”<sup>54</sup> Similar to Mary’s experience, George’s mother died when he was only about nine years old and was probably ill for most of his childhood.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps both due to poverty as well as ill health, George did not attend to formal school training. The narrative tells of a cultured father, who had no mind for business, but who owned a few very good books which served as schooling for his often-sickly son. Mary Seton writes,

But Poverty may also bring her gift of compensation; want of means made the books few, yet, as they were choice, the limitation had this advantage that he read them over and over again till they became part of his world... Without the imposition of dreary tasks of grammar....

George read and re-read *The Iliad* as a boy, which inspired his passion for ancient Greek culture and mythology and influenced his later artwork.<sup>56</sup>

George Frederic’s biography is not only interesting as a point of comparison to Mary Seton’s upbringing, but also because Mary wrote three volumes of it herself.<sup>57</sup> Since she did not write her own biography, *The Annals* is an interesting point to begin to understand Mary’s own mind as it reveals the personality of her curatorial powers in the telling of George Frederic Watts’s story. The reader might ponder the extent to which this description of George’s youth, so passionately written by her hand, mirrored Mary’s perception of her own childhood experience. Mary experienced a similar freedom in education, which came from the flexibility of being

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Seton Watts (MSW) *Annals* 7.

<sup>55</sup> MSW *Annals* 8. Mary writes that George remembered his mother “entirely connected with sadness” and “chiefly when passing with the sad slow steps that mark the progress of consumption to her grave by her little sons, where in 1826 she was laid; a loveable, patient, and good woman....”

<sup>56</sup> MSW *Annals* 15. Like Mary, George also loved Sir Walter Scott & Jane Austen. Mary writes that when he was unwell, George turned to these three sources more than any others.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the importance of artist biography, see Julie Codell, *The Victorian Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). Codell mentions that George Watts became an especially important and popular biographical subject and helped to ameliorate artistic reputations. She notes that these biographies were often “hyperbolic and hagiographic” (58). For more on the idealization of artist’s lives & especially their childhoods to fit an accepted narrative, see Paula Gillett’s *Worlds of Art* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990): especially pages 194-5.

schooled at home with the ability to roam the countryside rather than sit in the classroom. However, while Mary feasted on Scottish literature, like that of family friend Sir Walter Scott, George “entered freely and of his own choice into the Greek mind...The Iliad...he read and re-read....” Mary writes of the boy playing in the fields with freedom and imagination, as if roaming “the windy plains of Troy” or climbing “the heights of Olympus.”<sup>58</sup> Mary’s own childhood parallel might rightly be imagined as roaming the shores of Loch Ness imagining herself on the green isle of Iona during the ninth century creation of the Book of Kells or perhaps pretending to be a character from one of Sir Walter Scott’s novels. Rather than Greek art and mythology, Mary’s artistic inspiration would be the Celtic art and Scottish literature that she felt was her own heritage. The narrative portrays George Frederic Watts as something of a self-made man whose art and imagination propelled him from obscurity into the highest echelons of the art world where he made friends in the intellectual circuit of the day, perhaps most importantly, Henry Thoby and Sara (Pattle) Prinsep, whose work in India would eventually connect to the Fraser-Tytlers, particularly through Julia Margaret (Pattle) Cameron who had a home on the Isle of Wight where Watts would buy a house and first meet the elder Fraser-Tytler sisters. Here, the group of artists would form friendships and share evenings together reading Tennyson—often with Tennyson himself in attendance.

While Mary came from an elite and financially comfortable family, her status as unmarried and career ambitious, put her into a difficult position. After studying art in Europe with her family in 1869-70, she wanted to move to London. A letter from Mary suggested that she “would pay her own way” in London in 1870 when she moved to study art at South

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<sup>58</sup> MSW *Annals* 14-15.

Kensington.<sup>59</sup> Mary McMahon suggests that Mary may have done illustrations in the early 1870's to help pay for her own expenses.<sup>60</sup> She illustrated Christina's books on several occasions. The sisters worked together on *Sweet Violet and Other Stories* published in 1869 by Hatchards of London (Fig. 2), and Christina's own poem published in *Good Words for the Young* in 1871. Mary Seton's 1872 and 1873 illustrations for the same publisher demonstrate a marked increase in sophistication with detailed backgrounds, texture, shading, and more dynamic compositions (Fig. 3). Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler might be considered a veritable illustrator at this period. She is credited with thirteen images for the 1873 *Good Words for the Young*.

During this time, Mary attended the South Kensington School, studying design and decorative arts with like-minded women, followed by the Slade in 1872-3.<sup>61</sup> These two schools provided new opportunities to women in the arts. Such programs were crucial to the entrance of women like Mary Seton into the field of art. Women artists were often trained by artist brothers or fathers; however, Mary Seton did not have this point of access. Even with the broader availability of arts training at the end of the century, however, women artists were still usually constrained to limited genres considered appropriately domestic within the hierarchy of the arts. This was particularly true in architecture and the same might be said for the architectural design work employed by Mary Watts in the Compton chapel project. While women were often encouraged in general design work, the employment of women on public architectural projects is rare during the period. These ideas were expressed in a contemporary editorial from *The American Architect and Building News* which admits that "a fair portion" of women "have

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<sup>59</sup> McMahon 17. See Ronald Chapman, *The Laurel and the Thorn* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945): 110. Chapman states simply, "She [Mary] assured him that she would pay her own way, for the Fraser Tytlers were by no means rich."

<sup>60</sup> McMahon 17. Several illustrations have been discovered from this time period.

<sup>61</sup> For enrollment at South Kensington, see *The Times* 7 Sept 1938; Unwin "Significant Other" 239; and McMahon 17. For Slade, See McMahon 20 and footnote 23 for the entry, which reads, "1872-73. Tytter [*sic*], Mary F. London," *Arts, Laws, and Science Students*, p. 160.

shown good powers of design,” however architectural planning and design was considered outside of the realm of feminine capabilities. The author writes, “the work of superintending would probably be found too laborious and inconvenient” for women “and the preparation of large working-drawings would be almost equally awkward.”<sup>62</sup> Evidence suggests, however, that Mary Watts did do much of the architectural design as she provided a cardboard model of the chapel very early in the planning stages in 1895 and also did work superintending over the chapel building in coordinating work and visiting the construction site. Photographs from her various artistic projects demonstrate Mary Seton’s preparation, not only of large drawings, but of large panels of paint and plaster (Figs. 4 and 5).

George Frederic Watts’s years of study, by contrast, were spent at the prestigious Royal Academy where oil painting was privileged and exhibitions and competitions made work more visible.<sup>63</sup> This was not an avenue that would be fully open to Mary Seton or any other woman, even thirty years later. As Paula Gillette states in *Worlds of Art*, “because of their exclusion from the Royal Academy and its schools, most women (except for those from artists’ families) lacked the valuable personal introductions to clients and patrons that came far more easily to men.” She notes that “the juxtaposition” between real life opportunity for commissions and “bitter disappointment” was very real for these women who had artistic training without access to the

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<sup>62</sup> Editorial, *American Architect and Building News*, Article 1 (30 Sept 1876): 313. Qtd in Elizabeth Grossman and Lisa Reitzes, “Caught in the Crossfire: Women and Architectural Education,” *Architecture: A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989): 31. This editorial also supplies wry commentary on women’s dress as inadequate for such labor, an issue that would be seriously considered by the Watts’ and like-minded individuals forming the Healthy and Aesthetic Dress Union.

<sup>63</sup> As Barbara Bodichon wrote in 1858, “the academical facilities afforded to the female artist are so very far below those of a male student” that comparison was “wholly irrelevant.” Qtd in Casteras *Struggle* 12. From Untitled article, *The English Women’s Journal*, 1 (May 1, 1858): 205. A new book by Lucy Ella Rose was published during the writing of this dissertation and addresses the partnership of the couple in relation to women’s rights, see *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

influential mentors and sponsors working within the Royal Academy schools.<sup>64</sup> Since founding members Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser formed part of the Royal Academy in 1768, another woman would not be admitted as a full Academician until Laura Knight in 1936.<sup>65</sup> This hierarchy of genres and its availability along gender lines is particularly interesting in regard to the Compton Mortuary chapel as the project straddles the public and private spheres as well as artistic genres.

While Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler studied design and the decorative arts, designing a variety of projects in mediums ranging from illustrated fans to leather bookbinding (Fig. 6), she often worked in portraiture during her productive years of the 1870's and 1880's as a single woman artist. She worked primarily in oils and watercolors during these years. Surviving works are mainly of relatives. She painted Christina in oil in 1870 and in watercolour in 1877 (Figs. 7 and 8). Self-portraits in oil from 1881 and watercolor in 1882 demonstrate her increasing talent for painting (Figs. 9 and 10).<sup>66</sup> Mary met George Watts in 1870 and became an unofficial student. She visited his studio at Little Holland House frequently and records visits from him at her studio as well. She would have studios both in London and Sanquhar (Fig. 11).<sup>67</sup> George Watts and George Chalmers were preeminent influences on her painting in the 1870's at this

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<sup>64</sup> Gillette 134-35. Anna Lea Merritt stated in regard to the denial of women in the Royal Academy, "It may be partly for want of this recognition and encouragement that women often fall short of the expectations formed for them." See Gillett 176.

<sup>65</sup> Petitions from women in 1859 helped to persuade the Royal Academy (RA) to allow women into classes and Laura Herford was the first woman accepted into the RA schools. The acceptance of women artists into equivalent training opportunities was slow. Classes offering nude figure drawing were not offered to women at the RA until 1903. For more on this progress, see Casteras *Struggle*, especially pages 11-13. Much progress was made in the 1860's, see Sara M. Dodd, "Art Education for women in the 1860s: a decade of debate," *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995):187-200. Deborah Cherry, "Women Artists and the Politics of Feminism 1850-1900," *Women in the Victorian World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995): 49-69, esp. 52-56. Paula Gillett, *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990), especially pages 158-191.

<sup>66</sup> See Mahon, "Mary Seton Watts and Portraiture," *The Making of Mary Seton Watts* (Watts Gallery: Compton, Guildford, Surrey, 2013): 33-40.

<sup>67</sup> Gould *Heroine* 26.

crucial period in her artistic formation. Prior to their engagement in 1886, George indicated her artistic priorities were watercolor and oil in advising her to “try to produce in oil the qualities of your watercolour drawings, purity of tone and precision of outline...”<sup>68</sup> Mary also studied sculpture with popular French emigré Aimé-Jules Dalou during the 1870’s.<sup>69</sup> This experience led to Mary’s work as a teacher in the 1880’s when she volunteered to teach clay modelling for charity work connected to the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) through Reverend Barnett’s Whitechapel project.<sup>70</sup> Dalou’s series of Mother and Child sculptures are often cited in connection to one surviving rough sculpture by Mary’s hand from the 1870’s (Fig. 12).<sup>71</sup> The similarity can be readily seen, for example, in Dalou’s striking sculpture, *Peasant Woman Nursing a Baby* (1873) at the V&A (Fig. 13). The life-size sculpture rendered in red terracotta is both warm and bold in material as well as subject matter, frankly displaying a tender moment between a mother and her nursing babe. The earthy material is both humble and beautiful, drawing a connection between the woman herself and the materiality of the red clay object. Dalou has worked the textured details from uneven basket weave to elegantly folded dress fabric with expert hands. He demonstrates the power of terracotta as a medium, which fit perfectly into the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement expounded by Ruskin & Morris and must have influenced Mary Seton’s later choice of terracotta for the mortuary chapel and perhaps encouraged the association between the clay of the earth and dust from which humankind is

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<sup>68</sup> Chapman 117. Letter from George Frederic Watts (GFW) to Mary Seton Watts (MSW) 23 July 1886. At this time, Mary was contemplating an engagement to another man and George was waiting impatiently for news and realizing that he hoped she would choose him instead.

<sup>69</sup> For more on Poynter and Dalou, see Mary McMahon 22-23. Gould mentions that Mary studied with Dalou in *Heroine* 23.

<sup>70</sup> Mahon 29. Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler held classes twice a week for an hour or two in the evenings at St. Jude’s, Whitechapel. She discusses her experience in *Annals* II 57. Mary records that George entered “keenly into my interests” of the HAIA. A letter from 31 Mar 1886 reproduced in *Annals* documents his interest in sending paintings. However, Gould puts this into the context of courting as he had previously sent paintings. See also Gould *Heroine* 27.

<sup>71</sup> See Gould *Heroine* 23 and Mahon 22.

wrought in the story of Genesis. Mary Seton continued her studies after her marriage at the age of 36 to the successfully established 69-year-old George Watts in 1886. Mary Seton Watts explored a variety of mediums, even working on photography with W J Stillman and Fred Hollyer.<sup>72</sup> She also worked on anatomy with Henry Moore, which was considered a crucial element of education. It was a spiritual endeavor, as Mary Watts records,

He [George Watts] wants me to regard my work under Moore as most important even a religious duty—because he says the great laws of nature are all wrought one within another, one principle is under all, the mistake has always been made that here-is the moral law-there is the artistic-here the religious, there the political—whereas they are one in fundamental form principle—he feels the truth of this pervading & penetrating everything in life.<sup>73</sup>

As early as 1887, shortly after their marriage, Mary records that she is learning to work in plaster. She writes that “Mr Burne Jones sent his man, to arrange about teaching me to work in hardened plaster, & hope it will lead to much.”<sup>74</sup> George also worked in plaster, sometimes even prepping his canvas with it, as in *Sic Transit* (1897), in order to lend a fresco-like effect to his painting in the difficult damp British climate which made Italian style fresco unstable. While the details are lacking, Mary Seton shows excitement about this new medium and intends for it to be quite productive. It will prove very useful for her bas-relief ceiling panels at Limnerslease as well as the mortuary chapel interior. During many of her married years, Mary’s art production

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<sup>72</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Sept 1887 records work with Hollyer on photography. MSW Diaries 11 Aug 1887, “On Thursday Mr. Stillman came to teach me” and that it kept her “very busy too much away from my dear one—who was still in his room.” 12 Aug 1887 records that Mary took photos that morning but made a mistake in processing and lost her work.

<sup>73</sup> MSW Diaries 8 Jul 1887. “My dear one very anxious I should do my best under Mr Moore—He came behind me this morning while I was writing down some notes from my lesson, & kissed me saying ‘We may yet do some good work in the world’—.” The first lesson is recorded on 5 Jul 1887. “Began my first lesson with Moore. Signor pleased that I like it. Surely there is nothing more interesting than the revelation of Divine Intelligence, working on his own beautiful laws....” MSW Diaries 25 Aug 1887 records another lesson. Lessons from Moore may have been partly motivated by helping him financially, see MSW Diaries 19 Jul 1887.

<sup>74</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Jul 1887. Mary mentions forthcoming lessons after visiting Burne-Jones 28 Jul 1887 while he is working on *Sleeping Beauty*. Veronica Gould writes that Osmund Weeks helped Mary to prepare *gesso duro*. See Gould, *Heroine* 32.

remained within the domestic sphere (Fig. 14). She made a bookplate for her husband<sup>75</sup> in 1888 and designed a leather book cover in 1897, demonstrating her diverse decorative schemes. She also made George's paintings come to life in high relief sculpture like in *Death Crowning Innocence*, which was made in clay and cast into Bronze in 1891 (Fig. 15).<sup>76</sup> The delicate lines of the head and hand protectively covering the baby combine with the strength of the enfolding wings to add a new dimensionality to George's original painting of the same name (Fig. 16).

Mary Seton is also working on the couple's new home in Compton during this period, which would be a very significant move in their lives from urban London to rural countryside. George and Mary both express a love and fascination for the area of Compton from the beginning of their marriage. They visited dear friends Andrew and May (Prinsep) Hitchens in 1887 and Mary writes, "Signor said it was as lovely as any thing he had seen in his life...nature so various."<sup>77</sup> Mary writes that the little group of friends walked together and "rejoiced," fully embracing the nature around them and commenting on the variety of flora and fauna—"I never saw such numbers of butterflies."<sup>78</sup> In 1891, George and Mary make their escape from "the prison of the London fog." Although it is cold in the winter, they find the country air to be better for George's health.<sup>79</sup> The move to rural countryside and fascination with the natural landscape fit together with George and Mary's statements about the crucial link between the between the order of nature and societal harmony. As Mary recorded in her journal, the couple saw the

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<sup>75</sup> Gould *Heroine* 33.

<sup>76</sup> This is part of a triptych in which Mary Watts modelled and cast three paintings by G.F. Watts in bronze: The Messenger, Love and Death, and Death Crowning Innocence. They are exhibited in the new Mary Watts wing of Limmerslease at the Watts Gallery at Compton. Veronica Franklin Gould states that these were made as a memorial for Mary's nephew who died after falling from a horse and originally formed a triptych at the Aldourie cemetery. See Gould *Heroine* 30. From MSW DIARIES3 Oct 1886. The death of Mary's nephew is also recorded in *Annals* II 59-60. For more on these in the context of memorial artwork, see Lucy Ella Rose, "Subversive," *Visual Culture* 50-4.

<sup>77</sup> MSW Diaries 14 Aug 1887.

<sup>78</sup> MSW Diaries 14 Aug 1887.

<sup>79</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Jan 1891.

separation between nature, art, religion, and politics as artificial in that the same truths ran through all areas of life. Understanding and living in harmony with nature was understood as key to a happy and virtuous society.<sup>80</sup>

The house in Compton is named Limnerslease (Fig. 17). “Limner” refers to the artist with a special emphasis on the work of delineation and illuminating. It may also be associated with portraiture as the Scottish portrait painter to the royal household holds the title of Painter and Limner. The significance of the second half of the word, “lease,” is more ambiguous. “Lease” could refer to the verb “leasen,” to glean, suggesting that much would be gleaned from the couple’s time in the home.<sup>81</sup> Mary often uses the term “lease” during this period. George and Mary depend on the Hichens for a room while the house is built and for finances with which to build. Mary understands them as “leasing” the house until it can be fully paid for, which is a burden. The word also takes a more spiritual and philosophical meaning as Mary understands mortality on earth as a sort of “lease.” As construction on the house is being completed and the Wattses are still living with the Hichens’, Mary writes of a “stupid” proverb that has been bothering her, “When the house is ready the hearse is at the door.” She is feeling her own mortality, but especially that of her spouse who is significantly older. She writes of her time with Signor as being on a lease and she is not sure how long it will last. “Yesterday’s census too,” she writes, “Signor 75—May [Prinsep Hichens] 41—make vivid the long weary way I have in the ordinary course of things to go alone—will his life & spirit fade fast from me year to year, or shall I keep it distinct before me daily...How long will the lease be...gloomy thoughts are like

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<sup>80</sup> See MSW Diaries 8 Jul 1887 about Mary’s lessons with Moore in footnote 30 above.

<sup>81</sup> See Gould *Heroine* 34. Mary uses this definition herself in her biography, *GF Watts* II 137-38. For more, see also Rose, “Subversive Representations of Women and Death,” *Visual Culture in Britain*, 17.1 (2016): 47-74, especially page 48.

black wings round me--.”<sup>82</sup> However, the two artists are granted, or leased, several happy years at Limnerslease and the house and garden plans bless their remaining days together. Mary Ston writes in 1896, “I tear my sweet away from his big pictures as often as I can, & we wander together looking down upon our sweet garden, & seeing how it is growing now to the sister wood....”<sup>83</sup> Limnerslease allows both artists to feel closer to nature, which is crucial to Mary’s happiness and inspires her work.

Mary records much activity over her special project of decorative ceiling panels in her 1891 journal as the couple oversees the construction of Limnerslease and move into their new home. George and Mary are very active in the designing of the house, visiting often and making plans for the interior paneling, and etc. Mary records that it is George’s suggestion to make the ceiling panels from felt steeped in plaster. Previous to this, Mary records difficulty with making the moulds to fit her idea of the panels.<sup>84</sup> Her work is often interrupted by daily duties, so she proudly writes of “working like a tiger” when she has a good chunk of time to devote to them.<sup>85</sup> The first panel is ready to be installed in March. It is “the blessing Hand, the crowned heart, the palms of Peace—there it is, chosen accidentally because it was most convenient to send, & it looks well....”<sup>86</sup> She alternates between being pleased and disappointed with her work. The majority of the panels are installed by the spring of 1891 when the couple begins working full days at Limnerslease while the furniture is being moved in and finishing touches are made. Mary Seton writes,

The ceiling was all up & I saw my work for the first time complete – though I would like to begin it again & do it better in every way, I think it is not undecorative – certainly interesting if people like to make it so. I explained to Walker who looked at it with great

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<sup>82</sup> MSW Diaries 6 Apr 1891.

<sup>83</sup> MSW Diaries 29 Aug 1896.

<sup>84</sup> MSW Diaries 15 Jan 1891.

<sup>85</sup> MSW Diaries 10 Feb 1891.

<sup>86</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Mar 1891.

intelligence, & mouth open, enjoyed the meaning of the symbols. Mr George who seems to have been in Egypt, had not known that their decoration has any significance beyond that – its very *raison d'être* - .<sup>87</sup>

Mary Seton is also likely thinking of Andrew's criticism of George's work, which might equally apply to her own. She seems to consider the criticism of too much symbolism in art quite deeply before deciding to discard it. She records,

Andrew seems to think Signor is inclined to overdo symbolism in his pictures, & lose repose by it. It makes one think, but I am not afraid, for as long as symbolism does not force itself disagreeably upon you, by the sacrifice of the first principle that art should be beautiful, delightful, reticent, no man can make it too interesting. The minds that are disturbed by the occult meaning may ignore them altogether if they like—look at Faith, as an ideal figure & nothing more.<sup>88</sup>

Mary makes decorative panels for the ceiling, a reading alcove and a mantelpiece for the fireplace. She and George are very creative in the materials used for these panels and Mary's genius for symbolic schemes becomes apparent in tiles with philosophical designs, drawing artistic inspiration from a variety of cultures and periods much like the composition of symbols for the Compton mortuary chapel.

Beginning with her participation in the Compton cemetery and chapel around 1895, Mary Seton's art and design work becomes much more public, even resulting in the establishment of a pottery business. The years 1895 through 1904 were dominated by work for the mortuary chapel and cemetery (Fig. 18). By August of 1895, Mary Watts had already designed a cardboard model of the Compton mortuary chapel, which is now known as the Watts Chapel. She consulted with retired architect George Redmayne on her model during this period, which demonstrates her active role in pursuing the project. This is particularly striking considering the fact that the

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<sup>87</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Apr 1891.

<sup>88</sup> MSW Diaries 12 Apr 1891. George has been working on a copy of Hope, as well as on Faith and Conscience—all very symbolic works. Mary's future works will be steeped with symbolism as well.

Compton Parish Council did not pay for the mortuary land until October of that year. By November, Mary Seton had begun HAIA classes to teach terracotta modeling once a week at her home.<sup>89</sup>

The cemetery and exterior of the chapel were completed and consecrated in 1898 before the interior panels decorated with seraphs and messenger angels were hung (Fig. 117).<sup>90</sup> The building floorplan is a circle with two transepts forming a Greek cross (Fig. 18a). The same symbolism forms the three-dimensional architectural form of the building (Fig. 18b). The arms of the cross uniquely extend through the arc of the exterior walls. The roof is, therefore, a combination of domical sections with “superimposed transepts,”<sup>91</sup> forming the circle in the cross symbolism at the center of Mary Watts’s chapel design from all angles. The interior decorative panels (Fig. 18c) designed by Mary Watts to cover the brickwork from floor to ceiling (Fig. 53) would not be completed and installed until 1904, just months before Mary Seton’s husband, George Frederic Watts, would pass away and be interred in the Compton cemetery. The Compton mortuary project laid the ground work for the establishment of the Potters’ Art Guild, which employed local residents trained under Mary Watts through her HAIA classes for the cemetery. Mary Seton designed terracotta vases, sun dials, gardening sculptures, and figurines for the successful enterprise (Fig. 19).

A second business was established in Scotland with the help of Louis Deuchars called Aldourie Pottery, which made the same garden pottery designs for a shorter time.<sup>92</sup> In 1899-

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<sup>89</sup> For a timeline of the cemetery project, see Mark Bills, *Watts Chapel: A Guide to the Symbols of Mary Watts’s Arts and Crafts Masterpiece* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2010): 23.

<sup>90</sup> Mary Watts notes some controversy over consecration of the chapel in her diary stating, “had lunch with Mr. Davidson & Mr & Mrs Hogh (the chaplain)...There seems to be some doubt about whether it may be consecrated or not!—but they hope that as it is a private gift this may be got over--.” See MSW Diaries 11 May 1898.

<sup>91</sup> Nigel Hammett, “Watts Chapel: Investigation of the Structure and the Repair of the Fabric,” *The Word in the Pattern* (1905), eds. Mark Bills and Desna Greenhow (Lymington, Hampshire, Synergie Group, 2012): 105.

<sup>92</sup> HAIA classes may have been held in conjunction with the Aldourie Pottery as well. An undated letter from Mary Watts to Morton reads, “The Loch Ness class and [illegible] are in full swing. We had a telegram on Friday evening

1901, Mary would design the colorful Pelican Carpet steeped in symbolism. In 1903, Mary would participate in the sewing of embroidered banners distributed by the Governor General of Canada.<sup>93</sup> Particularly with the passing of the First World War, Compton Pottery and Mary's expertise in memorial design must have met an unfortunately great need. Mary Watts designed a memorial for local war heroes in Compton, as well as in other war memorials.<sup>94</sup> She participated in designing panels for the Dores War Memorial, which was an arched entrance with terracotta panels much like the Garment of Praise panels at the Compton mortuary chapel.<sup>95</sup> The panels are not intact, however the inscriptions read "To give unto them beauty for ashes oil of joy for mourning" and "The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."<sup>96</sup> From 1916-1921, Mary designed an altarpiece for the Aldershot Military Hospital, which can now be seen on display at the Watts Gallery. In addition, Mary became active in several diverse groups after George's passing.<sup>97</sup> She actively joined the fight for women's suffrage by acting as president to the

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'Forty enthusiastic youngsters send hearty highland cheers to Mrs. M. Watts' — That was the first meeting of the class..." Victoria and Albert Museum Archives, Blythe House, AAD 4/517-1988.

<sup>93</sup> Julie Rahrig discusses the banners in her thesis, "'Utmost for the Highest': Mary Seton Watts, G. F. Watts, and the Watts Chapel in Compton, Surrey," Hunter College, NY (2013): 71-2. For more on these banners in relation to representations of women during the suffrage movement, see Lucy Ella Rose, "Subversive Representations of Women and Death," *Visual Culture in Britain* 17.1 (2016): 49. For a general discussion of the Canadian Banners, see Jennifer E. Salahub, "The Distribution of Cultural Identity: A Canadian Case Study," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings* (2004), paper 488. For a contemporary article, see "To Adorn Our College Halls: Beautiful Banners Presented Through His Excellency the Governor-General to the People of Canada," *Canadian Life and Resources* 7.2 (Feb 1909): 12-13.

<sup>94</sup> Watts Gallery Archive (WGA), MSW/1. Danehill All Saints Church in East Sussex has a sculpted memorial of Captain Ronald Harvey (d. 1918) attributed to Mary Watts, a standing white marble figure beneath a canopy. It is similar in comparison to the design for Lt. Roy Gzowski at Aldershot cemetery. There is also a note mentioning a painted figure by George Frederic Watts. A photo is in the archive and shows a soldier in full relief kneeling at an altar and looks to be made from red terracotta for the memorial to Roy Gzowski. The pottery may have also made the reredos for St. Luke's Church in Reigate, Surrey. It had been painted over in the 1960's and the archive documents efforts to restore the original. It is probably the painted terracotta mentioned in a letter to Hester Fraser-Tytler on 26 Apr, c. 1921. A picture and correspondence is also contained in the box. The box also contains the mention of a sculpture in celebration of nursing by Mary Watts on an external wall at the Farnham Road Hospital in an email from Jane Turner 18 Oct 2013. This box also contains Mary's design for a memorial at Woodhouselee.

<sup>95</sup> I am indebted to Louise Boreham for this information from her talk at Study Day: Mary Watts: Victorian Progressive and Artistic Visionary, Watts Gallery, 7 Nov 2016.

<sup>96</sup> From The Scottish Military Research Group--Commemorations Project forum post by jamiemcglinlay 11 Aug 2007 <warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com>.

<sup>97</sup> She even founded The Ladies Watts Rifle Club in 1910 as part of the Compton Rifle Club. Clubs for men artists were prevalent at the time. For example, Frederic Leighton was first commander of the 38<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Artist's Rifle

Godalming branch of the NUWSS (Fig. 20) and participating in the Suffragist Pilgrimage to London in 1913, which made the front page of the *Surrey Advertiser*.<sup>98</sup>

The impossibility of financial independence prior to the pottery is suggested by a tangle of financial affairs in her later years—frustrations that result in part because of limited rights and role expectations for women during the period. Mary Watts hints at feeling the burden of family obligation and monetary disenfranchisement, which is complicated by the issue of marriage. Her 1891 diaries were written at a time when the couple was feeling some financial stress. George and Mary had embarked on building their home in Compton, Limnerslease, which was certainly a luxury, but not one without risk.<sup>99</sup> George had trouble sleeping at night just prior to the move early in 1891 as he worried over the financial burden. Mary fretted over the cold weather worsening George’s health and the travel required on moving day triggered George’s anxiety.<sup>100</sup> Mary Seton writes of an unfortunate treatment of her money in previous years by male relatives, which resulted in financial burden for the couple during this crucial time. She delays telling George Frederic, whom she almost always calls “Signor,” of the issue fearing the stress over monetary issues would negatively affect his health, but finally writes,

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Volunteer Corps founded in 1860. Mary’s club had 30 members at the first meeting. It became the Arlington Rifle Club in 1914-1921, then the Arlington Scouts. A minute book is held at the Godalming Museum. A reproduction of a picture of the club is also in Watts Gallery Archive (WGA), MSW/1.

<sup>98</sup> Watts Gallery Archive (WGA), MSW/1/3. LSE archives contain letters from 1910 with letterhead which reads “President—Ms. G. F. Watts.” This may have been a rather difficult position as nearby Guildford wrote, “I find people in Guildford very prejudiced against women’s suffrage. The other day at a tea party here an anti suffrage petition was produced and was signed by all the women but one. This one said she had not made up her mind on the subject. ‘Oh’ said the hostess ‘that does not matter; you must sign it; all the best people in Guildford are signing.’” See LSE, Women’s Library, Letter from Nadine Baker to Pippa Strachey, 6 Apr 1910. The Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage was also active in the period and William de Morgan is listed as a Vice President in a pamphlet from 13 Jan 1913 at the Women’s library LSE.

<sup>99</sup> Money was borrowed from Andrew Hitchens, the husband of May Prinsep whose family had hosted George for so many of his younger years. However, the situation was uncomfortable and Andrew had even suggested George giving it up and repaying him just after the couple had moved in. Mary and George had lived with the Hitchens for a short time and they may have wanted them to return. The initial plans with Limnerslease may not have been ownership, but a lease from the Hitchens. Mary felt a burden of living in borrowed space and yearned for a secure home with all their own where they could lay down roots like Aldourie had been for her in childhood. See MSW Diaries 13 and 14 This Feb 1891 and 17 and 18 Feb 1891, 21 Feb 1891.

<sup>100</sup> 2 Feb 1891.

I had to read him those troublesome letters of the Burkes & James Tytler to Ted—they want Signor to be security in my stead. I am angry that knowing the obligations I was under, they tied it up so that I cease to have any control over it & my debts, as it were, come upon Signor.<sup>101</sup>

She records that his response was “sweet, of course,” and that he reassured her that “whatever changes might come to us, nothing could affect our love and confidence in each other....”<sup>102</sup> The details of the transaction are not outlined, but Mary Seton seems to be entangled in financial debt on the Sanquhar property, the location of her father’s inherited home, Burdsyard. Mary Seton states that the financial settlement was made by lawyers and male relatives. Despite the crucial role she would be forced to play in paying a significant amount for the debt, the decisions were made without her and details concerning the amount to be paid were not transparent until the matter had been finalized. This happens on the day before Mary’s dream which prompts her to reveal her “theories” on “the bondage of family ties.”<sup>103</sup> George responds, “Duty cannot be well due unless it is a pleasure, & a duty always irksome, is a sign that something is wrong.”<sup>104</sup> In February, Mary writes that her mother visits alongside the following notation:

...A letter from Mr Woolcombe saying the bond on Sanquhar we are now asked to sign amounts to 670 more than J. Tytler said in his letter; this sum seems to have been smuggled into the three foolscap page of close writing of legal matter!<sup>105</sup>

The final sum is not mentioned, but that the sum is 670 more than the initial expectation suggests that a significant amount was owed. This is not the last time Mary Seton will write of personal financial shortages. Interestingly, Mary and George seem to maintain separate bank accounts

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<sup>101</sup> MSW Diaries 25 Jan 1891. Mary is unclear about the details, simply stating on 24 Jan 1891 that she has had “a disquieting letter about Sanquhar affairs.” Further debts over the Sanquhar discussed 28 Feb 1891. This is not the last time Mary writes of money shortage. See 4 Feb 1891 and footnote below. In 1893, she is still worried about the financial situation and reports, “How grieved I am that my glooms should vex him, but their troubles bring us together more closely! I cried in his [George’s] arms, & was able to rise again,” MSW Diaries 10 Jun 1893.

<sup>102</sup> MSW Diaries 25 Jan 1891.

<sup>103</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Jan 1891.

<sup>104</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Jan 1891.

<sup>105</sup> MSW Diaries 28 Feb 1891.

during the marriage. Mary records that her account is overdrawn in 1891 and George covers the debt as well as provides some padding in her account.<sup>106</sup> Despite coming from a landed upper-class family, financial tensions were still significant for Mary and she maintained a difficult position as a woman expected to obtain a financially beneficial marriage to support herself and her family. Mary Seton Watts, however, yearns for an evasive financial independence made more difficult by the limited opportunities available to women as well as the commitment of time and service expected from women in the family. She is unable to meet financial obligations independently and feels frustration at the lack of control that forces her to rely on George Frederic for financial assistance. The experience suggests that while Mary writes lovingly of her family and feels a very deep connection to her Scottish heritage, there is tension in obligations worsened by her limited political and economic rights as a woman. This is perhaps more apparent in the years after George Frederic's death as Mary Seton becomes more vocal in the fight for women's rights through her leadership in the NUWSS (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies).

## 1.2 From Fraser-Tytler to Watts: Marriage to George Frederic

Despite the perceived trope of young student marrying older master, Mary Seton and George Frederic Watts evaded stereotypical roles. Indeed, the roles of “husband” and “wife” were flexibly and alternately played by both parties. Mary surely did many of those wifely duties mentioned by Anna Lea Merritt in her satirical description of marriage for *Lippincott's Monthly* in 1900—writing the husband's letters, visiting and entertaining guests for his benefit, taking care of his health, and etc. However, Mary was not always “an encouraging” critic. Rather, she

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<sup>106</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Feb 1891. George sends money immediately to cover the debt and add 44 pounds.

was a trained artist with a critical eye and not afraid to disagree with her husband,<sup>107</sup> advise his work, and direct their professional and social affairs. As a husband, George sometimes played the part of model and, to Mary, was “personally suggestive of beautiful pictures” in terms of his goodness and innocence and she described him as her moral beacon. As Mary was the younger artist, George might very well be described as the “encouraging and partial critic” to a wife exploring new ideas and mediums. George also offered social connections for his wife and helped to curate “visits for [her] benefit.”<sup>108</sup>

Perhaps too often speculated upon because of age difference, there is no reason to doubt the reciprocal affection between George Frederic and Mary Seton Watts. Upon her birthday, Mary writes, “My world lies bathed in light & peace & happiness...I told Signor today when he said ‘Many happy returns’ that I was more happy than I thought was possible—absolutely complete...I feel as if I had been born for him & him only 38 years ago!”<sup>109</sup> They shared a rare relationship of “perfect liberty in thought and action with each other.”<sup>110</sup> The correspondence between the two is full of warmth and compassion. While on her honeymoon, Mary Watts wrote, “We have been two months & a half married & never been away from each other for half an hour—I used to think I could not be happy unless I was much alone every day—here I am never happy unless with Signor.”<sup>111</sup> Mary records George looking healthy and rather smart in a new

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<sup>107</sup> For an example of this, see MSW Diaries 13 Oct 1896. “He is working much upon his Time, Death, & Judgement. I regret Times face! but perhaps he will conquer in the end, & surpass the old fine dim eyed good. – Love has spread a more sheltering wing round Life & I think that is made more beautiful by it – He is piling up the hideousness of Mammon, beginning [to] feel afraid of it becoming an exaggeration –”

<sup>108</sup> We might even consider George something of a model for Mary’s work as she sketched him as well. 9 Jul 1887 records a particular drawing she did of him as a young boy of 17 with a poetic look about him and eyes that seemed to say “Wilst ye not that I must be about our Father’s business?” Mary sometimes laments not doing enough for George. For example, 3 Aug 1887, she mentions that she forgot to remind him about an RA meeting he was planning to attend and blames herself for his missing it.

<sup>109</sup> MSW Diaries 25 Nov 1887. Feelings were reciprocal. Mary records George’s lament that he “wished we had married 10 years ago” along with her own commentary, “I seem to have an undue amount of happiness now” in her diaries 3 Jul 1887.

<sup>110</sup> George Watts’s thoughts as recorded by Mary 3 May 1887.

<sup>111</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Feb 1887.

grey hat and her companion commenting, “Well, I do believe you are the happiest woman on earth.”<sup>112</sup>

George also found much happiness in the companionship. As Mary goes through his papers, she finds “a deep sadness & dejection now & then,” but notes that since the marriage, “I do not think he would write them now.”<sup>113</sup> Mary is very proud of the character and influence of her husband and writes, “to see my beloved through the eyes of the world, & then to feel that my arm goes round this & contains it. Often when I feel this is so, I say ‘Do I know what I hold & have?’—alas—only ‘in a glass darkly’ as yet—.”<sup>114</sup> The words reveal the deep admiration that she has for George as well as her happiness in the union. It also hints at her perception of control as well. She feels her arm go “round” and “contain” George, which is protective as well as controlling. Indeed, she will shape the image as well as the accessibility of his work, particularly after his death through the writing of his biography and control over the display of the gallery.

During the early days of the honeymoon, Mary Seton records a sweet exchange of affection, “I kissed him tonight through his mosquito curtains & said ‘The kiss through the veil’ —‘Ah there is no veil between us,’ he said, ‘Nor ever can be now.’”<sup>115</sup> The feeling of warmth does not diminish in her writing as time goes on. In 1891, she writes of reuniting with George after spending only a morning apart, “...as I got to the top of the first rise from the village, I saw my beacon, a grey spot in the distance & sent my heart bounding to reach him. My little King! —how terrible to possess a thing so dear! What would I do if that grey figure were not there for me--.”<sup>116</sup> The two seem closely bound together, in both thought and action. Even a few hours

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<sup>112</sup> MSW Diaries 9 May 1887.

<sup>113</sup> MSW Diaries 5 Dec 1887.

<sup>114</sup> MSW Diaries 1 Feb 1887. This statement is inspired by a meeting with an American artist who commented on the influence George Watts was sure to have on American Art. She saw his work as producing an important reaction against the French Impressionists.

<sup>115</sup> MSW Diaries diaries 3 Apr 1887.

<sup>116</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Feb 1891.

apart are written about as if it had been several days. Mary Seton often describes Signor as childlike.<sup>117</sup> Not childish, but childlike in purity of intention and artless sincerity in his desire for goodness. It seems to be a quality most endearing to Mary Watts. Such passages of affection frequent Mary Seton's diaries, manifesting that the intimate and loving relationship extended to the outside world as the two used their relationship to support one another's goals in lifting society.

### 1.3 A Marriage of Artistic and Social Reform

While Mary was born into the landed wealth of upper-class gentry, her status as a woman, and perhaps as a Scot, pushed her out of the mainstream in many ways. Her experience with other cultures and with colonization through her contact with India through the civil service may have also shaped her unique perspective.<sup>118</sup> Like George, Mary records her views growing more liberal as she matured. Indeed, she remarks that her relationship with George Watts influenced her to become more liberal in thought, which was celebrated by her sister, Christina, with whom Mary was particularly close. George teases Mary about this, saying "Watts is making Moll a radical." After the frivolity, though, he expresses to Mary his genuine desire that his strong opinions not infringe on her own freedom to think critically and come to her own conclusions on issues.<sup>119</sup> This was, perhaps, an issue to George as an older and more established artist; however, both partners share a growing concern over national politics with a concerned

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<sup>117</sup> See MSW Diaries 23 Apr 1887. "I looked at him tonight & I cannot say why but the words 'and a little child will lead them' came into my mind—There is a lowliness that I always find in the corner stone of greatness—." Also, MSW Diaries 26 Apr 1887 in talking of George's love for *Pride and Prejudice*, she writes, "His love of it is delicious—like a child who likes to hear the story over again, he has read this so often that he corrected me if I missed a word—." See also 7 Jun 1887 and 13 Jul 1887.

<sup>118</sup> She would not be the first in her family to find herself on the margins in terms of politics and religion. Her grandfather and great grandfather were both Scottish Tories and William Fraser-Tytler was referred to as the "Episcopalian historian of a Presbyterian country."

<sup>119</sup> MSW Diaries 12 Oct 1887.

eye towards poverty and a growing skepticism over hierarchical establishments. In this chapter, the marriage is understood as the beginning of a relationship in which Mary Seton Fraser-Tytler united with George Frederic Watts to address social issues through art.

Philosophies on freedom of thought and the equality of peoples were developed over the years and were influential to art projects and social clubs to which the couple belonged. This is particularly true for Mary Seton's chapel project, which began with a desire to empower the community with the ability to circumvent impersonal commercialized products in the death care industry. Mary and George understood from personal experience the importance of being able to make personalized memorials for loved ones passed. From the beginning of terracotta classes for local residents to the publication of the list of worker's names in *The Word in the Pattern* upon the chapel's completion, the project was always one of social awareness and community empowerment. The seeds of the project can be seen to take root in the early days of marriage at a time when George and Mary Watts were intensely close and conversations turned to shared goals and planned accomplishments.

While George and Mary Watts' relationship shows every sign of personal intimacy and love most valued in modern marital relationships, the marriage was also entered upon with a thought towards the good that the two artists might accomplish together with a united voice. The marriage union held the potential of benefiting a society that was sometimes blind to the struggles of the marginalized by amplifying the voice of those without public representation. Speaking of the marriage, George recognized his life with Mary as a new beginning in which an effort would be made to influence the society within their reach. In their happiness, the couple thought of their marriage as another chance to do good. Calling their marriage, a "new life,"

George said, “We must use it well & try to be good.”<sup>120</sup> Interestingly, both George and Mary associate their new lives together with good works, noting that people are generally good with a bit of comical criticism towards those who speak disparagingly of the human race. On this particular morning when George feels full of hope in his ability to accomplish a good work in his new life, he says with a bit of tongue-in-cheek, “I do not think people are right in constantly calling themselves miserable sinners & cannot think, when I see they make little effort to change, that they can be sincere.”<sup>121</sup> Indeed, George and Mary Watts anticipate that their marriage will be an opportunity to be a force for positive change and they believe that this change can be wrought through art.

Mary’s happiness and personal development seem important to George as well. After their engagement, George writes,

I shall be disappointed if you do not bloom out like a flower that is transplanted into favourable soil...I can love you very much with the love that joins itself closely around goodness and had its roots deep down in perfect trust, and that the door of your cage shall be wide open and there shall be no wires but silver films instead!<sup>122</sup>

George recognized that marriage could be as confining as a bird cage, familiar imagery in Victorian art, however, he promises that marriage to him will be liberating and he hopes that life with him will enable her to do more. One day Mary records, “Woke this morning to talk about the possible development of my ideas for design. My loved one says, ‘How happy we are to have interests what are more than interests in common. It is very rare.’”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, George and Mary practiced a different visual aesthetic within their works, yet the interests in humanity and the messages of hope and betterment were united. Moreover, within this shared loving relationship,

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<sup>120</sup> MSW Diaries 5 Apr 1887. The entry also reveals George’s distrust of religious clergy who obtain power from preaching such sermons. Also see *MSW Annals* Vol. 1, 146.

<sup>121</sup> MSW Diaries 5 Apr 1887.

<sup>122</sup> See Chapman 120. GFW to MSW 21 Sept 1886.

<sup>123</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Feb 1887.

there seems to be a complex understanding by both parties that Mary's union would provide her with a larger social circle and the potential to accomplish something quite different from her single life as a woman artist in late Victorian Britain. The marriage was full of hope to both parties. In April, Mary wrote of her marriage, "There is nothing for me to fear—I have only to be myself no need for me to feel in what was called 'a very difficult position.'"<sup>124</sup>

Mary's earlier journal entries are often carefully reported through a philosophical lens supported by biblical and literary quotations. Daily life is seen symbolically. In the diary kept during their honeymoon to Egypt, Mary records, "S [Signor] put out his hand to me before daylight & told me it was a New Year & blessed me." In Mary's symbolic words—and perhaps with an awareness that these words might be read by a wider audience<sup>125</sup>—she illustrates Signor offering his hand and asking Mary to match his steps forward in a new dawning for the two of them in a life together as companions, side by side. While these entries are short, each word seems rich with intention and her typical symbolism creates layers of meaning. Mary records, "I take for my text this year, 'Thou hast set my feet in a larger room.'" The simple verse from Psalms 31:8 in which David celebrates deliverance from enemies, is here applied by Mary to her new life of marriage and is profound in its suggestion that this new life offered by George Frederic Watts's proposal of marriage is also an offer to enter "a larger room," which might be

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<sup>124</sup> MSW Diaries 3 Apr 1887.

<sup>125</sup> Mary often notes the importance (and burden) of writing a record. She refers to her diary as "Fatima" and records going back to fix entries, perhaps with the occasional assistance from George Watts with the thought of future publication. On April 3 1887, she records, "We took up Fatima & read some of the notes & hope to work them out & put them into better form one day—any how they are a dear record to me which otherwise would have been lost—." Later in the year, she records a dream in which she dropped a precious ring into the ocean and managed to grab at it and catch it, but the most valuable part of the ring, the diamond, was lost and she watched it slowly drift down to the bottom of the ocean. She makes the comparison to precious ideas that she tries to hold onto, but slip away so quickly. She concludes, "I must try to keep my Fatima better, for that dream—" MSW Diaries 2 Oct 1887. She also mentions the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff, who was the second woman to have a diary published in France. It was translated around 1864 to much popular attention and critical acclaim. Interestingly, Mary specifically writes to note alterations made to the diary by relatives, which might have also occurred with missing portions of Mary's own diary. See MSW Diaries 7 Feb 1891.

applied to the growth she expects to experience personally as well as within a larger audience of public attention.

George is able to offer Mary a new society as one of the benefits of being his wife. “My dear child,” she later records him often saying, “that is part of your life in which I feel I give you something really good, many delightful & great people have been very kind to me & I have made them my friends & now can make them yours.”<sup>126</sup> Mary continues her journal entry with a poem that further illustrates the fact that she sees her union with George as one of growing in knowledge and productivity. Quoting Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” within the context of her new marriage at the dawning of a new year, the words are a vision of her union—not just with God, but with her husband. In the context of embarking on a new life with her husband, Mary quotes:

Let knowledge grow from more to more  
But more of reverence in us dwell  
That mind & soul according well  
May make one music as before.

Interestingly, this poem marks both the beginning of their life together as well as their parting at George’s death in Mary Watts’s diaries.<sup>127</sup> Seen within the aesthetic issues addressed by George and Mary, underpinned by social and philosophical beliefs, the artistic works of the couple come together like a duet of instruments at their marriage, creating a parallel between art and music that George Frederic Watts was fond of making. For Mary, time has been reset and it begins again at the beginning of history among the ruins of a great civilization on their honeymoon trip to Egypt. She sees the cyclical rise and fall of great societies and their accomplishments etched in stone for subsequent generations. Her new beginning, marked by her marriage and the start of

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<sup>126</sup> MSW Diaries 6 Oct 1887. Interestingly, however, he was not feeling so optimistic when he thought Mary might be getting engaged to another man in 1886 and he wrote, “It is not likely I can be of service to you for I live in a narrow circle of influence though not I hope of thought, but if I can be useful at any time I cannot say how great my gratification would be.” See Chapman 116. GFW to MSW 15 Jul 1886.

<sup>127</sup> “In Memoriam” is the poem quoted by Mary to George on his deathbed as recorded in MSW Diaries 1 Jul 1904.

a new year, is understood from within this context of cycles of life and what can be learned from them. She writes, “Pyramids & a sphinx by sunset and moonlight. I begin my life with Signor by beginning the oldest history of the world.”<sup>128</sup>

Significantly, a great part of the history of this great Egyptian civilization is seen and understood through architectural and sculptural forms and Mary shows a great awareness for these modes of sculptural production which will be her own. She is keenly aware of the three-dimensionality and physical presence of these monuments, as well as the way in which they function in terms of the changes in the natural world around them and of which they are a part. On January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1887 she writes of the landscape in terms of architecture, saying, “We passed under some grand cliffs & felt how distinctly they had suggested to the builders of the great temples, pyramids & Sphinx, the idea of line & size.”<sup>129</sup> When the couple reaches the Greek Parthenon, Mary is fascinated with the architecture. In discussing the horizontal curvature of the cornices,<sup>130</sup> she notes,

How wonderful these first builders were—we said they were surely in their early days nearer in their creations to the mind of the great Creator—the blue curve of the horizon was before our eyes! And behind all, the idea of the symbol of the circle—without beginning or end. Equal in all parts.<sup>131</sup>

Mary Watts is consistently writing of the relationship between sculpture, architecture and the surrounding natural environment, or the relationship between art and nature. Changing artistic movements as well as the cycles of the natural environment experience are documented by Mary Seton, but she also sees something constant or eternal running through time and space. These

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<sup>128</sup> MSW Diaries 1 Jan 1887.

<sup>129</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Jan 1887.

<sup>130</sup> Mary & George Watts met Mr. Penrose at the Acropolis who discussed the optical corrections made to the Parthenon (and Greek temples in general). For more information on the building as Mary and George would have understood it, see the recordings of F.C. Penrose, including a sketch of the optical adjustments in fig. 9, in William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: John Murray, 1890).

<sup>131</sup> MSW Diaries 17 May 1887.

concepts will be crucial to the conception of the architectural structure of the chapel, which will embrace the idea of the circle as symbolic of the cycle of creation. Mary Seton's designs demonstrate the cognizance of changing perspectives experienced by visitors within the three-dimensional space and its natural built environment with the philosophical contemplation of something immaterial that survives the cyclical rise and fall which she first discusses in her honeymoon journal.

While George Watts was one of the most widely known British artists of his day, he is not the only artist sketching his way through the Eastern world on the honeymoon trip. Mary Seton is actively engaged in artistic production as well.<sup>132</sup> She makes little notes like, "I ran back to make a blot of it,"<sup>133</sup> or "anchored to the Island of Roda & drawing from deck,"<sup>134</sup> and sometimes, "things flow too quickly past for painting."<sup>135</sup> In what remains of her sketchbook, we see a developing talent for draftsmanship and an interest both in the human figure and the intellectual concepts of design and aesthetics (Fig. 21). She notes her own physical presence in relation to monuments and times of day. For example, she records sitting on stones under the Sphinx, "With its great mysterious face burning with sunlight."<sup>136</sup> Mary experiences the sculpture of Egypt and the presence of rocks made into great forms, which she attaches to creation and the inherent striving within humanity—symbolism inherent to the Compton chapel as well. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, she notes that she is actively painting and sketching during the honeymoon trip and that the ruins of Egypt are symbols of time as it marches indefatigably onward. She writes, "One last look at the Sphinx at four o'clock. The sun was just behind its

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<sup>132</sup> In fact, Mary may have been the force behind the trip. George was unsure about leaving when he was feeling unwell and Mrs. Barrington confronted Mary and argued with her about the safety of the trip for George. But, Mary pushed ahead with the planning and reservations. See Chapman 126-7.

<sup>133</sup> MSW Diaries, 3 Jan 1887.

<sup>134</sup> MSW Diaries, 5 Jan 1887.

<sup>135</sup> MSW Diaries, 21 Jan 1887.

<sup>136</sup> MSW Diaries, 2 Jan 1887.

head. It looked grander than ever. I ran back and made a blot of it. Signor feels it to be a symbol of time, something strong and calm & inexorable with a smile that is cruel.”<sup>137</sup>

As the couple moved through Greece, Mary is finishing one of her pictures. She notes, “My picture has become most lovely ‘the wife of his idea,’ I call it. Madame Casavetti & all who have seen it admire it enormously—.”<sup>138</sup> As the honeymoon ends six months later, Mary writes, “next time I write it will be in my own dear home—a new joy to work with him.”<sup>139</sup> Mary looks forward to a life, not only of love and companionship, but of productivity together. She is correct, as two days later her entry begins, “Began our life Signor awoke at a quarter to four & said that I must not get up unless I liked it ‘but it will be very nice if you can.’”<sup>140</sup> Life with George began a little earlier in the day than Mary anticipated! It is uncertain how much of her days were spent taking “great care for small things”<sup>141</sup> for George and how much was her own work. However, she does record having busy days of painting and working on her own projects in her studio as well as her husband’s.<sup>142</sup> George’s praise for her work is sometimes recorded, as in her July 11<sup>th</sup> entry remarking, “Signor is pleased with the drawing of a skull I have done—he says it makes the whole difference if a drawing shows a thorough knowledge of the forms of the bones....”<sup>143</sup> However, even when remarks are not written, George Frederic’s presence is still often noted as he seems always a part of her thoughts and her work.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> MSW Diaries 3 Jan 1887.

<sup>138</sup> MSW Diaries 26 May 1887.

<sup>139</sup> MSW Diaries 3 June 1887.

<sup>140</sup> MSW Diaries 6 Jun 1887.

<sup>141</sup> MSW Diaries 9 Jun 1887.

<sup>142</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Jun 1887 records “Busy day! But still I began to paint at four this morning in my beloved’s studio, once working there now can I care to go to my own one.”

<sup>143</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Jul 1887.

<sup>144</sup> See MSW Diaries 16 Jul 1887, for example, “I painted on the lawn this morning my dear one across his big horse looked down upon me—“

This is not to say that the marriage did not occasionally provide stumbling blocks for Mary Seton whose time was increasingly dedicated to the support of George Frederic Watts, both in terms of his artistic production and health. Married life is full of “give & take,” “happiness or misery,” as she would later advise a friend.<sup>145</sup> Frequent artist visitors as well as portrait sitters required Mary to play hostess.<sup>146</sup> Some of these visitors allowed Mary access to artistic information that she otherwise might not be privy too. Other times, political visitors might provide discussions on the direction of the nation and some influence might be brought upon a turn of conversation. However, it was distracting from her work and could become dull or slightly offensive as when the artist John Gilbert came to sit in 1896. He was quite elderly by this time and Mary takes his sexist comments in stride, recording her relief that he is looking well. However, she lightly mentions, “I perceived more crankiness developing – women must not bicycle, girls should [be] kept in glass cases, & he harped unpleasantly to me on the subject of the physical difference between man & woman –.” She concludes with light humor, “I liked it better when he began to talk about the colours a sculptor had at his command...”<sup>147</sup>

Mary’s domestic life often interferes with her art. “My days slip by without a scrap of artistic work being done,” she writes one day, “Why women fail in art is answered to myself ‘because of the little things in life’” and Mary continues to detail the picnic that she arranged for the household that day.<sup>148</sup> She writes of the delight taken in the day and the care of children, but it is not without the frustration for missing her work.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> These are Mary’s words in a recorded conversation with the maid, Emma, over the evening hair brushing. MSW Diaries 20 Apr 1891.

<sup>146</sup> A good example of this is recorded about a visit from Jowett in which Mary plays hostess to encourage the patron to sit still long enough for George to obtain a good likeness. See MSW Diaries 3 Oct 1887.

<sup>147</sup> MSW Diaries 29 Sept 1896.

<sup>148</sup> MSW Diaries 15 Apr 1893.

<sup>149</sup> George tells her “if you had children you would think of nothing else.”” She writes, “Two delicious children would rightly fill both heart and mind I think, so wonderful to help the right growth of character – I suppose a real

Early in her married days, she writes good naturedly of enjoying the company, though it must have taken much of her time to entertain her husband's guests. She writes that such experiences were "very different from entertaining I have been accustomed too." On this particular day, which included visits by several artists and intellectuals, she relates, "Mr. Poynter, who I liked, though he came in saying he had come to see Mr. Watts—however I was not snubbed & liked him very much....I enjoyed my afternoon meeting people like that...."<sup>150</sup> Poynter's words designating that his interest was only with her husband would have stung since he would have been something of an acquaintance and mentor to Mary as the influential president of the Slade School from the years she attended and close personal friend to French sculptor, Dalou, who had also been influential in her life. Mary feels less enthusiastic the following day as her social commitments on behalf of her husband wear on and Mary admits the frustration of her many new roles. She is working on her own draughtsmanship while also handling George's correspondence and she admits, "I doing a terrible duty, driving all the afternoon to return calls, felt how much I was in the wrong place trying to do social duties."<sup>151</sup> Later in the year, she also writes, "My dear one made me answer some letters for him this morning" and reports his feedback that "it is nice to find that in all things you help & supplement my efforts."<sup>152</sup>

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mother has less anxiety than the poor hen, who spreads her feathers over ducklings, goslings, cygnets, & she knows not what!" MSW Diaries 15 Apr 1893.

<sup>150</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Jun 1887.

<sup>151</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Jun 1887. She is always collecting and sorting George's writings and notes on scraps of paper. It seems they even brought them to work on in Malta. Mary writes of going through the "lucky bag," which is what she calls his file of notes, for classification. See MSW Diaries 24 Nov 1887.

<sup>152</sup> MSW Diaries 18 Oct 1887. Mary notes that she answered about 20 letters in one day, which does not seem like an unusual occurrence. MSW Diaries 2 Jan 1891. She also records taking photographs of his paintings at his request. MSW Diaries 3 Jan 1891. Earlier in the marriage, they discuss writing and Mary seems willing to take on this responsibility, not because she enjoys writing, but because she understands its importance. She records, "We also argued about the matter of letter writing, for himself he says in the first place he cannot write, in the second if he could, he should not be able to give the time for it: he thinks I write too long & much. I argue that being a

In addition to letter writing, which sometimes amounted to twenty responses per day, Mary also kept a faithful record of their lives together writing almost daily. This was not a leisurely pursuit, but part of her record keeping. Mary would rather be creating art than writing and records in frustration, “My day to write! I sometimes wish pens were at the bottom of the sea!”<sup>153</sup> She often writes rather playfully and the diary offers a unique glimpse into 19<sup>th</sup> century life. She even nicknames her journal “Fatima.” In 1891 she writes, “Fatima like the grasshopper becomes a burden to me at times, the moment I take her up, my brains lie down like naughty boys & kick - I am like the unfortunate nursery maid trying to deal with them.”<sup>154</sup>

As George and Mary Watts worked to design and build their new home in Compton, Limnerslease, Mary and George are quite involved in the process working with architects, designing the space, planting a garden, and more. Mary is working on her ceiling tiles at this time. She writes, “Limners wanted a great deal of looking after, I made two journeys there, one with Signor & afterwards with Mitchell...no ceiling work done today—.”<sup>155</sup> Mary often answered correspondence concerning portrait sittings and commissions, took care of housekeeping, or “Martha’s cares”<sup>156</sup> as she sometimes called the housework, described as lying “heavy upon me.”<sup>157</sup> She entertained guests and helped George to maintain his rigorous schedule in addition to playing critic for his work, collecting his thoughts and letters, titling his paintings and occasionally acting as a caregiver and nurse when his health was failing. After the Watts’ trip to Malta, Mary was continually worried for George’s health and death is in her thoughts. She

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person whose time is of small value, it is a little act of duty sometimes, pleasure giving that I think I am right in doing - Were I to do as my lazy inclinations would make me do I should never write.” 2 Apr 1887.

<sup>153</sup> MSW Diaries 22 Dec 1896. Many of the pages of this journal have been torn out, especially before August 26<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>154</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Mar 1891.

<sup>155</sup> MSW Diaries 21 Jan 1887.

<sup>156</sup> MSW Diaries 14 & 15 Jun 1891.

<sup>157</sup> MSW Diaries 21 Apr 1891.

writes “death at any moment might sweep thro’ my home like that wind outside, blow out the light, & leave me in the storm alone.”<sup>158</sup> George’s anxiety and cramping in his legs bothered him quite often at this time. Mary notes playfully that when she suffers a migraine, possibly due to too much coffee, “he must give me leave to have *some* sick days ill & not keep them all to himself.”<sup>159</sup> He also became increasingly hard of hearing in 1891.<sup>160</sup>

Mary is rather forthright on Sept 7, 1877 in writing that her focus has changed since her marriage. She no longer feels the pressure of creating something great. Rather, she now feels that her role is helping her husband to do so. It is a sadness to her and she feels the loss. She writes out her discussion with George,

I told Signor today that the only sad part in my life now was that in all my life before I married my one object was my work to do something well at last! All this past year I have been conscious that the strenuous effort after that is past - Instead of my work, I focus on him - He is grieved because he says it is a wrong view.<sup>161</sup>

However, it is perhaps because of Mary’s own awareness and her ability to be honest about this perceived shift that allows her to work against the impulse to completely lose herself and her work. Moreover, these discussions must have helped George Frederic to see the weight that she carried for him and he did not like the idea of her work being stifled. In a similar mood, she records her work in Malta, “Signor comes in & helps me now & then—I told him today he must prop me up with encouragement—I feel so very limp working near him & cannot pull myself together for a real effort—.”<sup>162</sup> Perhaps in part because of these conversations, Mary is able to continue with her own work and her most artistically productive years take place after her marriage to George. She is continually taking inventory of her goals. She asks herself, “What

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<sup>158</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Dec 1891.

<sup>159</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Mar 1891.

<sup>160</sup> This is mentioned in many entries including 19 Mar 1891.

<sup>161</sup> MSW Diaries 7 Sept 1887.

<sup>162</sup> MSW Diaries 28 Nov 1887.

shall we both accomplish, & how? Am I a better woman for my years with him? Surely I must be.”<sup>163</sup> Mary is sometimes unsure how to proceed, but she consistently thinks of her goals and analyzes her progress. After being busy with various errands and life’s little duties, Mary consistently fights to make time for her art projects. She describes herself during these fruitful episodes as working like a tiger or a lion, bringing to mind her small frame working fiercely against the many demands on her time to push her work through the finish line. “Working like a tiger at my ceiling all morning,” she writes on the tenth of February in 1891 and “have worked like a tiger” again on the eighteenth of February. In March, she is still “working like a lion at my canvases.”<sup>164</sup> Mary records the epic fight of a woman artist feeling the urgent instinct to create. She writes of having renewed hope after completing a small project for their home in Compton “that when ‘I purpose aught’ *in time*, I am sure to do it—it has been the way with me always—I think I shall still paint a good picture one day.”<sup>165</sup>

As in all companionships, there were disagreements and unrealistic expectations. Perhaps the most unique thing about George and Mary Watts’ circumstance is that we have a record of these commonplace discussions between the Victorian artistic husband and wife. Mary Seton’s diary is full of humanity and reveals how these discussions were worked through. Shortly after their return from the honeymoon, Mary writes, “My loved one said to me today that I did not quite help him as I might, to be better & more kind in spirit.” There is sincerity in George’s suggestion that Mary could help him be better, but the passage turns into an incredible and humorous reflection of Victorian characterizations of woman as either an angel or a devil—Mary or Eve, Madonna or Siren, but nothing in-between. Mary’s reply is full of wit, “How

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<sup>163</sup> MSW Diaries 31 Dec 1891.

<sup>164</sup> MSW Diaries 10 Feb 1891, 18 Feb 1891, 9 Mar 1891.

<sup>165</sup> MSW Diaries 18 Mar 1891.

could I? I said ‘unless I were to become quite an angel! & ‘then wouldn’t you want a little devil sometimes to play with.’” George replies without missing a beat. “He tells me he thinks he could play with angels, & not find them monotonous—He says to me ‘Charity thinketh no evil.’”

However, Mary does not let up. “I say ‘Yes, but Charity’s wife does.’”<sup>166</sup> For all of their teasing, however, this is a serious issue for Victorian women and one that Mary Seton will continue to work through. She is expected to be a pillar of moral virtue, however, it is an unseen pillar that supports and holds up the public and more visible member of the relationship—a role that fit George Frederic. Later that evening she records being advised by a female companion to “‘be absorbed by him’...it is the right thing you should be—.”<sup>167</sup> Mary does not record her own thoughts or response. She seems to be contemplating her place. In many aspects of her married life, George does absorb her time and attention. However, she retains unique convictions of her own that find a voice, not only in her private conversations with her husband, but also through her more public artistic projects and social duties. This is perhaps most apparent, however, after George’s passing when her time is her own. It is easy to believe that George would have supported her efforts, as he intended the relationship to be a tool for the younger companion to wield after he was no longer able. From Mary’s journal it seems as if George is optimistic that because Mary is younger than him, she will be able to share a united perspective that continues to develop in marriage through their time and travels together.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> MSW Diaries 9 Aug 1887. Another amusing disagreement recorded by Mary illustrates the good nature of the relationship. When Mary misplaces the matches, George lectures, “My dear child, I do wish you would try to be a little more precise...so much time is wasted for want of order.” Minutes later, Mary finds George has left behind a pair of “voluminous” flannel bottoms on a chair. Mary can hardly wait to bring his mistake to his attention. “...I just want to ask you to be a little more precise,” she parrots, holding up the white drawers “big enough to fit Val Prinsep” and they laughed for ten minutes. MSW Diaries 17 Nov 1887.

<sup>167</sup> MSW Diaries 9 Aug 1887.

<sup>168</sup> MSW Diaries see particularly 15 May 1887. Remarks appear to be from George to Mary, stating that the world is “on the verge great change” and that “I would like to think that you will take part—will try to influence where minds refuse to see things as they are—trying to see all around things yourself.”

The extent to which Mary influenced George's work may never be fully understood, but the strength of her personality and extensive energy and ambition—the “very ingenious & industrious woman”<sup>169</sup> that she was—indicates that she was not a passive companion. Mary's 1887 diary indicates that even on her honeymoon, she was organizing George's paintings and planning for whose portraits should be included in the eminent Victorians series.<sup>170</sup> In discussing a letter addressed to her from Mr. Forsyth she wrote that Signor “wished me to do much of this kind of work endeavoring to make known the object of his works more perhaps than the meaning of particular pictures.”<sup>171</sup> The passage indicates the importance of ethical and intellectual issues that George Frederic Watts hoped to evoke with his work and his reliance on Mary to help with its intended influence. A brief passage in July of 1887 also indicates that Mary titled a portion of his paintings as well since she was most privy to his thought process and the intention of each work.<sup>172</sup> She may have also written descriptions for paintings in exhibition and sales catalogues as well.<sup>173</sup> After his death, Mary Seton records “I work all day—trying to get the ‘Little flower from the crannied wall’ done for the hand of Tennyson--& also varnishing his pictures.”<sup>174</sup> This indicates that Mary may have also assisted George with both sculpture and painting.

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<sup>169</sup> This is Thompson's description of her to Andrew Hichens, which Mary says she is proud to accept. MSW Diaries 20 Apr 1891. Thompson worked for Watts and married Emma, the maid at Little Holland House. Indebted to Watts Gallery Archive for this information. More on the marriage is recorded in the diaries, especially on 24 Apr 1891.

<sup>170</sup> MSW Diaries 23 Jan 1887 records, “Made a list of his portraits for the Nation—adding some still to be done.” She also mentions “I began naming the pictures in the Gallery” on 16 Jul 1887. George and Mary were of one mind to the extent that she very well may have taken the responsibility of distilling the meaning of works into titles for George.

<sup>171</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Jul 1887.

<sup>172</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Jul 1887.

<sup>173</sup> This is suggested in MSW Diaries 22 Apr 1891, “A morning writing out Signor's little preface to the Exhibition of drawings –.” She was also charged with making invitation lists for private shows and innumerable other jobs as wife of the artist like providing a personal tour at the gallery in an embarrassingly loud voice for “Old Mr Sidney Cooper,” who was quite a character. See also 24 Apr 1891 and 16 Apr 1891.

<sup>174</sup> 13 Oct 1894. Presumably, Mary Seton was modeling the plant in the hand of the Tennyson sculpture at Lincoln Cathedral. G.K. Chesterton wrote, “There is something very characteristic of Watts in the contrast between the colossal plan of the figure and the smallness of the central object” (39). See Chesterton, *G.F. Watts* (London: Duckworth, 1914).

Mary did feel the burden of being “the wife of the great artists.” Any work that she might accomplish would inevitably be seen from within his shadow. This might be particularly true in terms of the portrait painting which had taken up much of her time before her marriage, since George Watts’s reputation would be so tightly tied with his series of historical portraiture at the National Gallery. As Susan P. Casteras discussed in *A Struggle for Fame*, the woman artist in the Victorian Era regularly suffered from “the dynamics of creative inferiority, cultural submissiveness, and general low self-worth...” The romanticization of “the angel of the house,” or woman in the domestic sphere, was part of the problem hindering the woman professional artist. Casteras explains, “The very mythologizing and enshrinement of the woman’s sphere kept expectations low; to move beyond middle-class security and the domestic circle to pursue a vocation was dare, and earning a living in the field of art was the province and privilege of men alone.”<sup>175</sup> For Mary, the pressures of being married to a foremost Victorian artist, several years ahead in seniority, must have compounded the problem of perceived inferiority for the younger woman artist, who called her husband “Signor” out of affection as well as respect. As Casteras pointed out, “The issue of male criticism of female work is also germane,” as Victorian women would not have been prepared to respond to evaluation. “The fear of seeming unwomanly...left women poorly equipped to confront the politics of criticism and the commerce of art, since they were more culturally attuned to sacrificing for others rather than promoting themselves.”<sup>176</sup> We have already seen several instances in which Mary was faced with the difficult task of accepting or gracefully rejecting artistic criticism. This would have been a major factor for Mary as George had been her teacher and mentor. Her journal records the consistency and freedom with which

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<sup>175</sup> Casteras *Struggle* 8.

<sup>176</sup> Casteras *Struggle* 9.

George shared his opinions. In addition, Mary was constantly faced with the evaluation of her efforts by artist friends and sitters visiting the couple's home.

Mary's resilience and her ability to discern between good and bad criticism was crucial to her artistic survival. Creativity was required in utilizing George Frederic Watts's shadow of influence in a way that would nourish rather than smother the younger artist's aims. It is not until later, and from within her marriage to George Frederic Watts, that Mary's aesthetic grand oeuvre would take shape in the form of terracotta architectural sculpture and design. It is possible that, in some instances, Mary was able to use George Frederic's grand shadow to shade the harsh light of criticism that sometimes met a woman of Mary Seton's ambition. Additionally, Mary's marital relationship allowed access to the individuals who were privy to knowledge that she needed and that was so often restricted from women at that time, not to mention funding. After all, it was not until 1898 that the first women were allowed into professional architectural programs at two of the most prestigious schools in Europe.<sup>177</sup> Somewhat ironically perhaps, it is in the year 1898, the same year that Mary finishes and dedicates the chapel structure, that Ethel Charles is accepted to RIBA and Julia Morgan to the *École des Beaux-Arts*. It would come as no surprise, then, that Mary utilized social and professional connections to establish artistic as well as architectural knowledge in her work designing and decorating the unique mortuary chapel.

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<sup>177</sup> The use of the title of "Architect" was not regulated until the 1930's in Britain with the creation of the regulatory body now known as the Architects Registration Board (ARB). The organization was created in 1931 as "the Register of Registered Architects" and the restriction of the use of the term "Registered Architect" to applicants meeting the qualifications of the regulatory body went into effect in 1932. Architecture was undergoing a period of professionalization at the turn of the century. Architects were often trained through apprenticeship rather than through scholarly programs during the period. The ways in which this shift assisted and made more complicated the pathway of women architects can be widely debated. The first recognized American woman architect, Louise Blanchard Bethune, chose apprenticeship over an architectural degree pathway at Cornell University. However, Bethune expressed optimism concerning policies from the AIA encouraging formal architectural education. Criticism of Sophia Hayden's treatment of the Women's Building for the Chicago World's Fair and her "nervous collapse" during construction added an element of urgency in the defense for women architects at the period as well. For more on this, see Grossman and Reitzes, "Caught in the Crossfire: Women and Architectural Education, 1880-1910," *Architecture: A Place for Women*, Edited by Ellen Perry Berkeley (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989): 27-39.

It was Mary's cleverness and determination in utilizing George Frederic's connections to gain entrance to the knowledge and contacts needed to accomplish her projects. Rather than allowing George Frederic Watts's magnificent shadow to cover her talent and deprive it of the vitality that it needed to continue to grow and develop, Mary utilized this shadow to nurture the kind of projects that would flourish from within this shade of friendly social and professional connection. It is perhaps in line with these changes and opportunities in her life that Mary Watts focuses on design and relief sculpture rather than portraiture. For, while she had previously focused her training on the latter, she records thoughts on design and the encouragement received in this aspect of art. Interestingly, it is for her contribution to portraiture that Mary Seton is recognized in Crawford's article on British women artists for the Chicago World's Fair.<sup>178</sup> When mentioning ideas for design, Mary notes that George "throws himself into it warmly, & when I say there is one very important thing needed, to find out if I am able to design, he says to prepare myself for it now as far as I am able in this quiet time & that I shall probably find myself able, when the time comes to try."<sup>179</sup> While the reader yearns for more information on her design plans, Mary doesn't specify in this entry. However, the next entry describes her decorative schemes for the interior of Little Holland House<sup>180</sup> which are similar to projects still intact at Limnerslease and often reflect the influence of Egyptian and Near Eastern Art. After the honeymoon, she records that by June 21<sup>st</sup> she is set up in her studio painting. "A perfect day," she writes, "Signor looked in very often to my studio & kissed me—very pleased to find me working."<sup>181</sup> Her short passages reveal the encouragement that she received from George, but the

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<sup>178</sup> See E. Crawford, "Great Britain—Art," *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893*, Maud Howe Elliott, ed. (Paris and New York: Goupil & Co, 1893): 200.

<sup>179</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Feb 1887.

<sup>180</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Feb 1887 records, "Signor's motto 'Forward & Fear Not' is the first design I am to make—for our own mantelpiece...He suggests it being done by giving ships in full sail—"

<sup>181</sup> MSW Diaries 21 June 1887.

difficulty that she would also face in finding time to execute her work when the honeymoon was over and wifely duties competed for her attention. On her tenth anniversary, Mary writes, “Rich & sweet my days have been—They are a little more full now perhaps—.”<sup>182</sup>

#### 1.4 Cultural Philanthropy

George and Mary enjoyed a unique partnership in which they not only shared a strong intimate bond of romantic friendship, but also a working philosophy in which aesthetics could address serious social issues. While George and Mary seemed to eschew the politics of official relationships with establishment agencies, the couple did have very strong ambitions to forward a political agenda of social advocacy and to address specific criticisms of social issues that they found to plague late-Victorian society. The final section of this chapter argues that George and Mary Watts’ marriage was not only an arrangement for loving companionship, but also a conscientious move to forward a shared social agenda which both artists felt could be better accomplished together than apart during the age in which they lived.<sup>183</sup> This is not to say that the marriage was without setbacks and difficulties, as have been discussed. It certainly changed the artistic output of Mary Watts in both style and quantity. However, both artists enter the marriage with a belief that the two could accomplish more together than apart. George and Mary participated in charitable efforts on all levels of society through their artwork and the platform it provided. They participated in the popular “cultural philanthropy” of the Victorian period which aimed at lifting the working class through cultural education. However, they also took aim at

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<sup>182</sup> MSW Diaries 20 Nov 1896.

<sup>183</sup> Melanie Unwin forged the way in examining the artistic relationship on George and Mary in her work, “Significant Other” and *A Woman’s Work?*. New Research by Mary Ellen Rose also promises fresh research on the relationship and Mary’s feminism. See footnote 19 above.

their own class as it was the privileged and the wealthy with a voice of influence who were often deemed most in need of a sermon.

The social circle surrounding George and Mary Watts consisted of many of the social activists of the day including Josephine Butler. Butler fought to help the poor relegated to work houses, petitioned for women's suffrage, and spoke out against human trafficking. She was considered one of the most important activists of her day and was greatly admired by George and Mary Watts for giving a voice to people regardless of religious creed, financial situation, or gender.<sup>184</sup> Upon her visit in August of 1896, Mary writes joyfully, "Mrs. Butler here at eleven – & we had a happy morning – she is so beautiful in her largeness! the kingdom of heaven is for all, even the downtrodden mud besmirched –."<sup>185</sup> Josephine tells Mary that "after her long life & conflict, in the last ten years, feeble as she is & alone – her sense of hope is constantly growing – she said first to me, 'I never dare allow a single pessimistic thought for a moment.'" Butler remains optimistic in the wonderful hope of humanity. Mary says there is no other woman "to whom I can feel such reverence – she has fought with fearful odds against her." Interestingly, Mary notes that Josephine was not fighting against the masses, who are sometimes caricatured as primitive in the search for basic needs, but against her own peers—the intellectual and political elite. It was "the good & respectable" people who Josephine stood up to because they are those who would ignore the problems with society and the poverty and difficulty faced by the masses simply because of its ugliness, or as Mary recorded "who would cover up the sore for fear of offending our eyes!"<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> For more on the relationships of the couple with feminist activists particularly, See Rose, "Feminist" 74-91. However, the connection between Butler and the Watts should not be overstated as there does not seem to be a large foundation for personal friendship. The Watts admired Butler and her efforts, but their personal relationship was based on George's portrait which was received with mixed emotions.

<sup>185</sup> 27 Aug 1896. Mary goes on to write about religious creed and seems to particularly admire Josephine Butler for balancing her own personal beliefs and orthodoxy with the ability to allow others their own faith.

<sup>186</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Aug 1896.

Mary and George occupied a privileged space in British society but made an effort to look outside of their own social milieu to understand the world in a broader context. This meant trying to see things from the point of view of people from different classes and cultures. George and Mary showed a willingness to recognize that previous conceptions were incorrect or too narrow when considered from a different perspective. As they traveled from Egypt to Greece, Mary records a conversation in her journal in which the couple muses, “the book of the world [has been] opened from its earliest chapters.” And from it, “we have thought those things that before you hardly dare dwell on, for a fear that they should lead you wrong! & you have been taken away from your surroundings in which your mind had got a habit of looking at things not itself bad, but of necessity from one side—.”<sup>187</sup> The honeymoon records a shift in Mary’s perspective. She is forced out of her habitual mind and realizes her own bias. George and Mary Watts opened their minds to the perspectives represented by different cultures and often by humble people upon whom the British influenced colonial superiority. The artist couple were concerned with the opportunities available to those people whose opinions and lifestyles might be considered different and therefore incorrect by the dominating worldview of the upper classes in Britain. They consistently tried to look outside of their own perceptions while also recognizing the impossibility of freeing oneself completely from bias. These are the experiences leading up to George’s comment of “turning Moll into a radical.”<sup>188</sup> Mary later writes of George saying, “One can never arrive at any true conclusions...in religion, politics or anything else, unless one divests one’s mind of the desire to think in one particular way—Yes, that is the trouble—who can have a quite unbiased mind—.”<sup>189</sup> Mary’s mind begins to bend in this direction, even to the

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<sup>187</sup> MSW Diaries 15 May 1887. Interestingly, the first part of the statement about the book of the world is written in *Annals* II 71, however the section on biased opinion is omitted in the publication.

<sup>188</sup> MSW diaries 12 Oct 1887.

<sup>189</sup> MSW Diaries 19 Mar 1891.

point of losing her once unquestioning faith. Her religious rigor turns more toward George's inward spirituality, although she continues to attend formal services without him. George maintains a deep distrust in religious organizations while dedicating his life to an internal spiritual morality. For example, George's one-word answer for the highest human quality is "sympathy."<sup>190</sup>

Neither George nor Mary had much use for titles. In Mary Seton's honeymoon journal, she records reading about social hierarchy and the importance that issue had in their relationship. George stated cryptically, "I want you to try and learn from me this one thing. It is the only excuse I have for asking you to be with me, and that is an endeavor to see the balance of things—above all to be just in our judgements."<sup>191</sup> The statement suggests an unevenness in the marriage, perhaps because of Mary's age or birth, but an urgent concern with a balance of power in society and a critical need to be fair in judgement.<sup>192</sup> George declined baronetcy twice at a great risk to offending important relationships. Prime Minister Gladstone sounded sincerely flabbergasted when he wrote, "You have adopted a resolution of the kind that makes the Nineteenth Century stare, or blink as those blink who stand in a great brightness and have not eyes for it."<sup>193</sup> The Thornycrofts may have related George's sincere hopes on the subject when they commented, "So you won't let them make you Sir George. Ah never mind you shall be St.

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<sup>190</sup> MSW Diaries 22 Mar 1891. Mary's one-word choice is "integrity" and May Hichens responds with "unselfishness."

<sup>191</sup> This conversation may have taken place while reading about aristocracy in Max Nordau's *The Conventional Lies of our Civilization*.

<sup>192</sup> Before the marriage, George wrote "I cannot help thinking from what you say your family and perhaps especially the part of it you most care for would find me nothing but a jarring element." However, George defends himself based on intellect as he says, "I belong to the class that cannot help asserting a right to an independent range of reason." He notes his association with the intellectual circuit rather than family heritage, "...my mind has kinship with Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold and their Fellows..." GFW to MSW 8 Aug 1886. See Chapman 117. Chapman suggests that at least part of the concern was George's first marriage to Ellen Terry.

<sup>193</sup> William Ewart Gladstone to GFW 9 Oct. 1885, NPG 1126.

George anyway.”<sup>194</sup> And, as previously mentioned, his favorite novel was *Pride and Prejudice*, a book that takes issue with social hierarchy at its core. Mary wrote that she liked to think of herself as the type of person that didn’t have any attraction to social positions. George replied that he also aimed to be “free from worldly ambition.” However, they both acknowledged the real difficulty in being the people that they aimed to be.<sup>195</sup>

George and Mary Watts shared a spiritual and philosophical worldview in which art could agitate for social change and offer a voice to the politically and economically marginalized. Ever the religious nonconformist, George said, “Nothing to my mind is such religion, as to live joyously,” which joy he defined as “to make others happy.”<sup>196</sup> George felt that among the first virtues that one should cultivate was altruism, “others needs before our own.”<sup>197</sup> This was religion for George, who was wary of the danger of imagining God as an all-powerful being beyond human comprehension.

George and Mary Watts were each very concerned about current events and felt a keen empathy for sorrows in the world. The couple sometimes felt paralyzed at the misery that surrounded them and the inability to fix the inequalities of poverty. Mary described it as “like knowing that there is a wreck going on, & feeling obliged to watch it, knowing quite well that to plunge into the boiling sea would be death to oneself & no good to the drowning man.” She holds out hope that “there are lifeboats nobly manned, & doing what they can.” However, she says that George can often “see nothing but the wreck, & hear nothing but the cries of the

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<sup>194</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Sept 1887. Mary and George discuss their proclivity for “ladies and gentlemen” over titles and palaces in diary entry 13 Jan 1891. George did accept Privy Councillorship offered by Lord Salisbury. See letter from Gladstone to George Frederic Watts on his acceptance, 25 May 1896, NPG 1126.

<sup>195</sup> MSW Diaries 13 Jan 1891.

<sup>196</sup> MSW Diaries 13 Jan 1891.

<sup>197</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Jan 1891.

drowning.”<sup>198</sup> Both George and Mary experience times when the problems of English society overwhelm them to the point of depression because no solution is apparent.<sup>199</sup> Mary writes of the desire to turn religious fanaticism into fanaticism against “immorality, seeing the injustice of present social opinions, against that sacrifice of sacrificing women! Against intemperance against the desire for wealth, & the hideous inequality of distribution—to living in at last the universal brotherhood!—a return to our true balance....”<sup>200</sup>

In one diary entry, Mary notes feeling “shaken” by a current event and George responds with advice to try to remember that feelings are temporary and can be put aside in favor of productive action. He poignantly relates his own experience feeling “the black rays of calamity.” He says,

[When the black rays of calamity] seem round me I say to myself it is merely physical. There are sorrows where we can stir ourselves & help & there are sorrows where we can give nothing but sympathy, & if it vexes that we can do no more, we must remember that our daily work is required of us, & our minds must not be made unfit for that by vainly grieving where we can't help....<sup>201</sup>

George and Mary were interested in organizations of action aimed at philanthropy. While somewhat interested in organizations like the Slum Sisters,<sup>202</sup> who sacrificed upper middle class livelihoods to live and serve the poor in preaching Christianity, the couple showed preference for organizations that could utilize their artistic talents. Moreover, both George and Mary were interested in serving a much broader morality based in characteristics that the couple thought

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<sup>198</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Nov 1893.

<sup>199</sup> See also the report of deplorable conditions for minors in Mary's diary on 12 Nov 1893. Mary is often aware of men and women out of work to the point of hunger in 1893. See 13 Nov 1893 and 24 Aug 1893.

<sup>200</sup> 24 Apr 1893.

<sup>201</sup> MSW Diaries 24 Aug 1887.

<sup>202</sup> MSW Diaries 29 Jan 1891.

virtuous and uplifting rather than a specific dogma that might become narrow and self-interested.<sup>203</sup>

We see this keen interest in making visible the virtues of marginalized people and providing them with opportunities in George & Mary's involvement in social groups and charitable projects like the South London Gallery,<sup>204</sup> the Whitechapel project, and HAIA, all of which aimed at bringing artistic skill and aesthetic beauty into the lives of the working class. Even when one of the loaned paintings to a charitable display at Toynbee Hall came back with a hole burned through it, George took it in stride and was not discouraged in sending other valuable works. He responded to Mary's concerns saying, "Do not let us do or think any thing ungenerous, the pictures are meant to be of service – we must not forget that..."<sup>205</sup> Mary feels that he is correct and calls him "my lamp—trimmed & always ready," in reference to the biblical story of five of the ten virgins who are always prepared for the presence of the Lord through the cultivation of a virtuous life on a daily basis. Mary writes in flowery admiration of George's generous nature. When a widow comes to sell a fine watercolor from her late husband, Mary writes, "I like to think that on the threshold as we enter upon our happy peaceful house here – my darling stretched out the blessing hand to a stranger –."<sup>206</sup> George and Mary Watts did intend to do good with their resources and in outlining his wishes for his will, George states three priorities: two of which are aimed at lifting society through art. "First," he tells Mary,

that you shall have enough - - then the carrying out of the monument to heroes – I feel as I lie here more than ever how much art needs a great direction: I should like to live to see this monument sorted out, a beautiful semi circular cloister, or triangular building around

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<sup>203</sup> George is especially wary of dogma "narrowing the scope of your vision." These words are used in warning about individuals or groups with "strong convictions" in MSW Diaries 26 Jan 1891.

<sup>204</sup> The Wattses learned of the South London free library and art exhibit from Miss Oliver during a social call. See MSW Diaries 22 Jun 1887.

<sup>205</sup> MSW Diaries 2 Oct 1896.

<sup>206</sup> MSW Diaries 9 Oct 1896.

an open space, decorated with one fine group such as Gilbert can do & on the walls the names of those who had done heroic deeds to be inscribed.

This project would later be known as the Postman Park Memorial, a project which would require both George and Mary's dedication over several years. Concerning the third item for George's will, he said, "The last wish is to dedicate what money there is besides to the Home Arts & Handicrafts."<sup>207</sup> The Home Arts & Industries Association will become a very large part of Mary Watts's life and the impetus behind the chapel project.

The Postman's Park memorial is a unique project in which George and Mary worked together on an artistic monument intended to benefit British society by making visible the often-unseen acts of the too often forgotten and uncelebrated lives of ordinary men, women, and children. The Postman's Park was intended to be a prominent visual social history—not of military and political leaders or commercial businessmen, but of people doing good without hope of personal gain. While it is usually described as George's project, the Postman's Park would not have been built without Mary.<sup>208</sup> The project might more rightly be understood as the result of the two artists working together with a shared goal. In fact, the public letter to the *Times* in which the project was proposed and eventually came to fruition, was written by Mary, though it was signed by George and credited as his idea. Furthermore, George would pass away quite early in the production of the memorial and Mary would be left to guide much of the project—although

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<sup>207</sup> MSW Diaries 23 May 1891.

<sup>208</sup> John Price researched and published extensively on Postman's Park for his dissertation and book. It is a priceless wealth of information. He notes that George wanted to make some kind of tribute to good deeds for a long time he discusses it in a letter to Charles Rickards in August of 1866! At this point, George suggests a "colossal bronze figure dedicated to commemorating 'unknown worth' in Hyde Park." In an 1893 letter, George writes to James Smith that he is "'anxious some justice should be done to such splendid examples of human sympathy and self-sacrifice.'" See John Price, *Heroes of Postman's Park: Heroic Self-Sacrifice in Victorian London* (The Mill, Briscoe Port Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2015): 262. It is clear that George wanted such a project for many years, but Mary may have been the crucial force to bring the project into the public eye. Moreover, the final project's design is perfectly aligned to Mary's aesthetic. George would have liked a bronze sculpture, but that does not seem to be a practically feasible design with the limited resources available. Mary may have understood these constraints and had a mind for these types of negotiations.

the park remains unfinished today with room for more tiles to be added. Mary's diary records the following events:

I was busy writing out Signor's letter for the Times at last he is giving out his ideas about the national monument. I sent Alfred to the Times office & he brought the Times of April [25] of 85—a[n] account of Alice Ayres—who Signor wishes to take as a typical case—I have composed a letter from sentences Signor has used in speaking of the scheme from time to time.<sup>209</sup>

The proposal for the Postman's Park scheme was remarkable! For a national monument erected for Queen Victoria's Jubilee in the public square, George and Mary Watts do not suggest a tribute to the monarch directly nor a celebration of national wealth. But rather, they recommend a celebration of the everyday heroism of the people of the nation. The letter proposed that "the character of a nation as a people of great deeds is one...that should never be lost sight of."<sup>210</sup> They gently remind the public that a nation's greatness is a result of the morality of the people who live within it, rather than its financial good fortune which is fleeting and unreliable. The letter reads, "The material prosperity of a nation is not an abiding possession; the deeds of its people are."<sup>211</sup> The initial example is Alice Ayres, a name that had gained love and notoriety from the press after her death from a fire in which she had lost her life saving children (Fig. 22 and 23).<sup>212</sup> The scheme encompassed a larger concern for George and Mary Watts, which was often the case with their projects. Postman's Park was meant to help immortalize the lives of

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<sup>209</sup> MSW diaries 1887 Aug 29.

<sup>210</sup> G.F. Watts *The Times* 1887.

<sup>211</sup> G.F. Watts *The Times* 1887.

<sup>212</sup> There is some controversy regarding the details of events. A national public narrative arose in which Ayres saved the children of her employer, omitting her relationship to them. Ayres was a nursemaid to her brother-in-law and sister's children. She shared a bedroom with three of her nieces whom she helped to safety before being overcome by smoke and falling from the window. George Watts follows this narrative describing her as losing her life "in saving those of her master's children." While this is not untrue, it could be used to distort the narrative into a celebration of sacrificial servitude. However, it also participates in a Victorian play on words, lacing an everyday tragedy with religious overtones and eternal significance by using the language of Christian stories of salvation as Ayres becomes the savior to these children of God, in a manner of speaking. The facts concerning the fire and the omission of the relationship between Alice Ayres and her nieces were drawn from the report in *The Times* 25 Apr 1885, Col F, p. 12 as documented by Mary Watts in her diary 29 Aug 1887.

good men, women, and children, in an effort to fill the world with good over evil. During this time, Mary records a conversation with George:

Woke this morning to talk of the enormous power men have to do evil, one man in a few minutes can destroy what hundreds of men have stored in centuries of labor - Signor says too that the seeds of evil sown by bad lives, by carelessness & ignorance, seem to be more productive than their efforts after goodness & rightness= The evil men do lives after them, the good is often interred with their bones....<sup>213</sup>

Mary continues to discuss the wisdom in the sentiment and mentions that George wants her to write “an essay on the preciousness of great deeds, so often forgotten” but she expresses doubt. Perhaps she does not feel the pull to write of unknown people. Certainly, she will write of the one person that she feels is full of great deeds as well as wisdom, her husband George Frederic Watts, to whom she dedicates three volumes in *Annals*.

Little surprise that the Watts’ method of celebration was not adopted as part of the Jubilee celebration. However, George’s studio companion, Lord Frederic Leighton, was commissioned to create a Jubilee medallion featuring an enthroned sovereign flanked by the gods of Commerce, Industry, & Agriculture, among others (Fig. 24). It is perhaps with this typical celebration of colonial richness that makes George “woefully disappointed” as much as with the blurred edges and weak form that he cited.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, the colonial celebration is the antithesis to George’s projects produced at this period. The day before Mary records writing the letter to the *Times*, she writes of an idea that George has for a painting which is greatly encouraged by Leighton. It is described as a picture of a caravan charged with taking a group back to a kingdom for protection. However, the political leaders forget their purpose and instead make a festival of the journey to the detriment of those who would be protected as well as the servants doing the work and carrying the loads of supplies. George explains, “The picture is on

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<sup>213</sup> MSW Diaries 19 Sept 1887.

<sup>214</sup> MSW Diaries 2 Jul 1887.

the journey, gradually the purpose of it is forgotten. The prosperity of the whole is put aside—leaders are mounted in state, idlers dance & drink & all the while the burden carriers become more & more laden many stumble & die at the roadside, but the gay caravan goes on and no one cares.”<sup>215</sup> George’s symbolism seems a clear criticism of the political elite who have enriched themselves and abandoned the people in need that they have been sent to help. From a modern perspective, and with the added knowledge that George and Mary were sympathetic to the plight of the colonized, the idea for the painting seems a clear criticism of the imperialist agenda. Mother Britain is said to bring aid and improvement to her many colonies across the sea, but if this is true, her mission has been forgotten as wealth is accumulated and the benefit is to those few who were sent to help.

Postman’s Park is eventually built, not in the town square for the Jubilee, but as part of the park frequented by the comings and goings of mail couriers thanks to the attention of vicar Henry Gamble in 1898, the same year that Mary is finishing the exterior of her cemetery chapel project. The official title is The Memorial to Heroic Self Sacrifice, however, it is more commonly known as Postman’s Park after the location of the mail couriers. It was designed as a loggia by architect Ernest George in 1900 and filled in with ceramic tiles, which were done by William DeMorgan until 1931. Only 53 of the 120 tiles were filled, leaving much room for the project to continue and the Diocese of London did add one additional tile in 2009.<sup>216</sup> John Price’s exhaustively researched book on the monument concludes that the memorial “is unique in many ways, but something particularly noteworthy is that it publicly commemorates acts of heroism undertaken by children and women.”<sup>217</sup> Indeed, heroism during the Victorian era was understood

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<sup>215</sup> MSW Diaries 28 Aug 1887.

<sup>216</sup> See Price *Heroes* 13 and 276-277.

<sup>217</sup> Price 92.

as the “innate domain of adult men,”<sup>218</sup> but Postman’s Park points to the heroism capable in all humanity. This is the great contribution of the Postman’s Park project and perhaps the goal at the root of Mary and George’s artwork: to turn assumptions about good and evil on their head and reveal the capacity for greatness in every life.

George and Mary were genuinely concerned with class disparity, which was understood as a symptom of industrial greed. The Postman’s Park project can be seen as complicating the narrative that the lower classes needed to work in order to keep out of mischief as expressed in the common idiom: “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”<sup>219</sup> Such viewpoints could be used to rationalize the abuse of labor in industrialized Britain.<sup>220</sup> During this period of industrial success, some were concerned that it would lead to further class disparity as wealth flowed into the hands of the elite few while the working class struggled under the increased burden. In fact, we see this type of abuse of power illustrated quite literally in George Frederic Watts’s *Mammon* (Fig. 25). The image depicts an enormous man seated in a red throne adorned with two small skulls. His exaggerated size was an intentional critique of the growing materialism in Britain. Mary frets over the decision, “He is piling up the hideousness of Mammon, beginning [to] feel afraid of it

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<sup>218</sup> Price 92.

<sup>219</sup> Proverbs 16: 27. St. Jerome, *Letters*, CXXV “*fac et aliquid operis, ut semper te diabolus inveniat occupatum*” translated as “Engage in some occupation, so that the devil may always find you busy.” 416-417. In *Either/Or* (1843) Kirkegaard wrote of “boredom, rather than idleness, is the root of all evil.” See Thomas L. Cooksey, *Masterpieces of Philosophical Literature* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2006): 153. The Department of Labor in Rhode Island addressed the issue of child labor in an extensive report. While the aim is to prevent child labor, the issue of idleness is sometimes cited in arguments for labor. For example, while one evaluator finds that child labor brings about “the puny faces, dark circles under the eyes, the slender frames that shrink from exposure, seen in a factory village,” another evaluator states the effect as “often positive good...Idleness is positively an injury. Children wisely at work, and wisely at play, are made happy day by day.” See Blank No. 179 and 186, “Opinions and Remarks of Clergymen, in Answer to Question Four, Viz: ‘What effect does employment have upon the health, morals, and education of children?’” *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Fifth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industrial Statistics, Made to the General Assembly, At its January Session, 1892* (Providence: E.L. Freeman & Son, State Printers, 1892): 52-53. A sermon in *The Christian Messenger* published a similar message directly addressing economics in the morality of work. It reads, “The devil tempts all men, but an idle man tempts the devil. . . Loiterers in the world’s market-place are exposing themselves to the snares of the evil one” See Rev. A. Hebblethwaite, “Holy Toil,” *The Christian Messenger*, Vol. 7 (London: George Lamb, 1871): 232 ; 131-138; 232-6.

becoming an exaggeration.”<sup>221</sup> He wears a gold tunic and holds bags of gold in his lap as in Edmund Spencer’s description in *The Faery Queen*.<sup>222</sup> He is “a serious, most earnest Mammonism grown Midas-eared” as Carlyle described England’s materiality in *Past and Present*.<sup>223</sup> The commodification of society was understood as a vice of “materialism” and understood symbolically as the realm of Mammon. “Materialism,” says George, “of which I have the greatest horror. . .Materialism is to my mind out of harmony with all nature, all that I see around me.”<sup>224</sup>

While in Egypt, Mary records that the couple read “Mammon Worship” by James Martineau, who was painted by George and often read by both George and Mary. Mary writes that they “felt that it was perhaps the best—the most practical we have read—Signor has been reading the papers, & a gloom came over him, things seem so wrong, the struggle so great, & the right & good seem unattainable—.”<sup>225</sup> Martineau’s words strike a chord with George and Mary who are concerned over the current events in Britain and the injustices that they saw and read about. In this treatise, Martineau writes that the growth in manufacturing and mercantile sector of Britain was causing the “ascendance” of “the spirit of gain” and that “the gates of Mammon are

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<sup>221</sup> MSW Diaries 13 Oct 1896.

<sup>222</sup> Edmund Spencer, *The Fairy Queen*, 2 Vols. Book II, Canto VII, 4 (London: J. and R. T. Tonson, 1758): 253. For more on this painting, see the helpful catalogue description of *Mammon* in Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, eds., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, & Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910* (Flammarion: Paris and New York, 1997): 169-170.

<sup>223</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918): 196-7. For more, see Andrew Wilton, “Symbolism in Britain,” *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, & Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*, Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, Eds. (Flammarion: Paris and New York, 1997): 11-34. Wilton explains the relationship between George Watts and Carlyle saying, “there is a constant interplay between the two men’s minds and work even though they did not always agree in person. . .” He notes that Watts’ painted his portrait and was referencing Carlyle’s written works in both *In the Land of Weissnichtwo* (1894) and *Mammon* “which assaults ‘Midas-eared Mammonism’ as a pervasive evil of modern life” (29). Letters between Carlyle and GFW are held at the Heinz Archive, Album 1/17.

<sup>224</sup> MSW Diaries 29 Mar 1891.

<sup>225</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Mar 1887.

thronged now.”<sup>226</sup> “Still worse; money with us is the measure of morality,”<sup>227</sup> writes Martineau, who suggests that industry is causing a shift in moral values. Martineau writes of his concern that industry leaders have become “lax and lazy” while simultaneously demanding that those who work for them be punctual, untiring, equanimous, and full of integrity.<sup>228</sup> The admonition of Martineau, which seems to be so much appreciated by the Watts’, was to look to “the glories of nature.”<sup>229</sup> The sentiment is also recorded by Mary when she relates a story told by George in Egypt. In her honeymoon diary, she records that she was sitting up above on a rock when she heard George having a conversation with a Shiek about Allah. She records George saying:

We want to grow feathers to make wings, to get up to Allah—If man does a good thing it makes one feather. If man does a bad thing it makes heavy feet...it make[s] gold in his shoes...If he have gold shoes he can’t fly up to Allah.<sup>230</sup>

The story suggests that greed begets bad works and enslavement. Mary writes that the Sheik was so delighted with the analogy that he translated George’s little sermon to the surrounding people.

Further awareness of the struggles of the marginalized are shown in George Frederic Watts’s artworks like *Irish Famine*, *Song of the Shirt*, *Dry Under the Arch* and *Found Drowned*. Mary writes of her concern over the evils inflicted on the powerless. Even clubs like the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, with which both artists were associated,<sup>231</sup> had a much deeper agenda than a simple concern with comfort and aesthetics.<sup>232</sup> Rather, the union aimed at liberating the

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<sup>226</sup> James Martineau, “Mammon-Worship,” *Endeavors After the Christian Life* (London: J. Green, 1843): 109. 3. Letters from James Martineau to GFW and MSW are held in the Heinz Archive, Album 11/15-17, 18.

<sup>227</sup> Martineau 112.

<sup>228</sup> Martineau 118.

<sup>229</sup> Martineau 121.

<sup>230</sup> MSW Diaries, 2 Jan 1887. George Frederic Watts felt the strain between the material and the spiritual and the pitfalls of putting material goods above spirituality and goodness. On 27 Jan 1887, Mary explains that “...he [George] felt sure the whole world was moving towards two opinions—Materialistic Socialism or Christian Co-operation. Between these two the struggle for the future will be a sort of spiritual socialism...”

<sup>231</sup> Both George and “Mrs. Watts” are listed among the Vice Presidents in the opening pages of the club’s journal, *Aglaia*.

<sup>232</sup> See Elaine Chesley Paterson, “Decoration and Desire in the Watts Chapel, Compton: Narratives of Gender, Class and Colonialism,” *Gender & History* 17.3 (2005): 720. Chesley Paterson notes research by Diana Crane

human body, freeing its movements and allowing it to accomplish more. The aims of the reform were described in three words addressing the limitations of women's actions because of their clothing, "stiffness, tightness, [and] weight."<sup>233</sup> It was also a move away from the rigid judgments and social pressures of conformity to allow different ways to think and live. George and Mary Watts champion the freedom to think and share ideas. Even established religions were seen as suffering from guarded dogma and interference by intercessory ecclesiastical bodies. Mary Seton records George Frederic stating that religion should be "light and warmth" like the sun streaming through open shutters in the morning.<sup>234</sup>

While George and Mary came from different backgrounds, they found commonality within an overlapping sphere of artists and intellectuals in late Victorian Britain. While both artists were born into some privilege of social connection and financial advantage, they stood just outside of the periphery of convention. Perhaps in part because of unconventional upbringings—the relative poverty of George's youth and Mary's identification as a Scot and a woman artist or her experience in India—both artists were willing to critique the institutions that propelled the British economy forward. Both George and Mary saw the poverty and disenfranchisement of a large part of the population and believed that change could be brought

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proposing that clothing is "a form of symbolic communication" and "enormously important in the nineteenth century as a means of conveying information about the wearer's social role, social standing and personal character." Crane, "Clothing Behaviour as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 3 (1999): 241-68.

<sup>233</sup> These are outlined in an article announcing the formation of the club in "The Proposed Dress Reform League," *The Sanitary Record* Vol. XII New Series, Vol. XXII Old Series (15 Jul 1890): 20. The union was particularly concerned with limitations to health and movement from the corset, sleeves and skirts that limited the movement of arms and legs, and the weight and material of cloth which should not require the diversion of strength from "work more useful and interesting than that of simply carrying her clothes."

<sup>234</sup> MSW Diaries, 24 Jan 1887 reads, "light and warmth" [open window] as "religion should be." ...he hoped he had not given me the impression he valued intellect as the highest emanation from God—for he holds that the spiritual has a far higher place." George Frederic Watts would not align himself with a particular religion and carefully stated his abhorrence for dogma. However, spirituality and morality was of utmost importance. Mary records his optimism for the future of established religion on 30 Jan 1886, "Signor thinks that for pure undogmatic Christian principles this age is greater than any that has gone before. The question of right & wrong is much more regarded—"

through their work. With her marriage, Mary deliberately took the role of “wife of the artist.” This move was understood by both partners as having advantages and disadvantages, however, the marriage union was understood by George and Mary Watts to be uplifting to both parties who shared a deliberate social agenda to uplift society through the voice lent to the couple by artistic fame.

## Chapter 2. “Unkept” Aesthetic: Records for the Record-Keeper

“I sometimes wish pens were at the bottom of the sea!”  
--Mary Watts<sup>235</sup>

Since Mary Seton Watts did not write a treatise specifically on aesthetics, this chapter will look to her various writings on aesthetic issues within the context of the artists and art movements in which she was most active. Mary Seton’s closest artistic advisor for most of her life was her husband, George Frederic Watts. Much can be understood about aesthetic concerns through Mary’s journal entries and writings on her husband. The philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement, often centered around the writings of William Morris, is also an important context for Mary’s work as her art classes for the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA), the mortuary chapel, and subsequent pottery guild can be understood through this movement. Finally, the treatment of women’s art as aesthetically different based on perceived gendered lines of separation is an issue for all women’s art, but a subject that seems especially interesting to the iconography of the mortuary chapel as it will be discussed in later chapters. Within these contexts, the art of ancient cultures, the definition of decoration verses the fine arts, and the separation of women’s art along gender lines are three themes that emerge as particularly influential to Mary Watts’s work and important to a deeper study of the iconography of the chapel over the next couple of chapters.

George Watts’s biography and writings are easily available to scholars largely due to the publication work done by Mary Watts in three volumes of her book, *George Frederic Watts: Annals of an Artist’s Life* (1912). Perhaps most importantly, *Annals* republishes George Frederic

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<sup>235</sup> MSW Diaries 2 Dec 1896.

Watts's essays and writings on art, putting much of his aesthetic philosophy at the fingertips of modern scholars.<sup>236</sup> Mary Seton's painstaking collection of quotations and materials is a record-keeping chef-d'oeuvre. The volumes belong to a genre of family biographies popular in the late nineteenth century.<sup>237</sup> At this time, wives, sisters, and daughters were the biographers and archivists for the famous men in their lives. Mary fit into this role of woman as record keeper, spending a significant portion of her life collecting and recording the thoughts of her husband and mentor, George Frederic Watts. She helped to ensure his artistic legacy in *Annals* and provides a priceless glimpse into the aesthetic theory inspiring nineteenth-century art. *Annals* conveys many of the hopes and anxieties underpinning a nation of industrialization and labor reform through the images inspired by these changes. The volumes reveal the issues being debated in the intellectual circles of an artist like George Watts. They are an invaluable glimpse into the thoughts of prominent Victorian thinkers who had a voice of influence on society during a formative period of modern history.

However, few women have found husbands, brothers, or sons who fulfill the role of record keeper for the women in their lives. As Paula Gillett writes of Victorian women artists in *Worlds of Art*, "There was no such industry in posthumous biographies of women artists by their widowed husbands or children."<sup>238</sup> For too long in our history, the work of these women, their thoughts and ideas, have remained uncollected and unrecorded. The task is far from simple since many of them lived undocumented histories. Works and writings were not often painstakingly collected and printed by male relatives. Although, by late century, women were creating space to

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<sup>236</sup> Mary Watts's biography is sometimes criticized for narrative tone. However, the criticism may not take into consideration the genre of late Victorian biography in which it participates. It is not necessarily intended to be an unbiased perspective on art, but rather, a biography and republication of personal letters and essays collected by the wife of the recently deceased artist. For more on this discussion, see Julie Rahrig 72.

<sup>237</sup> See Gillett 175.

<sup>238</sup> Gillett 175.

voice their ideas in the formation of societies and journals. Additionally, legacies often survive within tangible works that were made, organizations established, lives touched and stories retold. Values and beliefs might also be surmised from the writings deemed important enough to be kept by women who wrote the biographies of others and through the chosen framework presented by them in the power of curation. In the case of Mary Watts, we have her biography of George Watts, a large number of diary entries, though incomplete, along with some surviving letters, sketches, newspaper and magazine articles about her work, arts and crafts catalogue entries, and one published book that she wrote about the Compton Mortuary Chapel called *The Word in the Pattern*. Though the historian wishes for more, the information available might be considered abundant in comparison to many others of her day.

While Mary Watts never published specifically on her own philosophy of aesthetics, her research and writings reflect a serious study of the role of art and its relationship to beauty and the pursuit of knowledge. It is quite possible that Mary kept her journal knowing that it could be of public interest one day. It is most likely that she foresaw it as an interest in George's work rather than her own, however, she did retain a hope of doing a great artistic work. She is writing contemporary to the famously popular publication of Marie Bashkirtseff's diary, which Mary mentions in her 1891 journal.<sup>239</sup> Mary also states that she hopes that the recorded notes in her diary might assist with publishing a book at some point.<sup>240</sup> She keeps her journal faithfully and though she doesn't always relish in the writing, she does so with profound duty, indicating that she felt these records to have a larger public importance beyond her own musings. She confesses,

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<sup>239</sup> MSW Diaries 7 Feb 1891.

<sup>240</sup> See MSW Diaries 3 Apr 1887 & 2 Oct 1887.

“Were I to do as my lazy inclinations would make me do I should never write,” however, it is her “little act of duty” and she finds pleasure in her belief that it is the right thing to do.<sup>241</sup>

Mary Watts’s diary is often used to record discussions with George Frederic on art and philosophy. Teaching and creating art was understood as a way to have a public voice in communicating and directing societal values. George and Mary Watts shared an outlook about how society might be improved through art and Mary Seton’s diary records amiable conversations on aesthetics and philosophy with George often taking the role of teacher. It is easy to imagine that Mary chooses to write those principles that resonate most with her own perspective. In fact, it is often difficult to disentangle Mary’s own ideas from her recorded memories of George’s words. Mary’s writings portray an artist couple quite united in terms of artistic intention, while stylistic methods remain more unique. There are occasions when Mary records George saying something with which she readily disagrees and Mary is not shy in stating so. An entry on George’s early morning musings becomes quite humorous as Mary states, “I think if he tried to work this out he would not find it holds—.”<sup>242</sup> It is also possible to discern some dissenting opinions on aesthetics, particularly through Mary’s writing on artistic inspiration from ancient cultures.

## 2.1 Artistic Genealogy: Mary Seton Watts’s Language of Art

The language of Mary Watts’s art differs markedly from her husband’s and the cultural influences on her work might be better understood through remarks in her writings which reveal a difference in perceived artistic heritage and might also account for some of the formal

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<sup>241</sup> MSW Diaries 2 Apr 1887. See also Ch. 1, fn 91.

<sup>242</sup> MSW Diaries 8 Apr 1891. See also Ch. 1, fn 50. MSW Diaries 13 Oct 1896. “He is working much upon his Time, Death, & Judgement. I regret Times face! but perhaps he will conquer in the end, & surpass the old fine dim eyed good. – Love has spread a more sheltering wing round Life & I think that is made more beautiful by it – He is piling up the hideousness of Mammon, beginning [to] feel afraid of it becoming an exaggeration –”

differences in her work. While George worked most often in oils and took pleasure in dynamic compositions inspired by a classical aesthetic from Greek and Roman art, Mary turned to plaster and bas-relief with a static design drawn from disparate cultures. Her symbolic patterns seem most related to the Celtic art that she considered her own heritage, however, worldwide symbolism is a crucial element of her work with particular attention to ancient Egyptian culture.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mary Seton came from Scottish heritage and felt a very keen connection to her Highland home. England and Scotland were united as early as 1707; however, tensions between the powers intensified in the middle of the nineteenth century when many Scots were forced to emigrate due to financial strain. Within the context of an expanding nation as well as an expanding railway system, Queen Victoria purchased the Balmoral estate in the Scottish Highlands in 1852. Cultural exchange might be seen as uneven as Scottish and Irish traditions were brought back to England and reinterpreted within a dominant English population that understood itself as separate. While the English upper classes followed in Queen Victoria's footsteps to visit the Scottish Highlands, the Scottish experienced a diaspora. Between 1825 and 1938, over 2.3 million emigrated out of Scotland, including six hundred thousand people that moved across the border to England between 1841 and 1911. It was considered "the European country of emigration over this period."<sup>243</sup> The Scottish struggled with a loss of identity and language due to this upheaval. In fifty years, from the beginning to the middle of the nineteenth century, the number of Gaelic speakers was cut in half.<sup>244</sup> During this period, the "Ango-Saxon

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<sup>243</sup> T. M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750-2010* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2011): 85.

<sup>244</sup> Thomas William Heyck, *A History of the Peoples of the British Isles: From 1688 to 1914* (London: Routledge, 2002): 238. Heyck writes, "An increasing majority of the British peoples spoke English and not one of the Celtic languages. In Scotland, the proportion of Gaelic speakers fell as the Highland Clearances took their toll, from about 20 percent in 1801 to 10 percent in 1861...the British government ignored the Irish language and conducted its state schools in English. By 1851, only about 23 percent of the Irish spoke Irish..." (238).

race,” was often differentiated from the “Celtic race” of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—sometimes referred to as the “Celtic fringe.”<sup>245</sup>

This is the background against which the Celtic revivalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century took place. The use of Celtic symbols in Mary Watts’s chapel design and the combination of these symbols with selected artistic quotations from a variety of cultures can be understood as a visual reversal of the racial separation and hierarchal organizations established by such accounts of the “Celtic fringe” and beliefs in the racial divide. Mary Watts is perhaps ahead of her time in focusing symbolic meaning on this shared heritage to emphasize similarity rather than difference. As an artist of Scottish aristocratic origins born in India, Mary Watts’s chapel is a witness to the difficult convergence of cultures during British Imperialism.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Heyck 237-8 & 379. Differences were emphasized in a negative light due in large part to economic crisis at mid-century. The misfortunes experienced by the crofter and cottar families during the Highland clearances were often dismissed as a symptom of a damaged working class rather than a broader power struggle and a problematic maldistribution of wealth and influence. Economic and military power was expanded by a financial revolution which included the support of the State through increased tax burdens and an expansion of the finance center including the creation of the Bank of England and the extension of the National Debt and long-term loans on London capital markets. As Scotland and Ireland were annexed into the UK, an increased tax burden was inevitable. See Devine 3 and John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1990): xvii.

<sup>246</sup> Mary Watts’s own political views are complex. She records some hope in the rise of political figures, sometimes conservative and aligned with imperialism. George Frederic visited and did portraiture for Arthur Balfour and Cecil Rhodes. However, the Wattses were critical of both political parties. For example, Mary Watts’s 28 Nov 1891 diary notes that Balfour felt that the country was well and comfortable. She writes, “Comfortable for the few, yes! Signor said that the rich had nothing to gain by change. I answered that they have nearly as much as the poor, tho’ they don’t know it—the pleasure of work, the pleasure of being freed from a burden of luxuries not pleasures of work, from surroundings that breed unhappiness by making the greater numbers of them selfish to a degree, that is disastrous to happiness.” During the decade before the chapel project, the secretary for Ireland, Arthur Balfour, helped to pass the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act of 1887 for which MP William O’Brian called him “Bloody Balfour.” Its passage gained international attention and outrage. The London Times 6 Apr 1887 contained an outline of meetings in Philadelphia, Boston, and Austin in which America expressed support of Ireland and considered the bill in opposition to freedom and classified the move as similar to oppression that the Americans felt justified their own war of independence from Britain. The meeting in Philadelphia concluded with resolutions of support for Ireland including a letter from Catholic Archbishop Ryan, and a telegram to Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Parnell. Mary and George Watts were on their honeymoon voyage during this period, but record reading an unspecified letter in *The Times* to which Watts responds, “How sad it was that right was not law.” MSW Diaries 6 Apr 1887. Although Watts’s *Progress* is used to decorate the memory of Cecil Rhodes, the recorded conversations on their meetings concerning a portrait commission seem conflicted. Rhodes writes to Watts saying, “I told Mrs. Stanley I would like you to paint me as you are the best...I did not know you would do it as I was told you were particular...” 12 May 1898. See NPG, Heinz Archive, GFW/1/4/61. Rhodes wrote again to Mary about the sitting, “It was such a pleasure to come to you & your home was quite different to anything that I had ever come across in my rough life...” He requests that George paint him “with the eyes of a Sphinx looking over the desert into eternity

Mary and George occupy unique spaces, benefiting from colonialism and perhaps able to envision a hopeful outcome for Britain's influence on its colonies. Yet, both artists also feel themselves at the margins of culture as well and write often of Britain's failings. They are particularly aware of failings in Ireland. George Watts wrote to Gladstone with strong words of rebuke for Great Britain, saying,

I wonder what Hosea and Ezekial would say now in our England, of our Mammon-worship, drunkenness, gambling and the appalling difference between very rich and very poor! .... our 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 means and human endowments, with such destruction of our character that we have neither voice nor weight in the councils of Europe.<sup>247</sup>

This is a startling rebuke which conflates the failings of both colonialism and industrialization. The recognition of the harm done to Ireland in the name of British progress takes place in the very year in which Mary Watts is using her Celtic imagery to design the Watts Chapel.

She notes in her book on chapel symbolism, *The Word in the Pattern*, that Celtic art is a shared heritage, "our own Celtic art – Ancient British, Irish, and Scotch as it is."<sup>248</sup> In a letter to her friend James Morton of Alexander Morton & Co., Mary Watts responds concerning his inquiry on Celtic books, "How glad I am that you are going to carry forward the Celtic art—it is our own. & was left incomplete—I love it with all my heart...." She notes the importance of the Book of Kells and sends him her facsimile copy with a note asking to send it back to her as soon as possible since she

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for the future, only in my case for empire of the race that I believe to be the best...I give you the thought for what it is worth, it is not a personal conceit, but the picture might help the cause one hundred years hence...You will kindly share this letter only with your husband." The letter was delivered by Lord Grey. Undated letter, NPG 1407, Heinz Archive GFW/1/4/62. The portrait was never finished. More research is needed to better understand the complicated political history of the Wattses.

<sup>247</sup> GFW to William Ewart Gladstone, 7 May 1896, Heinz Archive, GFW/1.

<sup>248</sup> Seton Watts, *The Word in the Pattern: A Key to the Symbols on the Walls of the Chapel at Compton*, 5. See also the discussion in Rahrig 49-50 and footnote 15. This is not to say that she didn't recognize regional differences. She is, after all, a woman of her time. Greenhow notes that Seton Watts was thrilled to discover that her husband had a Welsh background: "I knew he was a Celt. He could not be English." See Greenhow, "'Our own Celtic art': The Contribution of Mary Watts's Background and Times to her Choice of Decoration in Watts Chapel," *The Word in the Pattern: A Facsimile* 28.

looks at it so often. Mary Watts explains the value of using Celtic motifs to express modern ideas while also acknowledging criticism that it is an “emotional” style. She writes, “There is no decorative art so suited for telling its story, it is I believe, like the gaelic [*sic*] language, the most emotional of all the styles of decoration. But has the dangers common to all highly emotional things & requires reserve, & temperance, & judgement, in the soul of the designer, to prevent it from becoming meaningless—”<sup>249</sup> Mary’s praise of Celtic art as a unique heritage is reminiscent of the words of Mr. Kemble in his address to the Royal Irish Academy and echoed in Stuart’s *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* in which Kemble described,

“...those singularly beautiful curves...whose beauty, revealed in shadow more than in form...a form of beauty which belongs to no nation but our own, and to no portion of our nation but the Keltic portion. The trumpet-pattern is neither Greek, nor Roman, nor Oriental...it is indigenous, gentlemen; the art of those Keltic tribes which forced their way into these islands of the Atlantic, and, somewhat isolated here, developed a peculiar but not the less admirable system of their own.”<sup>250</sup>

In this passage, Kemble states the importance of Celtic art as the heritage of the British peoples. He sees the symbolism as an artistic legacy unique from Greek and Roman culture. It is also nontraditional in its beauty of curves and of the absence created especially by carving, “more beautiful perhaps in the parts that are not seen,” a beauty “revealed in shadow more than in form.”<sup>251</sup>

The admiration of Celtic art is important within the context of nineteenth century upheaval as a moment of cultural pride within a sometimes antagonistic and racially divisionary

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<sup>249</sup> MSW letter to James Morton, 15 Mar 1901, Victoria & Albert Museum Archive, Blythe House, AAD 4/520-1978. Parts of the letter are quoted in Gould *Heroine*, 17 and “Archibald” 18-19.

<sup>250</sup> Kemble is speaking specifically of repoussé in metal, which follows from the discussion of illumination. The discussion arises from the examination of the “double spiral line” which he describes as “totally unknown to the Greeks, the Etruscans, and the nations of the Teutonic North. Qtd in John Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, Vol 2 (Edinburgh: R. Clark, 1867): lxxxi from Mr. Kimble, “An address delivered to the President and Members of the Royal Irish Academy, at their meeting, Feb 9, 1857” (Dublin 1857, p.24, 27). Also quoted in footnote 3 of James Henthorn Todd’s “Descriptive remarks on Illuminations,” *Vetusta Monumenta* VI (London: Society of Antiquarians, 1869).

<sup>251</sup> Qtd in Stuart lxxxi.

nationalism. The point is made clear in the contemporary voice of biblical scholar, James Henthorn Todd. Todd points to the Book of Kells as a point of cultural pride in what might be considered the double speak requisite in the positive self-speech of minority cultures. He wrote, “it should be remembered...that Ireland in the eighth and ninth centuries was not the barbarous country that some have supposed, and that it afterwards became.”<sup>252</sup> Illuminated manuscripts like the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow were respected in England as evidence of the rich cultural roots of marginalized Celtic culture. However, derisive language concerning Ireland as “barbaric” is perhaps more indicative of the period and climate in which he wrote. The statement might be read as a result of the shaming felt by the “Celtic Fringe,” in which Todd suppresses or couches Irish pride with the requisite humility and acceptably derisive tone palatable when making such a statement. A similar reflex might be considered to arise in Mary Watts when the interior of the chapel is revealed. She feels the need to apologize for its excess. While simultaneously seizing the power of visual design over every inch of space inside the chapel, she submits her “decoration” to the artistic judgment of her artist husband and allows her feminine design to be subjected to or criticized as a realm of “lesser” ornament and excess imagination often attributed to her sex and used to excuse an artistic hierarchy that would place decoration, design, craft, feminine intuition as less intellectual, and therefore, more vulgar, than painting, sculpture, and architecture. It may also be considered in her words of warning to James Morton that Gaelic language and Celtic symbols have “the dangers common to all highly emotional things and requires reserve and temperance and judgement, in the soul of the designer, to prevent it from becoming meaningless.”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> See Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Kells* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2012):13. For James Henthorn Todd’s writing, see *Vetusta Monumenta* VI 1869 London, p. 3.

<sup>253</sup> MSW to James Morton, 15 Mar 1901.

In her letter to James Morton, Mary Watts clarifies her mission in utilizing Celtic symbols as a language for modern ideas. She warns Morton that decorators who copy directly from the Celtic pattern could ruin the Celtic revival and she prays that the designs will be used by “a young decoration master worthy to carry on in magnificent colour & lively beautiful thought, the glory, & passionate glow of Celtic pattern—.” This is the stated aim of the use of ancient symbols in the chapel. Mary Seton writes, “Nothing in the Chapel was copied except here & there a single fine symbol” that she found could work like a jewel, “a gem, which reflects the light of any day that shines upon it.” Mary Watts advises Morton quite boldly in writing, “if I may venture to say” that “we in the present day should not be mere copyists of their elaborate knottings...but breathe its spirit & work upon the same lines... use it as a language in which our modern thoughts can be conveyed, invent upon it—& then it will be alive....”<sup>254</sup> Mary speaks of decorative art as capable of being used as a language to express modern ideas in terms similar to George Frederic Watts’s description of painting and sculpture in *The Present Condition of Art*, which was among the works republished in *Annals*. Mary Seton flexed a strong curatorial muscle in the compilation of this oeuvre, choosing amongst a myriad of lectures, articles, and quotes, many of which were collected on varying sizes of scraps of paper and glued into volumes now kept in the Watts Gallery archives.

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The criticism is reminiscent of that used by art critics across movements to dismiss art considered marginal as “feminine” with imagination tending towards extreme emotionality as opposed to stoic, “masculine” genius. It is found in the criticism of many women artists like Angelica Kauffman, Maria Cosway, Vigée Lebrun in addition to male artists whose art was described as “feminine,” emphasizing color over line. For more on the gendering of color and ornament, see Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, transl. Emily McVarish (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993); Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and his Critics* (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2006); Anne K. Mellor, “British Romanticism, Gender & 3 Women Artists,” *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, eds. Birmingham, Ann and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>254</sup> MSW to James Morton, 15 Mar 1901.

This extensive publication was intended to be much more than a biography of the artist. It is a statement of aesthetic goals. It communicates the importance of the arts and the aesthetic power, not only to reflect, but also to change the ethical values of a particular culture. In this context, the power of visual aesthetics merges with political power as artwork acts as both a critical mirror image of culture as well as a vision of positive change. Within the choice quotations used in *Annals*, Mary's own principles and beliefs become apparent as they merge with the selected words of her late companion.

George Frederic Watts wrote extensively about art as a language. *The Present Conditions of Art* presents the same dilemma that Mary outlines in her letter—how to convey modern thoughts through images. For George Watts, this was a particular dilemma due to the material nature of art that relies on external images to relate intellectual or spiritual ideas. For George Frederic, the surrounding materiality of Victorian culture was not noble or beautiful. Therefore, “the painter or sculptor, who is prompted by aspirations outside material life, is forced to invent his language or imitate what has been done in, for art, happier times, for he cannot press into his service what is around him.”<sup>255</sup> G.F. Watts argues that poetic ideas are more difficult to express in images than in words because modern images do not contain the timeless truth that the painter yearns to express. He states,

Nature, as the poet deals with her, remains not fundamentally changed by time, but in these days great poetic ideas belonging to the past, present, and future, must either be expressed by the painter as a Greek or Italian would have rendered them, or he must invent a new method....<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> George Frederic Watts, “The Present Condition of Art,” republished in Mary S. Fraser-Tytler Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life* (London: Macmillan, 1912), III, 159-160.

<sup>256</sup> George Frederic Watts, “The Present Condition of Art,” republished in Mary S. Fraser-Tytler Watts, *George Frederic Watts: The Annals of an Artist's Life* (London: Macmillan, 1912), III, 159-160.

Whereas George often uses classical forms inspired by Greek and Italian art to express his ideas, Mary refers predominantly to a heritage of Celtic illuminations and ancient Middle Eastern symbols largely from Egypt and India. She invents a language by combining ancient symbols with contemporary methods and values, which appears as somewhat of a reversal of George Frederic's methodology as she "press[es] into [her] service what [and who] is around [her]."

George Frederic was raised on the Homeric stories of the *Iliad* and often spoke of the beautiful art that came from classical Greece and Rome. We often see his ideas filtered through the stories of Greek mythology. While visiting Athens, he imagines Greek culture to be like a baby that he passes on to Mary and delights that both Mary and the baby are delighted with one another.<sup>257</sup> However, with the exception of her Celtic Christian symbolism, Mary is more often drawn to Middle Eastern cultural influences like ancient Egyptian, Hindu, and Buddhist religions. For George, classical art might be understood as the source of his aesthetic.<sup>258</sup> However, this does not seem to be the case for Mary. While she affectionately describes George's admiration of the Elgin Marbles, Phidias, and the stories of Homer, Mary also includes subtle criticism. She reminds that Plato wrote of banishing Homer because the Greek Gods were worse than men<sup>259</sup> and often refers back to Egypt as being less barbarous, perhaps, or at least less emotional.<sup>260</sup> Indeed, after their trip to the Mediterranean later in that year, Mary writes of not having a natural interest in Greek sculpture and architecture. While discussing an article on the Acropolis, George asks if she would have been as interested in the subject if she had not just

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<sup>257</sup> MSW Diaries 1887, May 13.

<sup>258</sup> See Mary's description of George's childhood in *Annals* 15 as discussed in Ch. 1.

<sup>259</sup> MSW Diaries 1887, May 5.

<sup>260</sup> MSW Diaries 1887, Apr 30.

seen it. She responds, "...no certainly I should have found it very dull & said I believed I had not Greek mind—.”<sup>261</sup>

While George dreamed of passing on his love for the Greek and Roman aesthetic to Mary, his hopes to this end may not have come to full fruition. Mary's less sympathetic treatment of classical figures in her work fits within a trend identified by Wanda Corn in which women artists late in the Victorian period look outside of the classical genre to establish an art narrative that fit the unique experiences of women artists outside of the dominant narrative that served their male counterparts. She proposes, "Women artists...recognizing that classical allegory was embedded in masculinist discourses and Victorian binaries, gravitated to new ways of representing their sex in public decorations."<sup>262</sup> Interestingly, women may have seen Egypt as a powerful source of artistic genealogy. In the key publication on the Women's Building at the Chicago World's Fair, S. T. Hallowell traces the genealogy of women artists from Egypt, naming two women artists: Helena, daughter of Timon, who was mentioned alongside Apelles in many art histories of the period,<sup>263</sup> and Anaxandra who lived in Egypt in 200 B.C. Perhaps in part due to Mary's unique experience as a woman of Scottish ancestry, the Greek and Roman art beloved by George Frederic did not pass like a baby into Mary's arms. Rather, Mary looks to Celtic and non-Western art in her ambition to communicate human experience through visual symbols.

Mary's writings encourage an admiration for the rational stoicism and the symbolism behind geometric forms in Egyptian art—even above the expression of dynamic motion and emotion of classical renderings of human form. The chapel iconography can be seen as celebrating those characteristics most criticized in Egyptian art, namely a lack of interest in

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<sup>261</sup> MSW Diaries 28 Nov 1887.

<sup>262</sup> Corn, *Women Building History*, 45.

<sup>263</sup> See, for example, Nat Hubert John Westlake, *History of Design in Mural Painting from the Earliest Times to the Twelfth Century* Vol.1 (London: James Parker and Co., 1902): 22.

perspective and a lack of facial emotion.<sup>264</sup> Visitors to the chapel will notice an intense focus on the static poses of angelic bodies on the interior design and stoic faces external to the building with geometric forms underlying representations of the natural world. Mary calls the Egyptians, “those eldest Sons of God,” and describes them as having “wonderful revelation,”<sup>265</sup> indicating that she attributed to them a unique relationship to spiritual truths in the ancient time in which they lived. Her Limnerslease ceiling features a strong Egyptian element with one panel devoted to ancient Egypt featuring a Pharaoh with the crown of Egypt enthroned and flanked by winged deity (Fig. 26). Later designs that Mary may have considered Egyptian in influence are less obvious in reference. For example, Mary notes that the heart symbol on her Pelican Rug is meant to have some Egyptian connection when she writes to the workers who will tuft the rug saying,

Now this symbol made rather like the shape of the real working heart within our bodies is a very old one, and stood in the language of signs, used by the Egyptians for the word “Love” and they added to it two little rings which at first sight looked like handles, and there [*sic*] were always called handles when this old sign was spoken about till not long ago when a clever Irish professor, who reads the Egyptian picture language, as we read our ABC found out they meant these rings to show, that the heart had two big veins or arteries, which is true, and upon the flow of blood through these veins our very life depends—the hearts on this hearth rug have these rings, to show that love must be a living strong thing—going in and out like the blood in these two veins, and making the heart work night and day without ceasing.<sup>266</sup>

The stylized hearts with curled rings for veins becomes a signature design and is everywhere in the chapel design. In this passage, Mary denotes a genealogy for the image which is Egyptian in conception and passes through the translation of an Irish scholar, which might be compared to her own designs. The ideas for some of her forms, like the heart with swirling handles, are understood as Egyptian in conception, but are translated through her a Celtic stylization which

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<sup>264</sup> These were the perceived deficiencies listed in Alfred Woltman and Karl Woerman, *History of Painting*, ed. by Slade Professor, Sidney Colvin, Vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1888): 30.

<sup>265</sup> MSW Diaries 10 Aug 1887. Mary Watts discusses the trip to Egypt in *Annals* II 63-72.

<sup>266</sup> Letter from MSW, Limnerslease, to weavers at Alexander Morton & Co.’s factory at Killybegs, Donegal. Copy in Watts Archive MSW/1/10. Original in Victorian and Albert Museum, Blythe House Archive.

she considers to be her own language. The angel inside at the central base of the metal altar contains the heart, which makes up its upper body. Similar swirls make up many of the knotted designs; for example, two hearts with swirled veins placed on top of each other can be seen below the balances carried by the angels inside the chapel. They are used to decorate the interior arches. They are also in the fireplace design at Limnerslease.

The winged sun was also a favorite symbol. Mary mentions plans to use it while still in Egypt writing, “Talking a good deal of the possibility of making the best decorative art highly ideal—we mean to have the winged sun at Little Holland House, as an example of which we saw yesterday in great loveliness of proportion....”<sup>267</sup> We also see it above the pharaoh panel in the Limnerslease ceiling. Perhaps most importantly to our study, an abstracted version of the symbol is centered above the doorways of the chapel. It is often difficult to see from the ground, but conceptually, the winged sun disk occupies important positions in the chapel including one at the apex of the main doorway into the sacred space of the chapel and it is subtly repeated throughout the chapel.

Mary Seton Watts is very interested in diverse religions. Her research demonstrates a belief that she would find overlapping ideas in various cultures. She particularly draws from the ancient cultural sites that she visited during the honeymoon voyage. The Chapel Notebook in the Watts Gallery Archive contains numerous sketches of various decorative and architectural symbols from a variety of places including Celtic, Egyptian, and Buddhist cultures. A brown hardback book lists religions and cultures that Mary must have been researching including “Egyptian, Chaldean, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Islamism, [Greek?]” and “Christian.”<sup>268</sup> The book contains painstaking notes from various works on world religions, with

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<sup>267</sup> MSW Diaries 15 Feb 1887.

<sup>268</sup> Watts Gallery Archive, MSW/3. Unpaginated. Undated.

an emphasis on Buddhism. While Mary's sources can be somewhat divisive in separating and contrasting Buddhism with Christianity, Mary's notes from the documents tend not to stray into this territory.<sup>269</sup> Rather, they evidence an interest in contemporary research into the origins of religion and an exploration of varying perspectives. This is further evidenced by interest in world symbolism as used in the Compton chapel.

George and Mary Watts lived in a time in which nationalizing efforts were marked and history was sometimes viewed teleologically, with an emphasis on contrasting differences or with admired elements available for appropriation. However, the search for diverse cultural symbols to communicate common experiences in humanity could also be used in a less positivistic manner in a broadening of perspective instead of a narrowing one. Rather than simply essentializing, Mary Seton's vast effort and research demonstrates a willingness to accept different perspectives and question her own.<sup>270</sup> As Mary wrote, her travels forced her to think about issues in ways that she never would have dared before her trip. The new context forced her to realize that she, like others, had understood the world from a British perspective and needed to see it from another angle. In her own words, Mary admits with regret that she "had got a habit of looking at things not itself bad, but of necessity from one side."<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Monier Monier-Williams, *Buddhism: In its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism in Contrast with Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1890). The book is a publication of the Duff lectures originally given in March 1888 in Edinburgh. Within her notes, Mary omits opinions on race, particularly in respect to cultural decline, written into the document. For example, the author's opinion that Buddhism is in decline because of "the germs of disease, decay and death" (2) is not to be found in Mary's records. Rather, Mary's notes focus on the perception of religious principles, stories, and symbolism.

<sup>270</sup> Cheasley Paterson sees Mary's work as participating in nineteenth-century design reform led by Ruskin and Lethaby which called for "a new modern language of design" which "depended in part on a new imperial horizon and as such must be grounded in the global history of colonialism." See Cheasley Paterson "Decoration" 725. This is a relevant subject worth further exploration. The many contexts of individual experience are often at odds with one another, which contributes to the messiness of colonial history. Mary Seton's unique experience on the "fringe" and her demonstrated efforts of inclusion should also be taken into account. Within this context, the extensive efforts at unification within chapel symbolism are significant.

<sup>271</sup> MSW Diaries 15 May 1887. Also see previous chapter.

The Compton chapel participates in a late nineteenth-century interest in anthropological work often taking place under European advisement. It utilizes publications on ancient cultures and the histories of religions which were circulating in British intellectual circles. As a result, the tiny mortuary chapel serving a very small rural British community is uniquely international in its recognition of non-Western cultures. Mary Watts's designs reach out to cultures that may have seemed marginal to most of her audience as she herself may have sometimes felt as a woman artist and a Scot. She wrote, "the human mind with whatsoever name...is the same – loftily spiritual at its best...cruel & persecuting at its worst."<sup>272</sup> Through all of the perceived differences of culture, Mary Watts recognized and communicated the common experiences of humanity—both lofty and cruel. Within this context, the chapel's interest in non-Western religion and ancient cultural symbolism might be considered as taking part in a more complicated history of cultural appropriation which sought to rise above divisively nationalistic rhetoric. Encompassing a recognition of human shortcomings and biased perspectives, the chapel project contains the hope of erasing boundaries and uniting humanity's shared experience.

## 2.2 Ideal Art vs “pretty decoration”: The creation of Mary Seton Watts's Ideal Design

While George and Mary Watts choose different stylistic methods in art practice, the two are much more united in aesthetic ideology. George draws inspiration from Classical art and poetry while Mary connects symbolism from Eastern and Western cultures to observable natural patterns in modern life. However, both artists find the communication of non-material ideas to be the defining point of their artwork. For Mary, this symbolism becomes a crucial part of her aesthetic theory as she navigates contemporary categories of “decorative” versus “fine art.”

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<sup>272</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Mar 1898.

Neither George nor Mary intend to recreate art of the past; rather, both artists convey a search for aesthetic values that remain constant throughout time and might be adapted to suit modern issues and ideas. Mary records George as feeling that “turning back to Greek story to supply thought & material” is not a serious aim for art, but merely a “pretty decoration.”<sup>273</sup> For George Frederic, the mimesis of Classical art is simply an illustration of former ideas irrelevant to the modern mind. As such, it aligns more closely with decoration than fine art. Mary writes George’s aesthetic theory in contrast to that of Frederic Leighton, who often painted Classical subjects. Mary writes that Leighton believed “a picture actually loses something if it suggests a thought beyond what is painted.”<sup>274</sup> This was an issue discussed by George and Mary before their marriage and the belief that art should be suggestive was a principle which drew them closer together. George wrote to Mary in 1882 explaining that he wanted his pictures to “awaken higher thoughts and feelings...not that I intend to be didactic but simply to affect the mind seriously by nobility of line and colour even as music that one does not put definite words to is capable of moving the [baser].”<sup>275</sup> This is a crucial distinction for Mary, who often works in the borderlands between defined styles and formats but consistently relies on a thread of intellectual or spiritual truth running between disparate forms.

While great art must point to an intellectual idea outside of its material presentation, George and Mary Watts distrust moralizing art, finding divisiveness and dogmatism in its narrow interpretation. For George and for Mary, “neither painting nor poetry should be didactic, but there is a wide difference between being didactic & being suggestive—.”<sup>276</sup> A good example of

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<sup>273</sup> MSW Diaries 18 May 1887.

<sup>274</sup> MSW Diaries 18 May 1887.

<sup>275</sup> GFW Letter to MSW 17 Mar 1882. Watts Archive MSW/1/10.

<sup>276</sup> MSW Diaries 18 May 1887. These ideas discussed again in relation to George Watts’s art theory on 24 May 1887.

this thinking is recorded in Mary's diary when a guest suggests that an image of the Creator might be painted into the object of the sun in one of George Frederic's paintings. Mary records George's reply, "No, but it is exactly what I wish to make those who look at it conceive for themselves—the creator there moving—with light & heat to re-create..."<sup>277</sup> For George, and we might surmise that this is true for Mary as it resonates with her work as well, the material form contains connections and might resonate with the immaterial through shared attributes like beauty and power. However, any singularly defined image of "creator" would be unacceptable through the narrowness of interpretation.

While Mary Seton did not work in the Classical aesthetic as Frederic Leighton or George Watts, she did hold to George's ideas of art as a means of communication, and even elevation, through symbolism. Mary's artwork is not didactic in a straightforward presentation of concrete ideas or morals. Rather, she chooses patterns and symbols in a creative artistic recombination which allowed intellectual access points for disparate beliefs to participate in contemplating the designs. Art as symbolic communication becomes a defining point to Mary's aesthetic as she sorts through contemporary definitions of art.

The separation between the two categories of "decorative" versus "fine art" was increasingly identified and perhaps polarized through the success of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The aesthetic and connecting social issues circling the movement are better understood by examining Mary Watts's journal entries in relation to William Morris's writings. In her daily journal, Mary Seton Watts wrestles over the significance of hierarchal categories of art. She questions the very definitions of art and beauty and often finds that they are subjective. During a debate on the ugliness of modern art, George kindly asserts, "I don't mind error on the

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<sup>277</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Jul 1887.

road to truth.” However, Mary argues, “I do not know myself who is to decide about what is ugly or not – I think the roof of St Pauls is glorious, but seldom meet any one who ever likes it on the whole!”<sup>278</sup> By 1896, Mary has developed bold confidence. Not only is she willing to admit that she finds beauty in something aesthetically controversial, but she uses it as proof as to the subjectivity of beauty itself.

Mary was much less confident in her own opinions in 1887. In an admiring tone shortly after their marriage, Mary writes in her journal, “I wanted to know today why some pictures impress one as being merely decorative.” She notes George Frederic Watts’s response defining “mere” decoration as “distinct from the ideal, in so far that the ideal is something more [than] reality, the decorative is something less—unreal in its want of rotundity, in its being the aim of the painter not so much to paint an ideal form, as to reduce it to a pattern.”<sup>279</sup> By the time she is designing the chapel, Mary is clearly not afraid to “reduce” an idea into a pattern. Rather, this kind of “mere decoration” is developed into what we might call “ideal decoration.” Mary’s patterns do not lose meaning, but are rather intellectually dynamic images that reach into past cultures for associations with ideas critical to ancient beliefs while also embracing the natural environment in an attempt to be decipherable to the modern mind. For Mary, artwork reaches beyond superficiality not by eschewing decoration, but by containing an intellectual or spiritual element pointing outside of its own materialism. Mary does not believe that immortality is only gained through the fame that artworks bring to the artist after death. Rather, the value in the work lies in its suggestion of true immortality—the immortality of ideas, or truths that survive to be passed through the generations.

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<sup>278</sup> MSW Diaries 22 Oct 1896. Mary records this discussion on the use of “bad and ugly patterns” by new students with Mrs. Wyndham.

<sup>279</sup> MSW Diaries 4 Apr 1887.

This element of immortal and intangible truths revealed in art is one that she finds lacking in the work of the greatest decorator of the day, William Morris. While William Morris championed genuine art and craft as a solution to dehumanizing industrialization along the lines of Mary Seton's own determination, he also refused to contemplate an eternal spiritual perspective within modern life. Of death and the afterlife, he wrote, "I find that, never having experienced it, I have no conception of what it means, and so cannot even bring my mind to bear upon it."<sup>280</sup> This is unacceptable to Mary's spiritual and intellectually abstract worldview. She describes William Morris as having "wonderful powers" and yet "has a curtain down shutting out all hope & light of a spiritual kind = his mind is that entirely of a decorator—his limits are walls & curtains & windows."<sup>281</sup> Mary's walls and curtains are literally made of brick, the thickness of the opaque walls made obvious by the deep wells of the windows; however, the terracotta decorations and plaster panels are intended to act more like open windows guiding mourning visitors through death to see the continuation of life in its various forms. This distinction of the decorative artist will be an important principle in Mary's work at the chapel, a work which is often categorized as "decorative art." But, for Mary, the chapel would have contained a serious intellectual element that she probably considered beyond George Frederic's definition of "mere decoration" by suggesting issues relevant to the modern viewer. Furthermore, the issues of life, death, and immortality naturally addressed in the mortuary setting are the great equalizers demonstrating that humanity of all races and genders face these essential questions in their share of fate. These were the issues urgently felt in the context of a cemetery chapel and issues which Mary felt were uniquely suited to her address of visual design. For Mary Seton, they are also the defining element for great art across categories or genres. Among Mary's oft

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<sup>280</sup> William Morris, *The Aims of Art* (London: Office of "The Commonwealth," 1887): 3.

<sup>281</sup> MSW Diaries 2 Mar 1891.

recorded aesthetic musings with George is the note that “the idea in a work of art should predominate over the manner used in expressing it.”<sup>282</sup> For Mary Watts, genre was subordinate to the intellectual value of the work. Form and material were considered in terms of their ability to communicate profound meaning. This ability of the material to point outside of itself to a lasting principle was the indication of its value. This made terracotta, plaster, fabric, and felt just as appropriate for great art as the historically respected stones of Venice.<sup>283</sup>

In Mary’s work, the hierarchy of the arts that separated and elevated architecture and sculpture from decoration or craft, for example, were not necessarily sacrosanct. The medium was not the key—rather, the potential for intellectual expression. Fresco is often recognized as a highly prized medium by George Frederic, however, its importance is not discussed in terms of Mary’s work. The Wattses considered fresco to be “primitive & simple in its technique it is not so likely to put forward its medium above the language.”<sup>284</sup> We do not see the purity of traditional fresco in Mary’s work. George had tried to incorporate fresco into his work, but it was not very successful.<sup>285</sup> However, we do see an interesting merging of types of arts in a unique manner which incorporates elements of fresco by creating art into the plaster of the wall. Mary’s sculptural forms are unlike any other and she often used domestic items like felt and linen to add dimensionality to the chapel, followed by plaster and paint. She merged her formal training in sculpture and painting with craft materials as her work merged practical functionality with

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<sup>282</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Oct 1887.

<sup>283</sup> Ruskin urged architects to turn to bricks rather than stone. He wrote, “I believe the best academy for her architects, for some half century to come, would be the brick-field; for of this they may rest assured, that till they know how to use clay, they will never know how to use marble.” John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (London and New York: J. M. Dent, 1907): 240. He also wrote of the value of terracotta in *Lamps of Architecture*. See John Ruskin, *Lamps of Architecture The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley, 1849):45 and discussion in chapter 3.

<sup>284</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Oct 1887.

<sup>285</sup> Watts’s idea for a *House of Life* fresco commission went unfulfilled. His fresco at Lincoln’s Inn has not weathered well. See Chapman, *Laurel*, 37-38. For more on Watts and his methods including fresco, see “Watts as a Technician” in Chapman, *Laurel*, Appendix IV, p. 172-5.

aesthetics. Creativity and design took precedent over genre and material resulting in a merging of the boundaries between art and craft.

Mary's artwork demonstrates not only a confluence of aesthetic theory, but also a unique voice on the potential philosophical impact of decoration which was quite often dismissed by those around her who considered ornamentation to be intellectually less important in the hierarchy of the arts. The Compton chapel is continually obscuring this hierarchy. The bricks are highly decorative and ornamental, yet they are designed and coordinated to provoke intellectual understanding that was not considered the aim of "pretty decoration."<sup>286</sup> Additionally, the sculpted forms are often referred to in terms of needlework or textile arts, a domain available to Victorian women yet relegated to a much lower sphere than architecture. Interestingly, George Frederic Watts uses the term "embroidery" interchangeably with unintellectual surface ornamentation when discussing French aesthetics in a letter from 1880.<sup>287</sup> More significantly, Woemann's *History of Painting* explains the ancient art of Egypt and Mesopotamian nations as "figure-painting...no more than a piece of tapestry or embroidery down into stone, and can only be estimated according to the value it may have...as a piece of coloured wall-decoration."<sup>288</sup> Yet, weaving and embroidery are also understood by Woemann as setting the foundation of the much praised art of Greece—where "art first shook off all her fetters."<sup>289</sup> *The History of Painting* proposes the "origins of Greek painting" to be "representations either woven into or embroidered upon figured stuffs of various colours." The "robes of Helen and Andromachê," and "the veil of

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<sup>286</sup> MSW Diaries 18 May 1887.

<sup>287</sup> "...French intellect regards the art of painting and sculpture as a thing of passing interest—as embroidery on the intellectual needs and yearnings of our nature." See *Annals* v. 1: 314-315.

<sup>288</sup> Woemann Vol. I, 30.

<sup>289</sup> Woemann, Vol. 1, 35.

Hera,” and the weaving of Athena are mentioned, associating the arts of needlework with women characters.<sup>290</sup>

Mary Seton does not hesitate in describing her great oeuvre in terms of textiles, connecting her work to the foundation of the arts as it was understood during the period.<sup>291</sup> As we will see in the proceeding chapters, Mary Seton Watts embraces the vocabulary of the needle arts in her descriptions and makes use of the symbols of ancient cultures as well as the aesthetic values with which they are understood to be associated. Boundaries between the genres of needlework and sculpture are further confused in the overlapping decorations used by Mary Watts across mediums. The use of the scrolled heart within the chapel as well as in the sculpted forms in the Compton chapel have already been discussed. The mixing of designs across genres is perhaps most poignantly adapted in Mary Watts’s design of embroidered banners using the iconography from the interior of the chapel. Albert Henry George, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Grey and ninth Governor General to Canada, created a “little scheme” to send banners embroidered by British women to Canadian schools to strengthen the relationship between the nation and colony. Rather astonishingly, these banners currently remain in situ. Twelve banners are linked to the project in which nine were actually hung. Two were designed by Mary Watts, although only one was hung in a school. While the theme was St. George slaying the dragon, which was overwhelmingly followed in the other banners, Mary’s two banners feature the almond-shaped angels first designed for the interior chapel. *Our Lady of the Snows*, hung at McGill University, also utilizes the seven doves from the chapel altar (Fig. 27). *The Spirit of the Flower of Nations* (Fig. 28)

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<sup>290</sup> Woemann, Vol. 1, 38.

<sup>291</sup> Elaine Cheasley Patterson and Elizabeth Cunningham also write in terms of Mary Watts’s use of “textile reference” in her work. See “Decoration and Desire,” esp. 721-722. Also, Dissertation. Cunningham, “Patterns of Life; The Art and Design of Phoebe Anna Traquair and Mary Seton Watts,” *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880-1935: The Gender of Ornament*, ed. Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002): 13-24.

utilizes nature medallions like those on the pillars outside of the chapel and are decorated with overlapping virtues of unity, justice, liberty, and strength.<sup>292</sup>

In an early journal entry, Mary seeks to understand the categorizations of art which are already seeming somewhat arbitrary. She tries to make a delineation between simple interior decoration and the fine art of fresco, the latter considered an ideal art and therefore intellectually superior. “The difference between it & fresco, which must be to a certain extent decorative as it must not make one feel there is a hole in the wall, through perspective of line; (not shadow) is interesting to consider—.”<sup>293</sup> A distinction is attempted to be explained as bound up with linear perspective and shadow, but even fresco is found to be decorative at least to some extent. The issue of shading in order to create three-dimensional depth in decoration was part of the arts and crafts aesthetic. William Morris had discouraged it in the 1893 *Arts and Crafts Essays* preferring contrast or gradation to a deceptive illusion to space saying, “Never introduce any shading for the purpose of making an object look round...Beautiful and logical form relieved from the ground by well-managed contrast or gradation, and lying flat on the ground will never weary the eye.”<sup>294</sup> Mary Seton is already admitting the decorative overlap of fresco, however, “as it must not make one feel there is a hole in the wall.” And indeed, the boundaries between the two seem increasingly erased in her own work which makes untraditional use of paint on linens and plaster to solve the problem of dimensionality while also rendering the wall invisible through the presentation of the intangible.

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<sup>292</sup> For more on the banners commissioned by Grey, see Jennifer Salahub, “Governor General Grey's 'Little Scheme': Majesty in Canada,” *Majesty In Canada: Essays on the Role of Royalty*, Ed. by Colin M. Coates, University of Edinburgh, Centre of Canadian Studies Conference (Ontario, New York, and Lancaster: Dundurn Press and Gazelle Book Services, 2006): 98-118. The banners are also discussed in Veronica Franklin Gould *Heroine* 60-2 and “Symbolic Bas-Relief” 19; Rose, “Feminist” 90-1; and Rahrig 71-2.

<sup>293</sup> MSW Diaries 1887, Apr 4.

<sup>294</sup> Qtd in Parry, “The Rugs of William Morris,” *Arts and Crafts Rugs for Craftsman Interiors* 20.

Even the following day, Mary records her appreciation for the flat decorative shadow of a plant on the wall. The hierarchal distinctions between line and “not shadow,” fresco and not decorative, ideal and not pattern, seem undone. Juxtaposed against George Frederic’s definition of “mere decoration” on the previous day, Mary’s muses,

Looked at the beautiful pattern made by the shadow of a wonderful creeper, whose stems are interwoven in such a way, as make us both wonder & admire every time we pass down stairs—The flatness of the shadow made the decoration more perfect *for that* purpose than the real plant—. <sup>295</sup>

The aesthetic power of decorative shadow is asserted in the simple observation that it makes “us both wonder” every time the couple goes downstairs. The entry is a subtle overthrow of the previous day’s hierarchies. She writes again of shadow later in the year, “My dear loves silhouette against the dawn is a happy thing for me to wake to—a serene picture....”<sup>296</sup> The effects of shadow and its role in art, as contemplated by Mary, is an issue debated in the Arts and Crafts Movement as well as in the Modern Art Movement. However, the subject has also been at the heart of the gendered debate on art—feminine ornamentation and mimesis versus stoic masculinity and originality.

Mary’s thrice passing notes on shadow and flattened mimesis acquire significance in their resonance with the oft retold story of the beginning of art. And, in fact, the musings within her journal are often deliberately symbolic as Mary’s own thinking process seeks out the shadows of philosophical meaning behind the quotidian of her experience. Pliny the Elder wrote in *Natural History* of the birth of drawing inspired by the daughter of Butades who outlined her lover’s shadow on the wall (often portrayed as a garden wall) prior to his departure.<sup>297</sup> As Jan Marsh

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<sup>295</sup> MSW Diaries 1887, Apr 5. Decoration in terms of 2D or 3D is also briefly discussed in MSW Diaries 14 Jun 1887.

<sup>296</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Dec 1887.

<sup>297</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Pliny’s Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Harvard University Press, 1938-68), IX:271. Quoted in Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000): 160.

stated in her article, “Art, Ambition, and Sisterhood,” the Butades story was often used as an illustration of the idea that women were not creative by nature, but rather, imitative.<sup>298</sup> The story reinforced statements like that made in 1878 by Frederic Leighton’s sister, Alexandra Orr, “women are intelligent: they are not creative. That men possess the productiveness which is called genius and women do not, is the one immutable distinction that is bound up with the intellectual idea of sex.”<sup>299</sup> That Mary Seton might disagree with Leighton’s sister’s analysis of the creative value of her sex as she did with Leighton’s own aesthetics and politics would be unsurprising.<sup>300</sup> Perhaps we hear the beginnings of Mary’s attestation in her exclamation over the beauty of shadow when she looks against the sun to see “the cool stone carving, which was all like shadow—but such shadow!”<sup>301</sup>

The story of Boutades daughter has been adapted to fit particular artists over the centuries. This foundational story of artistic invention featuring a woman also has a history of functioning in a legitimizing capacity within cultures often antagonistic to creative contributions of women leading back to the eighteenth century. It is difficult to imagine that Mary Seton wouldn’t have thought of the capacity of the story to make room for women in art. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun called upon the story of Butades and his daughter in her 1790 *Self-Portrait* in the Uffizi,<sup>302</sup> as did her patron, Marie Antionette, who commissioned an image of the story for

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<sup>298</sup> Jan Marsh, “Art, Ambition, and Sisterhood in the 1850s,” *Women in the Victorian Art World*, Ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995): 33-48.

<sup>299</sup> As discussed by Jan Marsh “Art, Ambition, and Sisterhood” 35. Alexandra Sutherland Orr, “The Future of Englishwomen,” *Nineteenth Century* (June 1878). Marsh also notes that the tale is told contemporarily in Elizabeth F. Elliot, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries* (London, 1859): 4-5.

<sup>300</sup> Mary Watts also recorded Leighton’s opposition to suffrage. He wrote to gain her support to the opposition movement, but Mary Watts declined. It may have been a source of tension between the two, but it is lightly dismissed in the retelling in *Annals*, Vol. 2, 145-6.

<sup>301</sup> MSW Diaries 21 Nov 1887.

<sup>302</sup> For more on this, see Mary Sheriff *Exceptional* 232.

Versaille.<sup>303</sup> It is likewise referenced by Labille-Guiard<sup>304</sup> and by Angelica Kauffman who inserts herself as the woman limner into the story of Zeuxis (Fig. 29),<sup>305</sup> a motif that had such far flung influence as to reach across the sea to Charles Wilson Peale's *Self-Portrait with Rachel and Angelica Peale* featuring his daughter and Kauffman's namesake (Fig. 30). In Peale's version, his brush is quietly usurped by his daughter in a deliberate nod to Kauffman's painting. Charles and Angelica Peale might both be considered the artist in the middle of tracing the outline of the mother/spouse in a playful adaptation of Pliny's story on the origins of art. In these instances, Pliny's story is developed into a trope giving authority to the artist, which is often used to the advantage of women artists in creating space within the often male-dominated artistic sphere.

Mary Watts must have been familiar with Pliny's story and was a sophisticated scholar as well as practitioner of the arts, an avid reader and researcher with extensive travels to museums and cultural sites around the world. Is it possible that she recognized the significance of the Butades story when mentioning the beauty of the shadow of the plant against the wall? Was she imagining herself as Boutades daughter when she spoke of the shadow of her lover's silhouette?

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<sup>303</sup> The commission is mentioned by Sheriff in the footnotes of two different works. See Mary D. Sheriff, "The Im/modesty of Her Sex: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Salon of 1783," *The Consumption of Culture*, ed. Ann Bermingham (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 481, footnote 3. Also, Sheriff *Exceptional* 318 footnote 24.

<sup>304</sup> The shadow of the recently deceased Dutchess is prominent and intentional in her *Portrait of Louise-Élisabeth de France, Duchess of Parma, and Her Son*. For more on Labille-Guiard, see Laura Auricchio, "Self-Promotion in the work of Adélaïde Labille-Guiard," *Art Bulletin* 89.1 (2007): 45-62 and Auricchio's *Artist in the Age of Revolution* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009).

<sup>305</sup> For more on the significance of Kauffman's play on traditional art stories, see Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006):4-5. Also, Wendy Roworth, ed. *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) and Wendy Wassying Roworth, "Anatomy is Destiny: Regarding the Body of the Art of Angelica Kauffman," *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*, ed. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994): 43-5. Roworth notes that the central model is taken from the *Venus of the Beautiful Buttocks*. She reads an ironic criticism in the fact that Kauffman has presented her lower half extremely modestly. It is definitely interesting that Zeuxis is shown focusing so intently on her arm, as if blinded to the rest of her body, at a time when women were only allowed to copy arms and legs.

Certainly, it is worth noting within the context of her intellectual search for meaning and her continual return to the question of artistic hierarchy as she seeks a place for herself and her work. Her art and her words reveal her musings—sometimes doubtful—on the prevailing theories of the day. If she did indeed see herself as Boutades’ daughter outlining the shadow of her silhouette, she did not see herself as doing so against a wall. Rather, she saw George against the horizon of a new day. His silhouette symbolized a new future for her in the artworld—not one that was solid, but fluid and full of possibility.

Pliny’s story provides a place for women like Mary Watts in the story of art, however, it is sometimes an undervalued position—one of mimetic return rather than intellectual creativity. Mary Watts’s work does not simply turn that opposition on its head; rather, Mary’s work scrambles the categories and questions the division. The chapel utilizes a division of art often labeled as decorative and mimetic, but then builds upon patterns to convey the intellectual idea of the plan as a whole and mixes the decoration into the architecture of the building itself. One might say that Mary Seton traces ancient symbols like Celtic motifs from her far away homeland, for example, as Boutades’s daughter did the shadow of her lover upon the wall. The Watts Gallery Archive holds Mary Watts’s books full of little papers with inspirational designs sketched in pencil from her vast research into ancient symbols. Certainly, Mary worked with the same loving devotion on these symbols, especially the Celtic motifs which she understood as her cultural heritage. She did record them out of love and a longing to remember. And yet, as Mary herself stated, she did not wish to merely copy them—pure mimesis. That would not allow them to speak to a contemporary audience. Rather, she uses artistic creativity in treating them as a language, playing upon the patterns to sculpt and adapt them to her aesthetic. Mary Seton Watts uses them within the context of the surrounding world to pick out truth and meaning which

would provide comfort and guidance to the local community and possibly to society at large. Perhaps there is no such thing as mere copying, as the image must pass from the outside world through the filter of the artist, inevitably changing meaning—if not through line, then through context. In the case of the chapel, lines of patterns and symbols as well as context has shifted to a unique place and a rather thrilling time in history—the dawning of a new century in which societal structures as well as cultural beliefs were being questioned and altered.

Mary trained in sculpture under Aimé-Jules Dalou. Mary Watts's artwork often displays an effort to suggest three-dimensional space through creative techniques using felt and gesso or creating clay moulds. Her love of sculpture, perhaps, comes into her defense when George suggests that painting is a much more difficult medium evidenced by the fact that sculpture developed much faster in Italy. As early as 1200 Pisano was already doing “things that cannot be excelled.” The age-old debate of sculpture versus painting ensues. Mary writes,

Signor says that sculpture is a very much more easy art than painting, but I do not think that explains it, & suggested that it was because they [early Italian sculptors like Pisano] had some at least of the perfected Greek works in sculpture, whereas in painting nothing but the archaic byzantine mosaics & frescos....<sup>306</sup>

Like George, Mary had training in both sculpture and painting, but here she reveals her belief in the complexity of sculpture and awareness of three-dimensional space.

Mary contemplated dimensionality beyond sculpture in the round to the surrounding environment including audience experience. In terms of gallery space, Mary is excited about the Whitechapel project and the possibilities for drawing a unique audience into the space. As we have seen and discussed in her artwork, Mary concentrated on creating a personalized experience for the viewer. Within the gallery space, her theory holds as she yearns to create small museums in which a visitor might have access to a depth of information and a variety of work. She notes

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<sup>306</sup> MSW Diaries 13 Apr 1891.

that the work should be placed at an equal level and that arts and crafts should be included. For Mary, art should be understood in relation to other pieces and within context. The Grosvenor Gallery had begun revolutionizing gallery space just twenty years previously<sup>307</sup> and Mary demonstrates enthusiastic opinions on the subject and hoped to dialogue with Barnett on the design for the Whitechapel gallery.

Talked at breakfast about Mr Barnett's letter in the Westminster asking for an Art Gallery for Whitechapel – I told Signor of an idea of mine which was that small local Galleries should be built all over London... How splendid if Mr Tate would make his gallery the centre of it – Small Galleries are really far more delightful than big galleries & this place comes something near being in England what the private Galleries are in Italy – I would have an annex to each gallery for arts & crafts, exhibiting local work as well in it. The pictures would be of more equal merit, the descriptive catalogue could be a really good piece of descriptive literature – what we want in all work now is combination – so much is lost because each separate work is isolated.<sup>308</sup>

Mary's enthusiasm concerning gallery space is revealing of her aesthetic concerns. She is most interested in providing communities with access to information through intimate gallery spaces with quality work and educational literature. She imagines an amalgamation in which communities benefit from a small gallery feel in which exhibits might be catered to the audience, however, these smaller units benefit from the resources of a large gallery which can help coordinate and lend resources. Most importantly, perhaps, Mary finds that artwork is lost in isolation and must be understood in a broader context. This is probably helped both through literature as well as curation.

Mary's words, "what we want in all work now is combination" is revealing in terms of both the Arts and Crafts Movement as well as feminism during the late century. Within the context of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Mary's proposal for a gallery in which pictures would

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<sup>307</sup> For more on this, see Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney, *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1996).

<sup>308</sup> MSW Diaries 22 May 1893.

be displayed at the same time as arts and crafts objects is part of the revolution of the arts. For William Morris, the separation of the arts was a recently invented, artificial and hierarchal gap between craft and fine art. In *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Morris recalled a time when “all handicraftsmen were *artists*.”<sup>309</sup> He bemoaned the decay of contemporary art, “As the arts sundered into the greater and the lesser...the artist came out of the handicraftsmen, and left them without hope of elevation, while he himself was left without the help of intelligent, industrious sympathy.”<sup>310</sup> For William Morris and others in the arts and crafts movement, the separation of artistic genres into categories of utility versus perceived intellectualism created unfortunate boundaries for all types of art.

The concern may stem from John Ruskin who discussed the hierarchy of the arts twenty years previously in terms of architecture verses the craft of painting and sculpting. In the preface to “The Two Paths,” Ruskin wrote of the “vital law” at the core of his writing which is the interdependence of all “noble design” on the physical ability to sculpt or paint “Organic Form.”<sup>311</sup> Ruskin identified the problem along similar lines to Morris’s later, more political writings on the division of the arts. He laments that when architects are advised to “learn to carve or paint organic form,” the reply is, “We are above all that. The carvers and painters are our servants—quite subordinate people.”<sup>312</sup> For Ruskin, as for Morris, to build in this context of division of labor is to abandon the soul of architecture. In terms of the Gothic and Romanesque Revivalism of the period, in which Mary also participates, Ruskin states that “so-called Gothic or Romanesque buildings” do not embody “the principles of those styles” and are therefore a

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<sup>309</sup> William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 10.

<sup>310</sup> William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), 10.

<sup>311</sup> Morris “Two Paths” v.

<sup>312</sup> Morris “Two Paths” vi.

“shadow,” a “caricature” of noble architecture.<sup>313</sup> Within the Arts and Crafts Movement, the hierarchal separation of the arts was understood from mid-century as a plague of modern arts bound up with the problems of industrialized manufacturing.<sup>314</sup>

William Morris was at the head of the Arts and Craft Movement and defined the essential purpose for art in *The Aims of Art*. Like the Wattses, William Morris was very concerned with industrialization and saw the corporatization of society as the destruction of human happiness and inimically tied to the destruction of genuine art, whose purpose “is to increase the happiness of men, by giving them beauty and interest of incident to amuse their leisure, and prevent them wearying even of rest, and by giving them hope and bodily pleasure in work; or shortly, to make man’s work happy and his rest fruitful.”<sup>315</sup> The belief that making art was crucial to humanity is based upon the idea that people need the freedom to own their labour and creativity in order to take pleasure in making something that might also bring happiness to the user of the item.<sup>316</sup> This is also a belief at the root of the Home Arts and Industries Society (HAIA) and at the basis of Mary Watts’s chapel project. HAIA president, to whom the chapel book is dedicated, Eglantyne Jebb, wrote of the urge to create as an essential, redemptive instinct and part of our humanity.<sup>317</sup> This instinct could not be satisfied, however, by contemporary manufacturing jobs due to the

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<sup>313</sup> Morris “Two Paths” vi.

<sup>314</sup> The push to recombine the artist and craftsman, as well as a tendency towards simplification in both design as well as material, might be seen in contrast with the move towards architectural professionalism at the period inasmuch as it separates architecture from the building trade. The result of this friction might be understood stylistically in the differences between the highly polished architectural grandeur of the Beaux-Arts and the rough finish of locally sourced materials employed in Arts and Crafts architecture.

<sup>315</sup> Morris, *The Aims of Art*, 10.

<sup>316</sup> See Morris, *Aims*, 9-10. “I believe that art cannot be the result of external compulsion, the labour which goes to produce it is voluntary, and partly undertaken for the labour itself, partly for the hope of producing something which when done, shall give pleasure to the user of it....this extra labour...will keep before the workers a lively hope while he is working; and also by giving it work to do in which there is absolute immediate pleasure...pleasure is always present in the handiwork of the deft workman when he is working successfully, and that it increases in proportion to the freedom and individuality of the work.”

<sup>317</sup> E. L. Jebb, *The Magazine of Art*, “The Home Arts and Industries Association,” 8 (Jan 1885):296.

division of labor. The joy of creation “is only felt when the design is original, and heart and brain and hand and eye have all played their parts, the lower faculties in subordination to the higher.”<sup>318</sup> Once again, the influence of John Ruskin is felt. In “The Unity of Art,” Ruskin defines Fine Art as separate from manufacture by the combination of faculties required to produce a work. Whereas manufacture simply proceeds from the hands, Fine Art must include “the hand, the head, and the *heart* of man” together.<sup>319</sup> For Morris as well as for Jebb, the aim of art is human happiness through labor that meets the emotional and physical needs of both the maker and the consumer. Such an art requires a new definition of art object—one which is not based on a hierarchy of genres, but on the extent to which an object meets the needs of labor and recreation.

For William Morris, the fear of industrialization was a fear of external compulsion, which turns man into machine by taking away freedom of choice. The industrial time clock and the specialization of labor denies the needs of the individual and the theory of internal circadian rhythm, the bodily fluctuation of moods and periods of sleepiness or wakefulness throughout the day, as well as intellectual creativity. Without the modern scientific analysis of these rhythms, Morris recognized it as a need and wrote that humankind should have the freedom to choose when to create an ornamentally elaborate design and when to save labor and create a simple item for function in accordance with levels of energy. The problem with modern industrialization was the robbery of this saved labor. Machines no longer served humankind in order to give them more time for relaxation or to save human energy. Rather, the energy expended is always the same in the factory and the worker has little choice regarding the design of wares.

Philosophically, industrialized work denied the essential characteristics of humankind on both a

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<sup>318</sup> Jebb, “The Home Arts,” 297.

<sup>319</sup> Ruskin, *Two Paths*, “The Unity of the Arts,” first given as a lecture at Manchester, 14 Mar 1859.

bodily and intellectual level for William Morris and for many within the Arts and Crafts Movement. This is why William Morris calls us all “slaves of machinery.”<sup>320</sup> He provocatively states, “But why is he the slave to the machinery? Because he is the slave to the system for whose existence the invention of machinery was necessary.”<sup>321</sup>

The Arts and Crafts Movement is often connected to a revival of interests in needlework like embroidery, carpet and upholstery as well as pottery, leatherwork, stained glass and other objects that are useful as well as beautiful. The movement was extended to architecture as well. William Morris established the SPAB, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, in 1877. Founding members included artists associated the second-wave Pre-Raphaelite movement and architects like J.F. Bentley who built the neo-Byzantine Westminster Cathedral in striped red brickwork, PRB associate E. R. Robson, who worked with fellow member, J. J. Stevenson, in building several state-funded schools of brick and architectural terracotta, Philip Webb who designed William Morris’s Red House, and George Aitchison who is best known for building Leighton House of red Suffolk brick. The SPAB lent a forum for William Morris to have a larger voice in architecture.<sup>322</sup> Both Morris and John Ruskin wrote of using local materials and encouraged a love for all things English as well as a system of architecture in which labor was less divided. The result was often a return to brick and clay rather than imported stone. W. R. Lethaby’s Brockhampton is called “one of the greatest monuments of the Arts and Crafts

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<sup>320</sup> See Morris, *Aims*, 19-20.

<sup>321</sup> Morris, *Aims* 19.

<sup>322</sup> *Architecture of the Arts and Crafts Movement* 7-8. First year members included artists Millais, Rossetti, Hunt, Coventry Patmore, Sir Chales Dilke, Sir John Lubbock, Eustace, Balfour and Baroness Burdett Coutts. Charles Havey and Jon Press note the rise of brick for churches, use of structural polychrome brickwork during the Gothic Revival in Architecture at mid-century as influenced by George Edmund Street, Phillip Webb, Benjamin Webb, and Ruskin, particularly in the encouragement by these individuals as well as William Morris, to look at Continental Gothic. Specifically mentioned are Benjamin Webb’s “Sketches of Continental Ecclesiology,” Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*, and Butterfield’s All Saints building. See Harvey and Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester UP: Manchester and New York, 1991).

Movement” and cited as one of his finest accomplishments<sup>323</sup> using local Herefordshire grey and red sandstone and labour craftsmen rather than working through a building contractor.

Ruskin advocates this type of architecture in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in which he outlines the definition of architecture as well as philosophy. Ruskin defines architecture in the Lamp of Sacrifice, “Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure.” While to build is simply to “put together and adjust” the parts that make up a building, architecture must be “venerable and beautiful” beyond the necessity of function.<sup>324</sup> The first two categories of architecture, Devotional and Memorial, are most important to Ruskin’s treatise and also most applicable to the Compton chapel. Ruskin writes that there are two great conditions that should be first considered in building such architecture, which philosophy he calls the Spirit of Sacrifice. First, building should be done with best possible effort and second, increased labor should be considered an increase of beauty because of the principle of devotion.<sup>325</sup> This principle fit well within the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement because it values the artist’s labor as beautiful on the same level as the visual aesthetics of the material of creation. The monetary value of building material is less important than the physical labor devoted to the building and this labor plays a part in creating a building’s beauty. “For it is not the material, but the absence of the human labor, which makes the thing worthless,” he writes. For materials like clay that can be moulded and modeled, Ruskin notes, “they become precious, or otherwise, just in proportion to the hand-work upon them....”<sup>326</sup> Furthermore, Ruskin makes a case for using locally sourced materials shaped by hands rather than an industrialized workforce of machines.

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<sup>323</sup> *Architecture of the Arts and Crafts*. 31-2.

<sup>324</sup> Ruskin, *Lamps*, 7.

<sup>325</sup> Ruskin, *Lamps*, 18.

<sup>326</sup> Ruskin, *Lamps*, 46.

He famously stated, “a piece of terra cotta, or of plaster of Paris, which has been wrought by human hand, is worth all the stone in Carrara, cut by machinery.”<sup>327</sup>

Within the context of famous male contemporary architects trying to apply the arts and crafts philosophies of Morris and Ruskin to large-scale commissions, Mary Seton Watts’s design of the Compton Mortuary Chapel might be seen as architecture at the pinnacle of contemporary arts and crafts philosophy. Like contemporary arts and crafts architects, Mary utilizes local labour and materials. The small design of the chapel allows for the great amount of localized labour in what Ruskin would consider the true architecture of the building. This is clearly an important aspect to Mary as designer who painstakingly lists the name of every worker of terracotta in *The Word in the Pattern*. Rather than outsourcing stone resources or cutting required by industrialized machinery, the bricks that make up the outside edifice of the chapel are sourced locally in the red brick available from the area in the method of other arts and crafts architects. However, Mary herself is able to coordinate the design and much of the sourcing of materials. The ornamental friezes are her design made from moulds and local terracotta, possibly sourced from her own property as a contemporary writer known as Mrs. Stuart Erskine later notes in her articles on the pottery guild. Erskine expounds,

all the clay used is found on the property. The industry is therefore quite independent of external help; the band of artist craftsmen working here under the direction of the artist’s wife, dig the clay from the field and pass it through all the various processes, ranging from the potter’s wheel to the firing kiln.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ruskin, *Lamps*, 45.

<sup>328</sup> Mrs. Stuart Erskine, “Mrs. G. F. Watts’ Terra Cotta Industries at Compton, Surrey, England,” *House and Garden* 3 (Jan-Jun 1903): 235. Erskine describes “pure clay...found in the neighborhood of her home at Compton. It is composed of silica, alumina, proto-oxide of iron, magnesia, lime and water. No glaze is used, either in the body of the ware or on the surface...” (233). See also Shelagh Wilson, “Watts, Women, Philanthropy, and the Home Arts,” *Representations of G.F. Watts*, ed. Colin Trodd et. al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004): 181-2. Mrs. Erskine’s comments might be tempered by Mary Watts’s opinion that her writing is “the blowing of trumpets.” MSW diaries 4 Feb 1902. See footnote 329 below.

The interior walls create an entirely new standard for Jenkin’s description of Brockhampton as having “embroidery, carving, pictures and icons” on “every side.”<sup>329</sup> If any interior fits this description, it is Mary’s “wallpaper” which covers every surface of the interior from wall to ceiling.<sup>330</sup>

Mary and George Watts do not write as directly as William Morris concerning the feared loss of the autonomous labor of the artist because of industrialization. George and Mary Watts, despite their struggles and sacrifices, maintained a degree of independence in their work. However, aesthetic writings on the detrimental condition of modern art and of Mammon and participation in cultural philanthropy projects indicate their concern. The Compton Pottery provided a source of full time work for local artisans. Furthermore, Mary did intend for the workers that she trained through the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA), and who became paid workers in her pottery guild, to eventually have full control over a project—even its design. Such artistic autonomy would have fit in well with William Morris’s ideals in *Aims for Art*. In actuality, Mary may have had difficulty handing over design work as she reserved control over designs as director of Compton Pottery until 1920 before relinquishing partial control to the potters. While Mary seems to have planned to teach complete artistic autonomy from design to pottery, there may have been a doubt of confidence in the abilities of workers to create an intellectual design. After learning of her terracotta project, Frederic Leighton expressed his doubts over the long-term benefits of her plans in training artists in Compton saying, “Very Good, but no use because they do not design the things themselves.” Mary replied confidently, “Oh but they will come to that.” Leighton responded, “Oh!—You are young and hopeful.”<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Simon Jenkins, *England’s Thousand Best Churches* (London: Penguin, 2009): 310.

<sup>330</sup> Mary calls her own work on the interior of the chapel “glorified wallpaper” in *Annals*, Vol. II, p. 321.

<sup>331</sup> Quoted in Hilary Underwood, “Mary Watts, the Home Arts and Industries Association and Compton,” *An Artist’s Village*, ed. Mark Bills (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2011): 52 from MSW Diaries 16 Jun 1892.

However, even in the early years of the pottery guild, Mary's method of restricting any one pottery project to two individuals, the designer and the potter, received high praise as a reunification of divided labor and an example of "great importance and interest in the history of modern handicrafts."<sup>332</sup>

It is important to note that George and Mary were very clear in stating that they did not believe in the socialism or the need for the revolution ultimately envisioned by William Morris.<sup>333</sup> Upon reading the *Aims for Art*, Mary records, "it left us sad from its plodding materialism, & its hopelessness of the result of good effort not made in the direction of revolution—."<sup>334</sup> Mary and George shared concerns with William Morris about industrialization and greed to the detriment of both art and artist. This is clear both in their writings as well as works like *Mammon*, which show the crushing power of greed over humanity. Mary reports reading *Aims for Art* at the same time that she records George's work on "Present Conditions of Art" in which George expresses the difficulty of producing art in modern conditions because of the destructive greed of industrialization. However, William Morris's *Aims of Art* is highly political in its call for revolutionary change while also refusing to ponder questions of spirituality in art. This combination of political partisanship and revolutionary fervor without any attempt at attributing spiritual growth or significance, leads Mary and George to characterize this pamphlet

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<sup>332</sup> Erskine "Mrs. Watts" 237. Mary was also invited by the Dept of Agriculture for Ireland to show pottery as an example of "what can be done with Irish raw material" at the 1904 Irish Industrial Exhibition at the World Fair in St. Louis. See Gould, *Heroine*, 51. Rather humorously, Mary was always dismayed with Mrs. Erskine's articles. Though she was favorable and very helpful in explicitly connecting the pottery's work to the larger arts and crafts movement in principle, Mary eschewed the overt praise. About Mrs. Erskine's articles, Mary wrote, "Another peaceful day – except for a big post – & a wretched article written on our pottery by Mrs. Erskine – blowing of trumpets to do us so much harm – some how every[thing] she touches upon seems spoil in the handling." MSW Diaries 4 Feb 1902.

<sup>333</sup> In one of Mary's notebooks, it states, "No Socialism, no Republicanism, but [conscience?] is the best source." The book of political musings emphasizes "Cooperation! Equality in usefulness..." and "there can be no remedy in party squabbles neither side so desiring to know the truth as to gain political advantage [of?] opponents." MSW/3/7 Political.

<sup>334</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Dec 1887.

as pessimistic and limited in scope.<sup>335</sup> The dissatisfaction with modern conditions and the importance of arts and crafts does, however, resonate with Mary's own work and explains the power that his words have in bringing her such sadness in his opinion that revolution is the necessary answer.

### 2.3 Women Artists: Deeds Not Words

Mary Watts may have had more political sympathies with William Morris's daughter, May Morris. Certainly, both women artists seem more interested in creating change through teaching and art production than through writing. It is through May Morris's deeds rather than her words that best show her alliance to the Arts and Crafts Movement as well as her political leanings towards feminism. Indeed, the two were united under the Women's Guild of Arts as women artists sought rights of entry into the art world in which artistic groups, academic degrees, and entrances to sales through exhibition favored male artists. Because of this, politics and aesthetics merge. May Morris had run her father's embroidery department<sup>336</sup> and became a teacher after his death, even travelling to the US to give lectures in 1909-1910.<sup>337</sup>

The textile arts were understood as residing within the domestic realm in the Victorian period. Needlework is contrasted with labors considered physical, exterior, and masculine as in Edward Burne-Jones's image of Adam and Eve in which the first woman spins cloth to cover the

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<sup>335</sup> Mary records George stating that he thought the world was "moving towards two opinions Materialistic Socialism or Christian Co-operation" and that the result would be a "spiritual socialism," which may have been an acceptable state of affairs for George and Mary Watts. See MSW Diaries 27 Jan 1887.

<sup>336</sup> Jane Burden and her sister, Elizabeth, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Kate and Lucy Faulkner, and May Morris were all participants in the embroidery department at Morris & Co. However, these women probably received no payment, even May who managed the entire department. The names and numbers of the many women working in the factories are unknown but seem to have been mainly restricted to the domestic arts like embroidery and carpet weaving.

<sup>337</sup> For more on this, see Natasha Thoreson, "The Reluctant Reformer: May Morris' United States Lecture Tour of 1909-1910," *Textile Society of America* (Sept 2012). For more on Morris and the divisive hierarchy of arts, see Jan Marsh, "May Morris: Ubiquitous, Invisible Arts and Crafts-woman," *Women Artists*, eds. Elliott and Helland, 36. Marsh argued that the movement offered few opportunities in areas "from which reputations are forged."

nakedness and shame also revealed by her hand, while Adam works at farming (Fig. 31). The words on the image reinforce the perceived dichotomy with a humorously satirical rhyme, “When Adam delved and Eve Span / Who was then the gentleman.” Sewing and embroidery have been sites for feminine resistance in which both May Morris and Mary Watts can also be seen as participating. In the story of Philomena, her voice is taken away and she uses weaving to communicate a message understood only by her sister.<sup>338</sup> In yet another foundational story, Penelope weaves and unweaves in order to avoid suitors, feminine work that will save her kingdom in *The Odyssey*. She is represented tearing stitches apart in *Penelope Unraveling Her Work by Night* (Fig. 32), a remarkable embroidery by Dora Wheeler Keith using a needlework technique patented by her mother, Candace Wheeler; both women were influential participators in the Women’s Building decoration at the Chicago World’s Fair.

The nineteenth century witnessed great change in the meeting of women together to form artistic societies. In fact, any meeting of like-minded women had the potential to become a site of political dissonance.<sup>339</sup> A horticultural meeting at Gertrude Jekyll’s home was disrupted by police in 1912 on suspicion of “subversive activities.”<sup>340</sup> Interestingly, Mary Seton Watts collaborated with Gertrude Jekyll, who lived nearby in Surrey, to create the Jekyll Bowl for the Potter’s Art Guild.<sup>341</sup> This was how many women’s rights movements began—with a group of

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<sup>338</sup> For more on this, see Marsula Gail Guarino’s dissertation, *The Archetype of the Great Goddess* (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1999): 19.

<sup>339</sup> Patterson argues that “the energy and ingenuity that distinguished successful women craftworkers and gardeners were equally applicable to political agitation” in “Decoration and Desire,” *Gender & History* 719.

<sup>340</sup> See Patterson, “Decoration and Desire,” *Gender & History* 719. The account is taken from Francis Jekyll, *Gertrude Jekyll a Memoir* (London: J. Cape, 1934): 174.

<sup>341</sup> Patterson “Decoration and Desire” 718. Jekyll worked closely with Edward Lutyens demonstrating the tight knit community in which artists worked and the ease with which ideas spread. George and Mary were also friends with George Meredith, who had settled in Surrey in 1864. Meredith, who posed for *The Death of Chatterton* by Henry Wallis, advocated for women’s rights through writings like *The Egoist* (1879) which portrayed Victorian men as seeing wives as mirrors of their husbands. He called Watts a standard bearer (NPG Archive GFW/1/4/64). See also Rose “A Feminist” 74-91.

similarly talented women gathering to help one another and contemplating the ways in which society made their paths more difficult and how the world might be improved.<sup>342</sup> Mary Watts directly participated in this movement by becoming president of the Godalming arm of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies after the turn of the century.<sup>343</sup>

A gendered division in art was sometimes necessitated by the restriction of women into all-male organizations like the Art Worker's Guild. Established by May Morris in 1907, The Women's Guild of Arts was a response to The Art Workers Guild. Mary would act as first honorary president. By 1913, the group drafted an inclusive resolution to invite both women and men from outside of the guild to give lectures.<sup>344</sup> The action recognized the difficult position which placed women into separate categories from male peers. Many artists considered such entities to be dangerous to the reputation of women's art which would then be judged separately and characterized by gendered descriptions.

The separation of men and women artists and artwork not only risked the perpetuation of the idea that artwork was associated with a specific set of gendered assumptions, but also limited a women artist's opportunities to reach the same status of art done by a man with all of the advantages of an already established art world. The question of separation was perhaps most intense a few years previous to chapel construction during the Chicago World's Fair. While the fair took place across the ocean, women artists' participation became an international issue. The

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<sup>342</sup> Women's groups have often been successful in assisting in political movements as they have been considered outside of the political and economic process and therefore have often been considered benign and therefore often avoided the repercussions experienced by male peers. However, this was less so as the fight for women's rights wore on and it became more apparent that women might excite change and could exert power and influence—sometimes even destructive and dangerous action. For more on the political role of art and craft, see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>343</sup> Patterson, "Decoration" 719.

<sup>344</sup> Women's Guild of Arts Records, 1902-1949 and undated, Duke University Libraries, Draft Resolution, 22 Jan 1913. The Duke University library contains ten items from Mary Watts.

women directors for art decided to place women's art within a separate building, the Women's Building, which gave women full power to design, decorate, and fill the building. However, it separated women's art from men's art. American artist Anna Lea Merritt lived and worked in Britain and was friends with Mary Watts. She was one of two artists commissioned to decorate murals in the Women's Building as representatives of British art. Both sets of murals from England chose to represent the specific identities of modern women rather than allegorical figures. "By featuring Florence Nightingale and Dorothea Beale, two modern women reformers," proposes Wanda Corn's *Women Building History*, "they [Annie Swynnerton and Anna Lea Merritt] provided female counterpoints to the many male heroes like Christopher Columbus and Thomas Edison elsewhere at the Fair."<sup>345</sup> Merritt used *Needlework* as the central panel of her triptych, provocative not simply due to the progress women were making in this particular decorative art, but also as part of the foundational story of the arts. While women leaders charged with advocating the Women's Building often used Anna Lea Merritt as an example of successful women in the arts, Merritt herself was aware of the dangers of the building which separated women and men artists.

Recent attempts to make separate exhibitions of women's work were in opposition to the views of the artists concerned, who knew that it would lower their standard and risk the place they already occupied. What we so strongly desire is a place in the large field: the kind ladies who wish to distinguish us as women would unthinkingly work us harm.<sup>346</sup>

Some prominent women artists refused to exhibit within this international arena because the art would not be considered alongside the work of male peers.<sup>347</sup> Interestingly, when writing about

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<sup>345</sup> Corn 163.

<sup>346</sup> Qtd in Gillett 174.

<sup>347</sup> The creation of subcategories based on gender, nationality, and etc. is still a relevant topic of debate. For more on the "fragmentation of the profession" of architecture, see Chloethiel Woodard Smith, "Architects without Labels: A Case Against All Special Categories," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, Eds. Ellen Perry Berkeley & McQuade (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institutional Press, 1989): 221-228.

women artists from Britain in the Women's Building, Crawford immediately expands attention away from the building by explaining at the outset of her essay that while some of these artists are featured in the Women's Building, "the visitor must look at the Art Palace and see some of the strong pictures exhibited there" in order to be a "judge of all that they are exhibiting at Chicago."<sup>348</sup>

Wanda Corn notes that suffrage advocates "believed that assigning women to a segregated exhibition space...kept women powerless and denied them equal treatment."<sup>349</sup> However, the ultimate decisions regarding exhibition were not made by artists or suffragists. Rather, the men serving in the U.S. Congress appointed the politically moderate "group of well-placed Chicago women" who ran the "Woman's Department or Auxiliary" and made final decisions regarding representation. The Women's Department retained the tradition of a segregated exhibition hall but added an assembly hall and managed a better planned and funded exhibition than the Philadelphia Fair's women's building of 1876.<sup>350</sup> Much like Mary herself, perhaps, the Board of Lady Managers consisted of all white women who entered the public sphere through volunteer work. African American women publicly petitioned for a voice on the board but were denied any representation in the leadership.<sup>351</sup>

Corn notes that the Lady Managers were "post-Victorian" in that they occupied "the liminal moment" when women raised in the "strictures of bourgeois Victorian homes, began to forge new female identities." This was a transitional time for many women who "still had one foot in the Victorian parlor."<sup>352</sup> This is true for Mary as well. She belonged to this Victorian

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<sup>348</sup> E. Crawford, "Great Britain—Art," *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893*, ed. Maud Howe Elliott (Paris and New York: Goupil, 1893): 200.

<sup>349</sup> Corn 66.

<sup>350</sup> Corn 68.

<sup>351</sup> Corn 70.

<sup>352</sup> Corn 72.

bourgeois world in terms of monetary and educational opportunity and political influence. She felt the responsibility of a wife in documenting and supporting her husband's public role. However, she had perhaps entered the liminal space a bit more entirely than many of her day including the Lady Managers by delving into artistic work with both hands—physically and laboriously—and in opening her experience to the diversity of the world she was privileged to explore.

Mary Watts was aware of the project which inspired much debate concerning the issue of the acceptance of women's art within the broader field rather than separated and judged on its own terms as a unique entity not comparable to men's work. While little has been written on the relationship between Anna Lea Merritt and George and Mary Watts, their friendship developed over a substantial number of years and Merritt's connections to American art would have proved valuable to the Watts.<sup>353</sup> It is clear that Merritt was active in the community during the World's Fair and met with Mary during the planning phase of the exhibition in 1891. The women organizers of the Woman's Building continually mentioned Anna Lea Merritt as an exemplar of women's success in art.<sup>354</sup> Merritt received much attention, perhaps in part because both the American and British art worlds claimed her for their own. Mary Watts is also mentioned in prominent fair literature for "her admirable portraits."<sup>355</sup> Both artists would have been well aware

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<sup>353</sup> Anna Lea Merritt had settled in London in 1870 and worked in Cheyne Walk among George Frederic Watts, Edward Burne-Jones, William Holeman Hunt and several other artists. She was active in coordinating the exhibition of British and American artists, working on both sides of the ocean. Mary Watts records Anna Lea Merritt reporting to the Wattses about George Frederic's paintings in American on 10 Jul 1887.

<sup>354</sup> Anna Lea Merritt is mentioned as an American and the only woman artists whose work had been purchased by the Chantry Bequest for the South Kensington Museum in S. T. Hallowell, "Women in Art," *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building*, ed. Maud Howe Elliott (Paris and New York: Goupil, 1893): 58. She is again celebrated as "by birth American," but "has for so long lived and worked in England that we might fairly claim her for one of our painters" in discussion of her panels in the Woman's Building in "Great Britain—Art," *Art and Handicraft*, ed. Elliott, 205.

<sup>355</sup> "Mrs. Watts" is listed among the eminent women artists currently working in Great Britain in Crawford's "Great Britain—Art" in the 1893 publication of *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the Columbian Exposition Chicago* (Paris and New York: Goupil & Co, 1893): 201.

of the contention that the Women's Building caused at this time and the two must have discussed it.<sup>356</sup> Anna Lea Merritt actually brought Mrs. Hutchinson from Chicago to visit Mary in 1891!

Certainly, there was talk of the women's building and the World Fair, however, very little is recorded.<sup>357</sup> Mary simply writes,

Our visitors were few, & Signor did not intend to see anyone, but Mrs Hutchinson from Chicago, whose husband lunched here last year, & Mrs Merritt had written to say she was coming with her – They were the first & went straight up to the studio – the pretty & clever little American did Signor good, she interested him with all they are doing for Art in Chicago, which seems much in advance of their other towns – Mrs Merritt & I talked so I did not hear all she had to say, but she made half an hour pass quickly, & he was not tired by it – .<sup>358</sup>

Mary's diary does, however, reveal the intimate relationship with Anna Lea Merritt as the two women artists take advantage of the visit to have private conversations and enjoy one another's company. During this important year for women's art exhibition in America, Mary Watts also entertained Bertha Palmer, director of the Women's Art Building. Once again, little is recorded about the details of the visit, but Mary's diary is clear that the visit is at Mary's request, though their aesthetic philosophies may have varied widely. She writes succinctly,

Dr. Kohen here & a Mrs Palmer from Chicago, whom I had invited but thought they would not come - Mrs Palmer is head of the Womans-work department at the exhibition to be held at Chicago next year - I told them I had been given to understand by Mr Edmund Russell that in America the people themselves were much in advance in taste – (decorative art), & that they took much more interest in it - they did not at all agree, & seemed to put no very high value on Mr Russell's judgement.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Anna Lea and Mary Watts socialized often, even going to plays to support Anna Lea's younger sister and actress, Marion Lea Michell. See MSW Diaries 8 Apr 1891. Anna Lee Merritt and Mary Seton Watts had much in common. Like Mary, Anna married her artist mentor. He passed just months afterward and she memorialized his work. Anna Lea Merritt also moved to a small town and sometimes worked in murals. Her work is often both thematically and stylistically sympathetic to George Frederic Watts's work. For example, *Love Locked Out* might be favorably compared to *Love and Death* completed within five years of each other.

<sup>357</sup> Mr. Charles Hutchinson was a founder and president of the Art Institute of Chicago and heavily involved in the World Fair. Brief entries in Mary's diary suggest connections between this powerful American family and the Wattses.

<sup>358</sup> MSW Diaries 10 May 1891. The Hutchinsons may have found favour with English artists who found poor representation of their country in American collections. Mr. Aidee reported that he sees the "work of the same Frenchmen" in every American collection with the exception of Hutchinson. See MSW Diaries 1 Jul 1891.

<sup>359</sup> MSW Diaries 3 Jun 1891.

The Watts' connections to American artists and culturally influential figures kept them abreast of aesthetic interests in the United States. Mary Watts knew of the Chicago World's Fair and actually had personal connections to Bertha Palmer, Mrs. Hutchinson, and Anna Lea Merritt during this period.<sup>360</sup> Mary clearly has her pulse on the issues facing women artists both in Britain and in America. Within this context, the Watts Chapel can be seen as a test case demonstrating the successful outcome of a project which allows women and men to work alongside one another in the community. When the chapel is understood within a context of social change in which the world was searching for answers concerning women's roles in work and society, especially in terms of integrating with male peers in the public sphere, it speaks loudly to successful integration and explains the importance of recognizing each worker individually as a part of a collective in which women artists are given space both in the work and the visual design of the building. The Compton Chapel knows no boundary by gender or age. Pictures of the chapel decoration and later pottery guild show women working alongside men. The list of participants at the end of the *Word in the Pattern* is characterized similarly. While Mary was active within the world of women's art as well as in the movement for women's suffrage to provide an increasing space and voice for women in public roles, it seems most likely that Mary envisioned artists working alongside one another without the boundaries of separation along gendered lines.

The mortuary chapel at Compton is designed around aesthetics inspired by societal issues of the period. Mary's journal demonstrates her thoughtful interactions with the prominent artists in George Watts's circle and their language of art. The mortuary chapel project demonstrates the

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<sup>360</sup> There is room for work in understanding the other women artists that may have worked along similar aesthetic lines with Mary Watts. Mary's relationship to Anna Lea Merritt has not been examined. Blanche Jenkins is also an interesting artist working during the period who exhibits at the Chicago World's Fair and is mentioned by Mary in her journal on 13 Jun 1887 concerning a fine painting of a child which she exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery.

principle goals of the Arts and Crafts Movement in architecture and design by embracing the commitment to respect both the physical and intellectual elements of human labor as well as the dedication to the authenticity of using local materials and resources. Furthermore, the building of the chapel addresses the debate concerning the separation of women's art from men's art catalyzed by the World Fair's construction of the Women's Building in Chicago of 1893 which called upon women artists, especially those in the US and in Europe. This chapter has argued that the chapel project provides a rich artistic object that provokes a compelling dialogue with two of the most urgent societal discussions in the late century which became entwined with Victorian aesthetics: labor and gender equality. The following chapters will look to the iconography of the interior and exterior of the chapel to further establish the aesthetic context of the building and how it dialogues with related works by this same circle of British and American artists in terms of these larger societal issues as they are expressed by the art works and their movements of the period.

## Chapter 3.

### A Sign in the Pattern: Philosophy Made Flesh in the Chapel Project

“Among trees at the top is a red building  
—all red walls and roof—  
looking unlike any other in the British Isles.”  
--*The International Studio*<sup>361</sup>

A contemporary *Studio* article declared that the Compton mortuary chapel “is in a way an architectural triumph.... the whole building is like nothing else.”<sup>362</sup> The following two chapters will be an in-depth discussion of the symbolism designed by Mary Watts and created by the local community for a cemetery and mortuary chapel. The little terracotta chapel with the circle in the square design is unique. While the chapel is small and not widely known outside of Surrey, the project is one of importance, both in terms of understanding the past as well as in contemplating future works. The chapel stands at an intersection of time, begun in 1896 and finished after the turn of the century in 1904. It represents an intersection of art movements, encompassing elements of Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Symbolism, and “Second Phase Pre-Raphaelitism.”<sup>363</sup> Most importantly, the chapel intersects with these movements in a dialogue over contemporary social issues of the time concerning labor, gender, and even religion.

In helping to restore the Compton Mortuary Chapel, a work catalyzed by a leaking roof in the early 1990’s, the site architect wrote of the importance of the chapel as “a key edifice to study” for all of those interested in architectural history because it “embodies the essence of the Arts and Crafts period.” He noted that it “can be ranked alongside other important Arts and

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<sup>361</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel Designed by Mrs. G. F. Watts,” *The International Studio* Vol. 5 (1898): 235.

<sup>362</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel” 239-40.

<sup>363</sup> The term “second-phase Pre-Raphaelite” is an imperfect one, however, it is helpful in designating later artists also associated with the Wattses. For more on this, see Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*, chapter three, especially pages 87 and 98. The influence of artists considered to be part of this group will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Crafts works such as Brockhampton Church (1901) by W.R. Lethaby.”<sup>364</sup> Small community projects are at the heart of the Arts and Crafts Movement. They embody the ideals of autonomous artistic labour, original and comprehensive design, and the use of local resources on a scale which is impossible in professional commissions. This is perhaps even true for localized private commissions of the Arts and Crafts Movement like the Brockhampton Church, for which Lethaby hired an additional architect to carry out designs and labor was also outsourced to workshops like William Morris & Co.<sup>365</sup> Architect Charles Ashbee is said to have complained, “we have made of a great social movement, a narrow and tiresome little aristocracy working with great skill for the rich.”<sup>366</sup> Yet, the small voluntary works like the Compton chapel are not often included in work on the architecture of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The mortuary chapel at Compton, or the Watts Chapel as it is widely known, suffers not only from being a small building outside of the regular modes of economic commerce as part of the cultural philanthropy movement within Arts and Crafts, but also possibly from being an architectural project largely planned and designed by a woman. Even licensed women architects successful in the completion of large commissions have a long history of being omitted from

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<sup>364</sup> Nigel Hammet, “Watts Chapel: Investigation,” *The Word in the Pattern*, eds. Mark Bills and Desna Greenhow (Lymington, Hampshire: Synergie Group, 2010): 104. Watts Gallery Archive contains detailed report from conservation report. See box MSW/5/7. The brickwork was sound. Some terracotta blocks were replaced due to erosion and frost, including 15 from the river of life section. New blocks were made by Mike Pinner of West Meon Pottery. Terracotta repairs were made by mixing hydraulic lime and red colored sand by Nimbus Conservation, headed by Michael Chapman, a descendent of the Watts’s adopted daughter, Lilian. 50% of the roofing tiles were also replaced.

<sup>365</sup> Architecture might be considered as existing in a space between professionalization and trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Training of the 1880’s and 1890’s often still took place in an established firm and with evening classes. Prominent Arts and Crafts figures like A.H. Mackmurdo, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and M.H. Baillie Scott are also missing from RIBA. For more, see Peter Davey, *Architecture of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Rizolli, 1980).

<sup>366</sup> Quoted V. Irene Cockroft, V. Irene, *New Dawn Women: Women in the Arts & Crafts and Suffrage Movements at the Dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Compton: Watts Gallery, 2005): 6 from Charles Ashbee, unpublished Memoirs, V&A, 1938. William Morris is also quoted in expressing disappointment in his work which did not meet the needs of everyday people and utility, but “ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich.” Cockroft 6.

published anthologies.<sup>367</sup> Recent publications by the Watts Gallery community are working to remedy the situation by providing access to information on the building of the chapel alongside detailed photos and illustrations of the iconography and layout to a wider public audience of visitors and scholars, supporting and inspiring a rising interest in the small chapel as well as in Mary Seton Watts's life as an artist.<sup>368</sup>

This study hopes to build upon recent publications as well as archival information to delve deeply into the iconography of the chapel as it is situated within the cemetery space. The longer format of the dissertation will allow for a close analysis of the many interesting, and often hard to access, iconographic details of the chapel project, while also demonstrating their significance to the larger aesthetic conversations of the period which, as discussed in the previous chapter, had political implications. This study connects an object-oriented study of the chapel with the cultural context in which it was created. Despite the great strides made in researching and rediscovering art made by women artists in current art historical studies, women's art is still often segregated or seen within a vacuum as an isolated moment of creativity. This disconnect between art and context not only denies multivalent meanings within

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<sup>367</sup> Sara Holmes Boutelle documents her astonishment in the lack of recognition to Julia Morgan as she began her research with a long list of architectural books omitting the successful woman architect. See Boutelle, "An Elusive Pioneer: Tracing the Work of Julia Morgan," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, eds. Berkeley and McQuaid (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institutional Press, 1989): 107-116. Similarly, Adriana Barbasch notes the poor recognition of Louise Blanchard Bethune who opened her own architectural office in 1876 and yet is rarely known. Despite having her own office and working with many commissions, when she is written about, it is usually only in connection to one of her commissions, the Hotel Lafayette. See Barbasch, "Louise Blanchard Bethune: The AIA Accepts Its First Woman Member," *Architecture A Place for Women*, eds. Berkeley and McQuaid (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institutional Press, 1989): 15-26.

<sup>368</sup> A knowledgeable community dedicated to the gallery and chapel exists in Compton. The Gallery and its staff continues to contribute to education and community building. I am indebted to Director Perdita Hunt, Curator Nicholas Tromans, and Beatrice Bertram for access to archival materials and knowledgeable assistance. The groundbreaking publications by Veronica Franklin Gould continue to inspire. Recent publications by Dr. Lucy Ella Rose's work uncovering information on Mary Seton Watts's participation in the suffrage movement and its connection to a feminist reading of the chapel is very revealing in terms of chapel iconography. Desna Greenhow and Catherine Hilary have not only added to a database of knowledge surrounding the pottery and art gallery, but actively participate in maintaining the intellectual community environment established by George and Mary Watts. Work done by the previous Curator, Mark Bills, offers invaluable information to the broader public, as does the little volume, *The Making of Mary Watts* by Mary McMahon.

the work itself, but also reveals fissures and distortions within the larger historical narrative of art movements and the philosophies that inspire them.

Because work like the Compton chapel exists outside of authorized institutions and, to some degree, outside of the traditional economic system of exchange, such works are not often included in anthologies or canons sponsored by these larger organizations. Yet, work done outside of large commissions and institutions is often the force for change within them. The exclusion of such works denies a fundamental part of history and the forces which change society. The formation of societies was fundamental to societal change in the nineteenth century and much of this practical work was done by women volunteers. Walter Besant called the formation of Victorian societies, “the only way to get [work] done.”<sup>369</sup> Scottish preacher, Henry Drummond, even declared that Christ created his great work by creating a society.<sup>370</sup> In the case of the Compton chapel and the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) in which it took part, work done by women philanthropists helped to open public space for women and influenced the public education of both sexes.<sup>371</sup> The Compton mortuary chapel was designed in 1895, built and dedicated by 1898, and the interior finished in 1904. This was a community project in which formally trained male artists and architects were enlisted,<sup>372</sup> however the project

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<sup>369</sup> Walter Besant, “Home Arts,” *The Art Journal* (Jan 1886): 18. According to Walter Besant, the creation of a society “is the only way to get done, or attempted, any kind of work which needs funds, organization, and concerted action.”

<sup>370</sup> Henry Drummond, *The Programme of Christianity*, (New York: James Pott & Co, 1892). Christ as the head of a society is introduced on page 17 and each chapter is titled after a different element: The Founding of the Society, The Programme of the Society, and The Machinery of the Society. Mary records re-reading the *Programme* after George’s death and remembering how much he loved it. 12-13 Jul 1904.

<sup>371</sup> For more, see Anne Anderson, “Victorian High Society and Social Duty: The Promotion of the ‘Recreative Learning and Voluntary Teaching,’” *History of Education* Vol. 31.4 (2002): 311-334.

<sup>372</sup> Louis Deuchard is listed as an architect in census data from the period. Retired architect George Redmayne is also known to have advised in some capacity. Veronica Franklin Gould proposes that local firm, Heal & Jackson did the actual building construction. See Veronica Franklin Gould, *Watts Chapel: An Arts & Crafts Memorial*,” (Farnham, Surrey: Arrow Press, 2005): 12. Also discussed in Unwin, *Woman’s Work* 24 and “Significant Other” 246.

was overwhelmingly designed by a woman and much of the labor carried out by volunteer women and men from the community.

Tellingly, the first women accepted into the most prestigious formal architectural programs began the same year in which the chapel was dedicated, with Julia Morgan at the École des Beaux-Arts and Ethel Charles at the Royal Institute of British Architects. It is clear that this is an exciting period, in which the disenfranchised were working and making changes which would alter modern institutions. The Compton mortuary chapel is built at the turn of the century and on the edge of cultural upheaval. This chapter will focus briefly on the building process, the importance of symbolism to the overall architectural plan, and the surrounding built environment, while the following chapter will look at the exterior brickwork and interior panels of the mortuary chapel in order to situate the project firmly within these contexts in an effort to bring much deserved attention to this unique built environment.

In the summer of 1896, Mary Seton Watts is fully focused on the outer panels that will encircle the Compton mortuary chapel. This is an intense period of design. The plan for the exterior portion of the building is continually in her mind, even when she is not actively working on the panels. She writes, “Every minute that I can spare must go to my ‘path’ & to my ‘garment,’”<sup>373</sup> referring to the four friezes encircling the outside of the chapel as *The Path of the Just* and the spandrels around the entryway as the *Garment of Praise*. When she is asked to write an article on George Watts’s views of religion on art, she is grateful that the topic is not one that interests. She excuses herself and references her commitment to the brickwork of the chapel. Mary records, “I said fortunately I could not be tempted, as I had not the ready pen, otherwise I

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<sup>373</sup> Mary Watts continues, “– But having no temptation to write, I can the better see how hopeless it is to capture Signors real “views” upon the “religions” = he has not put them into words himself, it is an air he breathes, & it can be only breathed out again from his pictures.” MSW Diaries 28 Aug 1896.

might have gone away from my bricks & failed!”<sup>374</sup> The language of the artist is telling. She is accustomed to writing articles on her husband’s behalf, but religion in art is not a topic easily broached. Furthermore, spirituality is better fit for symbolism which allows flexibility and insight through an association of signs with personal experience. This is just as true in George Frederic’s work as it is in Mary Seton’s brick chapel designs. Mary Watts’s own artwork benefits from her ability to turn down the opportunity. Her skilled coordination between her work and work for her husband, including the ability to reject some projects to prioritize others, seems a foundational point of her marital relationship as well as her success in finding time to express belief through her own artwork.

During the quiet moments of the day, Mary Watts takes up her notes and the ideas for the chapel exterior fill her head in the time between formal working hours. “My head is full of ‘path of the Just,’” she writes at the end of August 1896.<sup>375</sup> Just a few days previously she writes with a bit of frustration in coordinating her work. She is simultaneously installing ceiling panels over a window at Limnerslease, working on the chapel plan, and helping to entertain during portrait sittings. She writes of “a long day” working on window panels but is a bit dismayed that she “had to sit all the afternoon while Signor worked upon Lord Aldenham.”<sup>376</sup> Sitting with the politician is an imposition on her work, but Mary does so as part of her daily duties. It is not without its advantages. George’s work subsidizes the couple’s charitable endeavors including the chapel building. Mary Watts documented this aspect of his work rather humorously in *The Epsom Beggar*, in which George offers his services as an artist in order to fund The Home Arts and Industries Association (Fig. 33). Mary Seton has written on the back, “An Epsom Beggar.

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<sup>374</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Aug 1896.

<sup>375</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Aug 1896.

<sup>376</sup> MSW Diaries 26 Aug 1896.

Drawn from life by the Beggar's wife, May 30, 1895." The famous artist is depicted as a beggar with hat outstretched. George Watts also explains this aspect of their relationship in a letter discussing the prices of his artwork, writing,

My intention is as soon as I can feel secured without depending on the chance of selling, to put by no more money but spend everything I may make in some way good for other people, my wife has a peculiarly sympathetic nature and I should like her to have the means of gratifying her feelings in the direction most delightful to her.<sup>377</sup>

More significantly in terms of the social issues relevant to the chapel, portrait sittings also provide Mary Watts with an opportunity to inquire about current events and assess the perspectives of prominent voices in the art world, society and government.<sup>378</sup> These duties are important as they infer Mary's consideration of her artwork within the broader context of contemporary events and issues.

During this time, George and Mary Watts take walks together around the woods as often as possible and visit the chapel grounds together to see its progress. While a chapel notebook filled with sketches from various cultures is available at the Watts Gallery, specific notes on the chosen designs for the chapel, especially the exterior, are remarkably scarce. The notebook is filled with a few sketches from the honeymoon trip in 1886-7, notes on the ceiling panels for Limnerslease, and various sketches with notes on world religions. As Catherine Hilary noted in her essay for the republication of Mary Watts's *The Word in the Pattern*, these panels are very instructive as to later work on the chapel.<sup>379</sup> Additionally, a few pages of the chapel notebook are

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<sup>377</sup> Letter from GFW to James Smith, 11 Aug 1894.

<sup>378</sup> Veronica Franklin Gould mentions the advantage of entertaining George Watts's associates like the Burne-Joneses and the De Morgans in "Mary Watts and the Creation of Watts Chapel," *An Artists' Village*, ed. Mark Bills, 67.

<sup>379</sup> See Hilary Underwood, "'A Shout from the Heart': Tracing the Genesis of Watts Chapel in the Ceiling Decoration at Limnerslease," *The Word in the Pattern (1905): Facsimile*, eds. Bills and Greenhow (Lymington, Hampshire, Synergie Group, 2012): 6. Hilary notes major visits as Egypt, Constantinople, Athens, and Messina as very influential and traces the notebook symbolism of the Tree of Life, in particular, to the Limnerslease ceiling and the later chapel decoration.

dedicated to a general plan of the building as a whole and an outline of the attributes which will be symbolized in each section of the interior panels of the chapel. Little is written of the intermediate research for the exterior panels, indicating that other notebooks were used for these designs.

### 3.1 Chapel Project and Built Environment: The Embodiment of Arts and Crafts Philosophy

The cemetery and chapel building project can be understood as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement, bound up with ideas about labour and community as discussed in the previous chapter. This process of creating a built environment for community mourning is as much a part of the art movement as any relationship to formal aesthetics. The Compton cemetery project fulfilled William Morris's written declaration of the importance of merging the fine arts with handicraft out of respect for the labor of the artist and a recognition of his or her humanity, making the joy of creation and the freedom to create a priority on par with the product itself. Likewise, it fulfills Ruskin's emphasis on locally sourced materials and labor.<sup>380</sup> The project accomplishes these tasks by creating a communal space which will serve a practical purpose for local residents, as well as a feeling of community through working together with a shared goal.

Mary Watts organized pottery classes for local residents willing to volunteer in creating a personalized community cemetery space. These classes were part of Eglantyne Jebb's Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA). The HAIA provided upper class women with an organization within which they could teach artistic skills and had a philanthropic aim of uplifting the working classes. The organization provided a new space within the Arts and Crafts

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<sup>380</sup> This is discussed by Ruskin especially in *Lamps of Architecture* 45-6 and *Stones of Venice* 240. See discussion in Chapter 2.

Movement, sympathizing with opinions like those of Ruskin and Morris<sup>381</sup> that art and craft be reunited and that all people might create and enjoy art, merging philosophy with action. As an early article on the HAIA explained, art was understood as “the birthright” of humanity.<sup>382</sup>

Eglantyne Louisa Jebb was the founder and leader of the HAIA, writing articles on its importance and recruiting teachers. She explained her vision of art spreading to all classes in *The Magazine of Art* by quoting George Sand, “A day will come when the laboring man will be an artist also, able to enjoy what is beautiful.”<sup>383</sup> The Home Arts and Industries Association aimed to improve work by removing it from the impersonalized realm of big industry and placing it back under the control of the individual. Mary Watts wrote of a conversation on the importance of the Home Arts “& what it gave to the poor, whose life is too often like the grind of a machine!”<sup>384</sup>

Mary Watts dedicated her book on chapel symbolism, *The Word in the Pattern*, “To Eglantine Jebb, who by the gift of sympathy first called about her a little gathering of workers from her village to practice the beautiful art of wood carving, and from which beginnings sprang forth the many workers forming the Association of the Home Arts and

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<sup>381</sup> For more on the importance of the HAIA and its history, see Anderson 311-334. Ruskin’s and Morris’s writings are understood to have inspired many of the arts and crafts societies including HAIA, however, the HAIA was often dismissed as missing the mark by only producing amateur work. This was the characterization made in early histories like J. W. Mackail’s biography, *The Life of William Morris*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1899): 199. Anne Anderson proposes that this was largely due to “the threat such amateur societies presented to the professional craftsman” (317). The organization was sometimes seen as a way to keep “idle hands” out of mischief. See “Home Arts and Industries Association,” *Charity Organization Review*, Vol. 2.19 (15 Jul 1886): 259-260. The article is also interesting for its reassurance that exhibition sales “in no way interferes with existing trades” (260).

<sup>382</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, “The Home Arts and Industries Association,” *Charity Organisation Review*, Vol. 4. 40 (Apr 1888): p. 137.

<sup>383</sup> E. L. Jebb, “The Home Arts and Industries Association,” *The Magazine of Art* 8 (Jan 1885): 294. The quotation is from George Sand’s fictional novel *La Mare au Diable*. Sand does not suggest the laboring man should make artworks necessarily but hopes that he will someday have enough of the comforts of life to enjoy the beauty that surrounds him. Like the artist, “the happiest of men would be he who, working intelligently and laboring with his hands, drawing comfort and liberty from the exercise of his intelligent strength, should have time to live through his heart and his brain, to comprehend his work and that of God.” George Sand, *The Haunted Pool*, trans. Frank Hunter Potter (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1890): 18.

<sup>384</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Aug 1893.

Industries.” Mary continues, “These few pages endeavoring to explain the spirit in the work done by us at Compton for our chapel, are dedicated with love and gratitude.”<sup>385</sup> Chapel decorations were displayed at the HAIA annual exhibitions of 1897, 1898, and 1899.<sup>386</sup> The appendix to *Word* lists “the names of those who have modelled any part of the Terra-Cotta Work on the Chapel,” emphasizing the communal work, in alphabetical order. The chapel is never referred to as “Watts Chapel,” but as “our chapel” or “the chapel,” and “work done by us,” using inclusive language. A paragraph at the end explains, “of these the workers daily for nearly two years were: --Louis Deuchars, George Andrews, Thomas Steadman and Frank Mitchell, without whose intelligent interest and unfailing help the work could not have been done.” The passage continues to note significant work done by Thomas Steadman, Clarence Sex, and retired architect Mr. George Redmayne.<sup>387</sup> In a letter from George Watts to Briton Rivière, urging a visit, he writes, “I am most desirous that you should see what we are trying to do...my wife has pretty nearly the whole villiage [*sic*] of Compton helping to carry out a design she has for stimulating interest in the country life and home of the people.”<sup>388</sup>

The participation of local businesses and community volunteers together in an effort to build their own mortuary space is an important element of the Arts and Crafts philosophy. Mary Watts describes the decorators as working “under unusual conditions—much of the work having been done gratuitously, and all of it with the love that made the work delightful.”<sup>389</sup> These “unusual conditions” increase the value of the chapel as per Ruskin’s direction in *Lamps of*

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<sup>385</sup> *Word* (1905) Dedication.

<sup>386</sup> For a helpful chronology, see the appendix to Bills *Artist’s Village* 162. The yearly exhibition ensured that artworks were publicly displayed and provided an important opportunity for female artists to operate within the economy. “The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Royal Albert Hall,” *The Studio* Vol. 11 (Aug 1897): 112 mentions the Garment of Praise panel on display.

<sup>387</sup> *Word* (1905) 27-28.

<sup>388</sup> Letter from GFW to Briton Riviere, 6 Feb 1896, National Portrait Gallery, Heinz Archive, GFW/13/123 and 127 or Vol 13, pg. 137.

<sup>389</sup> *Word* (1905) 5.

*Architecture* while also valuing the happiness of the workers, fulfilling William Morris's *Aims of Art*.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, Mary Watts's initial conception of the Compton cemetery is a disruption to the commercialized mortuary industry which provided an impersonal stock of headstones. The Compton cemetery project and the HAIA itself occupies a liminal space between capitalism and volunteerism, mixing and perhaps erasing the boundaries that divide these two spaces that were so often gendered as male or female.<sup>391</sup> The HAIA participated within an Arts and Crafts movement dominated in elite artistic spaces by male artists and male organizations like the Art Worker's Guild. The HAIA sought help from both men and women members. It was a society in which both artistic husband and wife could work together and many did.<sup>392</sup> However, classes were often taught by upper-middle class women volunteering time and talent.<sup>393</sup> While unpaid instructors, these women found a voice within the movement through teaching classes and organizing exhibitions through which participation in the economic markets took place. However, the organization was often left out published works on the Arts and Crafts Movements because it took place outside of the regular channels of economic production as part of the charitable philanthropy movement. Anne Anderson proposes that this may have been due to "the threat such amateur societies presented to the professional craftsman."<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> For more on this, see chapter 2.

<sup>391</sup> Unwin argues that Mary Watts was able to "draw the public sphere into the physical geography of her own private realm" by "aligning herself with the craft of decoration, a traditional site of femininity." See Unwin, "Significant Other" 237-250.

<sup>392</sup> More work could be done in this area. An early article calls out the relationships of women in the movement to male artists. See Julian Holder, "The Home Arts and Industries Association," *The Sheffield Art Review* (1893): 13-20. Holder writes, "In many cases teaching was undertaken by the wives and daughters of established professional artists. This included Mrs Heywood Sumner, Mrs GF Watts and Mrs W.A.S. Benson; graduates from early women's colleges also gave their services" (13-14). Artist George Haywood Sumner was married to HAIA teacher Agnes Benson, sister to William Arthur Smith Benson whose wife is also listed. E.J. Poynter, married to Agnes Macdonald, served on the Vice Presidency of the HAIA. Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey Blunt worked together in Haslemere on textiles.

<sup>393</sup> In the words of a contemporary article, "taught almost entirely by volunteer teachers, in most cases ladies, sometimes men, in a few cases working men." See Bosanquet, "Home Arts," *Charity Organization Review* 135.

<sup>394</sup> Anderson 311-334, especially 317. Ruskin's and Morris's writings are understood to have inspired many of the arts and crafts societies including HAIA, however, the HAIA was often dismissed as missing the mark by only producing amateur work. This was the characterization made in early histories like J. W. Mackail's biography, *The*

The Compton cemetery project fits within this movement in which boundaries are questioned and the hierarchal oppositions of male/female, teacher/student, fine art/handicraft, public/private, and economy/philanthropy were breeched, confused, and recombined. The active roles taken by women artists to change the organization of society is keenly felt within the history of charitable societies and clubs which took place in a space outside of the academy exhibitions and the regular channels of artistic production. It is through these systems of socialization and the HAIA, which initially lay outside of economic commerce, that Mary Watts was able to traverse the boundaries that separated the private domestic sphere from the public artistic realm.<sup>395</sup> Her effort to emphasize community work, as well as the non-industrial nature of the work, seems intentional and fits within the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement in which she is involved.

Mary Watts is the driving force behind the building of the chapel and its design, but it is conceived as a project belonging to the community. By 1900, the little charitable organization began crossing boundaries into the realm of public economy. Mary noted that many of her HAIA students were interested in establishing full time employment in the pottery trade and she formed Compton Potter's Art Guild.<sup>396</sup> This would provide full time employment to some members of the local community and would fulfill the aim of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the HAIA to establish artistic practices which would be financially beneficial to the community while also allowing an amount of control over artistic products through the formation of what Mary termed

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*Life of William Morris*, Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1899): 199. The Wattses noted some shortcomings, but on the whole, were inspired by the level of work that came from the organization.

<sup>395</sup> Malanie Unwin effectively demonstrated that the Watts Chapel can be seen as "a tool of negotiation" for Mary Watts, who was able to use the project to work in the borderlands of public and private space. See Unwin, "Significant Other" 237-50.

<sup>396</sup> Gould *Watts Chapel* 39-48. Hilary Underwood, "Compton Pottery," in *Artist's*, ed. Bills, 103-105. In 1901, Mary found that she needed assistance in running the business in order to finish the interior of the chapel. With the help of James Morton, she shrewdly acquired James Nicol who had been the successful manager of Cumnock Pottery for twenty years with the promise of a high salary and idyllic lifestyle.

a “guild.”<sup>397</sup> An effort was even made to expand internationally. Louis Deuchars, who had helped with the Chapel, opened a pottery branch near Mary Watts’s home in Aldourie, Scotland.<sup>398</sup> Mary Seton directed the management of Compton Pottery until 1920 when she allowed the potters to take partial control. The pottery underwent several changes and outlived Mary Watts, survived two world wars and finally closed in 1951 after the Board of Trade imposed a 100% purchasing tax.<sup>399</sup> As Mary Watts negotiated the boundaries of private versus public spheres that separated much of Victorian society along gendered lines, she blurred the boundaries of charity and commerce as well as that of artist and craftswoman. The Compton cemetery and chapel project demonstrate the upheaval of social divisions at the end of the century as traditional categories were questioned, interrupted, and renegotiated.

Essential to a study of the chapel and relevant to the Arts and Crafts philosophy of the building as a local and communal project, is the consideration of the context of the mortuary setting. Mary Watts is not designing a solitary building, rather she is concerned with the entire built environment. In fact, as discussed earlier, the chapel project is initially an ancillary outgrowth of the plan to provide classes for local citizens who wished to design personal memorials for loved ones passed.<sup>400</sup> This progression is a testament to the chapel as part of a

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<sup>397</sup> The boundary between autonomous artist and a communal guild is a messy one. Mary maintained control over designs for most of her life, as discussed earlier. There has also been criticism that the potters did not learn design as Mary initially intended, but that most workers practiced repetitive jobs described as unskilled labor. By 1930, the pottery was having difficulty in finding a new manager. Mary Watts’s friend and associate James Morton was enlisted to help. He called upon Leonard S. Elton who was very critical of the amount of control that Mary Watts seemed to employ and to the use of moulds which was considered unskilled labour. See his letter to Morton, 27 Aug 1930, Blythe House Archive, Sir James Morton & Morton Sundour AAD/1978/4.

<sup>398</sup> The company probably did not survive longer than five years, as clay imported from Compton became very expensive and did not retain the same longevity in the new climate. For a detailed account of the Compton Pottery and the many changes it underwent, see especially Underwood, “Compton,” 103-119; Hilary Calvert, *Compton Pottery* (Romsey, Hampshire: BAS Printers, 2006); and Gould “Archibald.”

<sup>399</sup> Underwood, “Compton,” 103-119.

<sup>400</sup> Veronica Franklin Gould relates this story in context with her own unhappiness concerning an aunt’s gravestone. See Gould, “Mary Watts,” *Artists’ Village* 67 and *Watts Chapel* 4-5. Compton recognized the need for more cemetery space by 1888, but final approval for needed land purchases were not recognized until March of 1895.

larger built environment which encompasses individual headstones and memorials, cemetery well and gate, as well as the hillside of trees rising up from the country road (fig. 34).<sup>401</sup> The built architecture is intended to work together with the natural environment in a symbiosis between man and nature as a symbolic outgrowth of the philosophy of cycles.<sup>402</sup>

Nature and manufacture work together in visible harmony in the chapel project, as described in *The International Studio*. The article on the mortuary chapel describes in poetic words the cycle of life and death encompassed in the environment of the space in which the trees are an integral part of the atmosphere.

To be buried beneath the shadow of spreading branches has peculiar fitness. The horror of a flat, treeless graveyard comes to mind vividly as you pass through the lych-gate and contrast it with the idyllic restful God's acre, set apart for the little village of Compton, whose old Norman church is seen amid the red roofs of the cottages across the fields of the north.<sup>403</sup>

Veronica Franklin Gould writes that Mary Watts even planted the little yew trees that now dominate much of the landscape.<sup>404</sup> Concerning the importance placed on the natural setting in architectural planning, one contemporary architect wrote that the single most important element that visitors enjoyed about his architecture was not in the building itself, but “the water and the trees” which the architectural devices pointed to through gaps in the colonnade and “the flower-

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Mary Watts acted quickly, writing to the Parish council with an offer of the chapel and completing a model by August of 1895.

<sup>401</sup> A contemporary article on the chapel notes a fight to keep the trees as part of the cemetery. See “A Mortuary Chapel” 235-240.

<sup>402</sup> The consideration of a park-like setting can also be considered within architectural movements at the time which separated ideal art from commerce by placing artistic buildings in segments of the city separated from commercial districts. See, for example, the discussion Bernard Maybeck's work including the Palace of Fine Arts from the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915. Maybeck's work is interesting in conjunction with the Compton chapel as it is situated between interests in the Arts and Crafts philosophy of Ruskin and Morris, but yet taking part in the Beaux-Arts tradition. See especially chapter six, “Craftsmanship and Grandeur in an Architectural Mood” in William Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976): 275-313.

<sup>403</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel” 236.

<sup>404</sup> Gould, *Watts Chapel*, 7. Gould notes that a tree was also cut down to make room for the building of the chapel by Heal & Jackson. See “Mary Watts,” *An Artist's Village* 71.

covered pergolas.”<sup>405</sup> Rather than supplying nature as a contrast to the building structure through gaps in the built environment, the chapel at Compton points to nature through illustrated decoration as part of the structure well as in the material design of the building from local clay which connects the building to nature rather than providing its counterpoint, or “bribing the public” to look at architecture by providing a natural setting as stated by the architect.

The wellhead in the cemetery also illustrates this relationship between man’s labor and natural creation. It was placed in 1906 as displayed in the metalwork (Fig. 35). Each of the six sides of the wellhead is made of terracotta carvings. It must be circled clockwise in order to read the inscription along the rim and features Celtic designs that illustrate the meaning of each panel. The entire message reads, “The Lord God / planted a garden / Eastward in Eden / and a river went / out of Eden to / water the garden.” The scripture illustrates the story of the very first instance in which man and nature must work together in Genesis 2: 8-10. Under the panel reading, “The Lord God,” an angel with closed eyes carries a jug labelled, “Water of Life” (Fig. 36). The invisible and spiritual force of creation is symbolized by both the water and the closed eyes of the robed angel, indicating invisible spiritual truth. The compliment to spiritual creation, its physical embodiment, is symbolized in the next panel. Underneath the inscription, “Planted a Garden,” an open-eyed angel carries a tree in the format of heart-shaped leafy branches enfolding a human figure emanating from a knot of trunk and roots labelled, “Tree of Life” (Fig. 37). The well contains a symbolic illustration of the cemetery’s built environment. It illustrates the balance between man and nature with labor imagined as existing peacefully alongside natural creation. Material creation, whether natural or manmade, is an embodiment of spiritual, or undying, truth. The symbiosis between nature and manufacture can be understood as a testament

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<sup>405</sup> Ben Macomber, *The Jewel City: Its Planning and Achievement; Its Architecture, Sculpture, Symbolism, and Music; Its Gardens, Palaces, and Exhibits* (San Francisco and Tacoma: John H. Williams, 1915): 102.

to the Arts and Crafts philosophy valuing human labor and work within a natural environment and sourced from the natural tendency to create useful and beautiful production from local resources.

The cemetery environment further conveys an idea of mutualism between the living and the dead. Grave markers are made of unfinished and unpolished clay and stone. Moss has quickly grown over parts of headstones from underneath and trees cradle from above and between (Fig. 38-41). The result is aesthetically picturesque, but also a peaceful reminder of the cycles of birth and death, of made things coming from and returning to the earth. The harmony between living and non-living was well understood as part of a contemporary movement to reform cemetery space.<sup>406</sup> A review on the HAIA exhibit from 1900 offers the opinion that

the most interesting of the exhibits—because it is one that gives a chance of reform in a very important matter to those who care to take it—was a simple little headstone for a grave, perfectly free from the vulgarity that is so prevalent... When we can see, that of the earth, in which they are laid, we can make quite beautiful things to mark the resting places of our dead, we may hope to banish vulgarity....<sup>407</sup>

This passage, inspired by Mary Watts's Compton Terra Cotta Home Arts, reveals the influence of the Arts and Crafts philosophy specific to the cemetery space, in which impersonal commerce was understood as a vulgarity that had imposed upon the aesthetic beauty of humble memorials created from the local earth as a testament to the cycles of life and death. This process was best

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<sup>406</sup> See, for example, William Brindley and Weatherley, *Ancient Sepulchral Monuments* (London: Vincent Books, 1888), which made cemetery designs available in order to encourage smaller monuments and tasteful designs. This may have been used by Mary Watts as it was directed to British designers and included a large section of Celtic markers and crosses of which Mary Watts was also aware. A review of the book in the *Athenaeum* also notes the intended use of the book for cemetery reform. Review of *Ancient*, *Athenaeum* (21 Jul 1888): 103.

<sup>407</sup> Mabel Cox, "The Home Arts and Industries Association," *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* (American Edition), Vol. 28, No. 247 (Aug 1900): 150. A sepulcher monument with a Chi Rho surrounded by peacocks and grape vines from Brindley and Weatherley was also reproduced in "Ancient Sepulchral Monuments," *The Building News & Engineering Journal* 41 (23 Dec 1881): 824-860. See Brindley Pl. 28.

accomplished through natural resources and the personal creative efforts of friends and relatives as a part of the ritual of community mourning.

In terms of creating a community of mourning, the cemetery space is sacred to the artist Mary Watts on a personal level as well. Most immediately, she is keenly aware of the dawning of her own beloved husband's life. George Watts would pass away in 1904, the same year that the interior of the chapel was completed. With this personal consideration in mind, a Buddhist story relating instruction on living with grief after the death of a loved one seems particularly relevant to the sense of community that was also built at Compton through the cooperative design of the cemetery. The story is summarized at the top of one of Mary Watts's pages of research notes on world religions, although it is not immediately related to the text on the rest of the page. In the story, a mother fears the imminent death of her sick child and goes to the Rishi to ask for a cure. She is directed to bring back mustard seed as medicine, but was warned "take it not from any hand or house / Where father, mother, child, or slave hath died." At every door, the woman is offered seed as well as piteous compassion. However, when asked if there had been a death in the house, the afflicted reply was always the same, "the dead / Are very many, and the living few."<sup>408</sup>

The woman is not able to find seed from a house untouched by death nor is she able to evade the touch of death herself. The Master reveals that although there is no cure for death, there is comfort in shared grief. Sir Edwin Arnold's poetic Victorian version explains, "the whole wide world weeps with thy woe: / the grief which all hearts share grows less for one."<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Lines from Edwin Arnold, "Book the Fifth," *The Light of Asia or The Great Reunification Being The Life and Teaching of Gautama Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism* (London: Trübner & Co., 1885): 104. *The Light of Asia* was first published in 1879. The story can also be found in H.C. Dubose, "The Tola of Mustard Seed," in *The Dragon, Image, and Demon* (London: S. W. Partridge And Co., 1886): 156-157.

<sup>409</sup> Arnold 105.

In other versions of the story, Buddha sometimes replies by comparing the mortal body to clay in a message that resonates well with the chapel, “As all earthen vessels made by the potter end in being broken, so is the life of mortals.”<sup>410</sup> The use of clay is certainly symbolic of creation for Mary Watts and she emphasizes the point that “the clay of Surrey” was modelled “by Compton hands,”<sup>411</sup> drawing a literal connection between the two. The concept was also immortalized in William DeMorgan’s shining red vase made by Sands End Pottery (Fig. 42), on which the words are emblazoned, “All this of pot and potter tell me then who is the potter, pray and who the pot.”<sup>412</sup> The built environment of the chapel project creates a space in which mortality is experienced as a community in order to make grief grow less for the individual by sharing it between all. In this manner, the Compton cemetery chapel is the Arts and Crafts philosophy of noncommercial community building made flesh.

### 3.2 Symbolism: An Artistic Language for Modern Thought

The story of the mustard seed is also interesting in terms of the contrast between an overtly Christian discussion of the Compton chapel and the designer’s increasing interest in world religions and especially Eastern philosophy. The chapel symbolism is often seen as heavily Christian, which is linked with the Celtic stylization overt in the chapel decoration. Mary Watts quotes biblical passages both inside the chapel as well as in her book on its symbolism. However, she also took inspiration from other sources and surviving notes reveal an intense interest in world religions and civilizations. This is perhaps first apparent from the honeymoon

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<sup>410</sup> Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha According to Old Records*, (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1895): 188.

<sup>411</sup> *Word* (1905) 5.

<sup>412</sup> The quote is from *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Earlier lines read, “When my soul and thine have fitted, they will place a couple of bricks upon my grave and thine. Then to make bricks for other tombs they will send to the kiln my dust and thine” (162). *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: English, French, German, Italian, and Danish Translations Comparitively Arranged in Accordance with the text of Edward Fitzgerald’s Version*, Ed by Nathan Haskell Dole, Vol. I (Boston: L.C. Page and Co., 1904).

trip that she planned with George Frederic Watts to regions of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Greece, and a few surviving sketches from the trip. Journal entries record a particular fascination with ancient architectural remains in Egypt, as well as the modern people that the couple encountered (Figure 43).<sup>413</sup> Mary Watts studied world religions and iconography from around the world and kept a book of notes taken from various sources. One such book is *The Migration of Symbols*, a culmination of publications and lectures by Eugène d'Alviella with introduction by Sir Birdwood.<sup>414</sup> The publication date is 1896 and Mary Watts writes of having a proof of this work in her chapel notebook.<sup>415</sup> However, Mary writes of meeting George Birdwood in October of 1893 and talks of learning a great deal from him.<sup>416</sup> The book is valuable as a reminder of the turn of the century interest in discovering overlapping symbols across diverse cultures. Birdwood writes that he hopes the work will “exert an abiding influence on the whole future of the study of symbolism,” as well as “the decorative designs of the artistic industries of the West.”<sup>417</sup> The English publication was intended to bring this symbolism into the schools of art as well as archeology.<sup>418</sup> Mary incorporates passages as well as sketches from this source into her notes.

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<sup>413</sup> Mary Watts writes that George was less impressed with the pyramids aesthetically as “they came too much into competition with nature,” but that they were respected as “great monuments to the labour and skill of the workmen.” See *Annals* Vol. II 66. They are, however, struck by the aesthetic beauty of the modern workers themselves remarking, “he began to think the Western complexion was quite a mistake!” *Annals* Vol. 22 67-8. Mary Watts describes the flowing clothing of passers-by, “not dressed but clothed,” which interest is also recorded in her sketches in the Chapel Notebook, Watts Gallery Archive. See *Annals* II 64.

<sup>414</sup> *La Migration des Symboles* was first published in French and subsequently in English with the forward by Birdwood. However, Birdwood notes that several papers had been given by Goblet d'Alviella on various topics over the years. The volume is also part of the Hibbert Lectures. The French version was also reviewed in the *Atheneum* in 1892.

<sup>415</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, Watts Gallery Archive, unpaginated.

<sup>416</sup> Birdwood was born in India, went to school in Edinburgh and returned to India as a medical doctor. He became a sheriff at Bombay. He was respected in Britain for his knowledge of India and seems to have also had a deep respect for Indian culture, although he can also be considered a controversial part of the British Imperialist effort. Mary Watts records his opinion that “he goes so far as to consider that the last thousand years have been the dark ages, having lost the fine religious conceptions of India & the philosophy of the Greeks. Hypatia he considers the first martyr for science.” MSW Diaries 15 Nov 1893. Hypatia would also become a symbol for the feminist movement.

<sup>417</sup> George Birdwood, Introduction, *The Migration of Symbols*, by Count Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, *The Migration of Symbols* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1894): vii.

<sup>418</sup> Birdwood viii.

Interest in world civilizations at the turn of the century often took the form of a positivist historiography following a linear progression of civilizations from mythic to scientific. This teleological advancement of civilizations is also found in art from the period. For example, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. features *The Evolution of Civilization*. Despite being round to fit the collar of the dome, the mural suggests a linear progression beginning with ancient Egypt's angelic attribute of writing and ending with America's attribute of science<sup>419</sup> (Fig. 44). There are indications that Mary's earlier work for the Limmerslease ceiling begins this way. A drawing near the beginning of the chapel notebook of sketches held at the Watts Gallery shows a planned layout for one section. The sketch begins with a corner section marked "Prehistoric" and "Central American," then "Egypt," "Hebrew," and so on (Fig. 45). However, the sections are revised, scratched out, and worked through. As Hilary pointed out, some of the symbols on the Limmerslease ceiling can be understood as inspiring later decorations for the mortuary chapel.<sup>420</sup> Indeed, ceiling panels and mortuary decorations demonstrate the same interest in civilizations, often using overlapping symbols. However, the maturation of Mary Watts's symbolic language from neat squares, often with a single symbol which is sometimes copied from one of her books, and the complex, interwoven designs uniquely altered by the artist, is rather significant.

Mary Watts began and finished most of her work on the Limmerslease ceiling in 1891, however, the final window panels were not installed until 1896. Panels in the sitting room, or Red Room, are predominately a celebration of life with symbolic representations of the "joy of

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<sup>419</sup> For more on the "evolutionary view of history" in American Art, see Corn *Women Building*, 20-22.

<sup>420</sup> Catherine Hilary's "A Shout," in *Word* 5-13. The essay focuses on the evolution of the Tree of Life design from the Limmerslease ceiling to the Chapel. Catherine Hilary also wrote an article outlining the plan for the ceiling panels at Limmerslease, grouped into three areas: the entryway hall, the Red Room, and a section of ceiling between the Red Room and the bay window. All panels were designed in 1891 and most were installed at that time, but the window panels do not go up until 1896. See Catherine Hilary, "Mary Watts's Ceiling Decoration at Limmerslease," *Artists' Village*, ed. Mark Bills 157-161.

work,” “joy of the senses,” “joy of the soul,” and “joy of the heart.” They draw upon disparate images, from bees to butterflies to Egyptian hieroglyphs. The area also reveals the Watts’ interest and love of birds, which are portrayed symbolically in the panels much like they will be in the later chapel iconography. While George Watts was very ill, Mary records a conversation in which the heron is seen as “an omen of the soul ‘migrating to the unseen,’”<sup>421</sup> which gives further indication that birds play a symbolic role in representing a bridge between life and death. Mary chooses the owl, phoenix, pelican, and cock. The hallway ceiling is most relevant to Mary’s research on cultures and religions. This section contains five civilization panels described as relating to Egypt, Chaldea, Buddha, Brahman, and Hebrew. Surrounding panels consist of single symbols drawn from Mary Watts’s research on ancient art.

Sketches from the first half of the chapel notebook are easily matched to ceiling panels portraying ancient symbols and civilizations. The Egyptian panel, for example, contains the winged sun symbol (Fig. 26). This was a symbol seen by Mary and George repeatedly on the archeological ruins visited on their trip down the Nile River. Both artists were awed by the symbol and Mary writes of her intention to use it in her designs. Several sketches appear in the notebook. Most strikingly, a repetition of the image three times with carefully drawn feathers and writing indicating the symbolism for “creator,” “preserver,” “destroyer,” and the central disk representing “creation” itself (Fig. 46).<sup>422</sup> These symbols were understood as sun symbols prevalent across cultures,<sup>423</sup> but most strikingly represented by the ancient Egyptians. Amongst these symbols is also the Assyrian version, which shows a man rising from the central circle, also

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<sup>421</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Jun 1904.

<sup>422</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook unpaginated.

<sup>423</sup> Irene Cockroft also notes the use of the sun in feminist art of the period symbolizing the optimism of a new day for women. See Cockroft, *New Dawn* 13.

sketched in the Chapel Notebook and used in the Chaldean panel (Fig. 47 and 48).<sup>424</sup> The Chaldean panel features winged figures with beards and helmets standing on either side of a tree with a sun circle in the middle with cones on each branch which extend from the center like rungs on a ladder. There is a visual similarity between the image and the tree of life on the exterior of the chapel. However, the most striking similarity is between the roots of the Chaldean tree which knot in graceful circles around medallions at the bottom of the panel and the stylistically Art Nouveau Tree of Life roots in the chapel decoration. The panel on Buddhism utilizes the lotus flower and Bodhi tree, also a tree of knowledge (Fig. 49).<sup>425</sup> It features medallions and mazes that will also decorate the chapel space. Interestingly, Mary Seton transfers the iconography of the lotus flower to the side panels of the bronze triptych of *The Messenger* and *Love and Death* (Fig. 50). Mary Seton wrote of the lotus as an emblem of perfection and of cycles.<sup>426</sup> She also notes the tradition of Maya, Buddha's mother, as seated on a lotus flower. In Mary's design, a winged angel sits on the lotus holding a seashell and surrounded by butterflies emerging from the cocoon, symbolism that will also be used for the unity of creation and the hope of resurrection in the chapel. Circular mandalas with spoked wheels and flowers decorate the pages of her notebook, the ceiling panels, and the chapel decoration. Reference materials noted by Mary Watts indicate that many of these images are understood as shared between various cultures. They also convey profound spiritual and

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<sup>424</sup> Hilary notes that it is almost identical to a panel in the British Museum, donated by Henry Layard in the 19<sup>th</sup> C. Mary Watts's notebook is filled with sketches from Layard's discoveries. See Hilary "Ceiling" *An Artists' Village* ed. Bills 160.

<sup>425</sup> For more on the ceiling panels, also see Rahrig 30-40.

<sup>426</sup> It was understood as a symbol of the solar matrix, emblemizing the cyclical rising and setting of the sun. It was connected to Egypt, as part of creation mythology connected to Hathor, but also to Brahma and Buddhism. Mary writes of these things in her chapel notebook and references G. Maspero, *Revue de l'hisotire des religions* 1889 and probably also utilizes Goblet d'Alviella, *Migration of Symbols* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1894): esp. pgs. 28-31. See MSW Chapel Notebook unpaginated. The Lotus's wheel-like spokes of petals were also a symbol of cycles as written about in MSW 3/History Notebook. These ideas are probably taken from Monier-Williams.

philosophical ideas about life and death. A close study of the iconography of the chapel within the context of these writings and sketches reveals a symbolism of shared culture within the walls of Compton, which will become more striking as the elements of the chapel are studied in depth in the following chapter.

The process of completing the Limnerslease ceiling provided Mary Watts with experiential practice. She struggled with varying materials in order to reach the desired effect. She became intimately acquainted with the symbols that later become her artistic language. Most significantly, however, the hierarchy of civilizations that commonly results from the ordering of cultures is destroyed in the circular nature of the chapel architecture and by Mary Watts's interwoven mixture of designs inspired by disparate cultures, erasing the boundaries of periods and peoples as will be further demonstrated in the iconographical study in the following chapter. While the voice of Mary Watts's artistic language might be considered dominantly Celtic, it is a voice that comes out of, influences, and is influenced by other powerful cultural symbols. This change in format from the initially linear and separately categorized ceiling panels to the circular interaction of symbols in the chapel can be understood as an essential element in the philosophy of the chapel panels.

As Veronica Franklin Gould noted in her work on the chapel, George and Mary Watts discussed "the evolution of the idea of goodness in the mind of man, leading up to the knowledge that love is all."<sup>427</sup> Mary's shifting use of symbols from various cultures as well as her research into the use of repeated symbols throughout time, suggests the potential goodness in the mind of man across traditional boundaries of religion or nationality. The shift from the much more linear, two-dimensional, and teleologically oriented progression in the Limnerslease ceiling

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<sup>427</sup> See Gould, "Mary Watts," *Artists's Village* 79 from MSW Diaries 11 Nov 1897.

demonstrates a move away from the disposition of positivistic progression displayed in many contemporary narratives and nationalistic art programs. Mary expresses dissatisfaction with her earlier panel designs in her journal, saying “The window panels are all up. I am glad they are but I think I should like to do them all over again.”<sup>428</sup> It is the modest expression of an artist perfecting her craft; yet, as it is expressed in 1896 during the frenzied planning stages of the chapel, it is also a revealing indication of how Mary Watts’s aesthetics have changed over the intervening five years.

A non-linear progression is not only encouraged in the intermingling of symbols from various cultures throughout the chapel design, but also in its rather revolutionary and intentionally symbolic architecture.<sup>429</sup> It can be seen as a usurpation of linear positivistic history in which non-Western culture is placed at the apex. In *Word in the Pattern*, Mary Watts writes that the form of the chapel is linked to the eight round churches built in England<sup>430</sup> in commemoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.<sup>431</sup> From the ground of the interior and exterior, the shape of the church is predominately round. Interestingly, however, the transept which extends beyond the circular building footprint, creates the shape of a cross. The mortuary chapel does not simply have a cross-shaped interior plan, nor does it have a central

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<sup>428</sup> MSW 21 Oct 1896.

<sup>429</sup> Heal and Jackson, a nearby architectural firm, as well as retired architect George Redmayne probably helped with complex structural design to ensure the integrity of the building. Gould reports that “the entrance and lich-gate were carved by Compton joiners...the small bricks and arched dair bricks made in Guildford by Messrs E and A Miles and the Roman roof tiles made at Mile’s Cranleigh works, all erected by Heal and Jackson of Puttenham” (12). Veronica Franklin Gould, *Watts Chapel: An Arts & Crafts Memorial*, (Farnham, Surrey: Arrow Press, 12. Also discussed in Unwin, *Woman’s Work* 24 and “Significant Other” 246. See also Elizabeth Beazley, “Watts Chapel,” *Architectural Review* 130 (1961) 1961: 166-172. Beazley states, “Mrs. Watts designed the building without professional help,” but does not address the issue of professional help with the building structure. Rather, the article is concerned with design.

<sup>430</sup> Four churches survive as functional buildings with new additions. They are: Temple Church in London, Holy Sepulchre Church in Northampton, The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge, and St. John the Baptist in Little Maplestead.

<sup>431</sup> *Word* 24-5.

dome with four extended arms radiating outward. Rather, the architecture of the building physically divides the circular walls and domed ceiling into the shape of a Greek cross by the four short arms of the interrupting transept. The plan is based on the circle—a symbol of eternity and perfection—intersected by the cross—the linear progression of mortality ending in imminent death.

Remarkably, the chapel forms a perfect Greek Cross when imaged from an aerial view (Fig. 51). However, a visitor inside the chapel would find the circle predominates experientially. While many churches contain a cross in the ground plan, the Compton chapel's use of the Greek cross within the circle of the walls themselves is unique. It is perhaps close in design to the five-domed cruciform plan of the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>432</sup> The Church of the Holy Apostles in Athens, for example, forms a Greek Cross floorplan similar to Compton. The circle in the square idea is conveyed by five domes covering five squares—domes over each of the four arms of the cross plus one in the center. A similar symbolism might be found in the architecture surrounding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as well, which was the specific building mentioned by Mary Watts in *Word in the Pattern*. However, Compton's design is quite different and it results in the clean, simple lines of the cross designed to be seen from a top view while leaving the impression of a domed building from the interior. Attempting to turn the attention of the architectural community to the chapel in the 1960's, Elizabeth Beazley explained,

The roof is simply a cross-ridged structure supported on four semicircular arches where the drum cuts off the walls where it meets the cruciform. There is clearly no excuse for imagining a dome, even if the building was entered blindfold with no awareness of its outer form; however, the circular plan of the interior together with the round arches decorated in the same material of the walls give this fleeting illusion.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> According to Gertrude Bell, who studied and wrote about Eastern Europe at the turn of the century, the "five-domed cruciform" church was the most prevalent type of ecclesiastical architecture in Eastern Europe after the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. See Bell and Ramsay, *Thousand and One Churches* (London: Hodder, 1909): 300. Elizabeth Beazley makes the connection to Byzantine architecture and "the fortress of Mistra." See Beazley 168.

<sup>433</sup> Beazley 172.

The observation that the illusion is “fleeting” is perhaps the most controversial element of the statement, as Mary Watts has indeed created a dome-like space, emphasized by the circular apex and the iconographical path around the walls.<sup>434</sup> In terms of contemporary architecture, the design might be compared to Bernard Maybeck’s First Church of Christ in Berkeley California. Maybeck’s architecture is a unique combination of arts and crafts philosophy mixed with Beaux-Arts grandeur. Philosophically, Maybeck is an interesting comparison to Mary Watts as he embraced decoration and ornament, referring to his Palace of Fine Arts as jewelry. However, “the spiritual significance of the plan” was also essential.<sup>435</sup> Like the Compton chapel, Maybeck’s Christian Science Church also takes the Greek cross for its plan (Fig. 52). Perhaps even more striking in comparison to the Compton chapel are the crossed trusses spanning the interior and decorated with segmented parts featuring circular medallions which connect the two buildings visually (Figs. 53 and 54). However, whereas the circular experience is emphasized in the Compton chapel architecturally as well as experientially, the Maybeck’s building conveys a heavy linearity, especially in the exterior through horizontal extension of roofing structures and “porch-like gates.”<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Further research into the choice not to build a domed structure is warranted. While a dome may have been a more expensive option, the ambitious fundraising aspect of Mary Watts’s personality almost certainly would have pursued this option. The choice to utilize the arms of the cross to represent this shape from an aerial perspective seems significant. Moreover, the dome was often used in contemporary Beaux-Arts architecture calling upon Neo-Classical designs. These grandiose structures might have been considered as working in contrast to the Arts and Crafts values of local labor and design that seem essential the Mary Watts’s aesthetic philosophy.

<sup>435</sup> Bernard Maybeck, *Palace of Fine Arts and Lagoon, Panama-Pacific International Exhibition, 1915* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1915): 2.

<sup>436</sup> Jordy 304. Jordy describes the church as having a “ceremonial” entrance shelter which calls on international design principles which is certainly a similar feeling conveyed by the Compton chapel. However, the inspiration is described as reminiscent of “Japanese or Chinese temples” and conveys box-like linearity rather than the circular experience that is essential to the Compton chapel. Maybeck worked contemporary to Mary Watts and finished the The First Church of Christ shortly after the Compton chapel would have been completed. His approach is similar in a “cavalier appropriation of specific historical motifs” and a “daring amalgamation within a single building” as well as his sympathies with Arts and Crafts philosophies and building within the natural environment.

In terms of the English round churches mentioned by Mary Watts, most of these Romanesque buildings originally consisted of a simple circular nave, sometimes with a clerestory or belfry. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Northampton, for example, was built c. 1110 with a circular nave, an aisle, and an impressive eight column arcade with a clerestory and tower added in the 14<sup>th</sup> C.<sup>437</sup> The Romanesque style of these churches was certainly influential to the design of Compton's mortuary chapel. None of the English Round Churches, however, contain the cross within the circle plan of the Compton Chapel.

Knowing that Mary Seton traveled down the Nile to visit Aswan, it is also possible that non-Christian architecture influenced ideas on the structure as well. Fatimid Cemetery's domed square mausoleums of mud-brick in the circle in the square format are certainly interesting in comparison with the simple lines of the circle and square symbolism of the Compton cemetery chapel. At the end of Mary Watts's notebook, she has written the quote, "The Christian prays, the Moslem built a prayer,"<sup>438</sup> indicating that Mary Watts also found inspiration in ecclesiastic architecture outside of her own Christian heritage. An early sketch in Mary Seton's notebook of the footprint of a round architectural building is very striking in relation to the chapel footprint. It is the restored floorplan of a Sthupa and seems to be taken from Frederick Maisey's *Sánchi and Its Remains* (Figs. 55 and 56).<sup>439</sup> Mary's journey to the Middle East was a very influential experience in her life as well as in her art works. It is possible that the cross in the circle

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For more on Maybeck, who might be considered bridging a European and American perspective as he is a German born artist trained in Paris but working in California, see William H. Jordy, *American Buildings*.

<sup>437</sup> Northern aisles were added as well in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, creating four parallel naves terminating at the vestry at the East end. George Gilbert Scott undertook restorations after a lightning strike in the mid Nineteenth Century. See "The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain & Ireland," from The Kings College London, Digital Humanities, 2018. <<http://www.crsbi.ac.uk/site/776/>>.

<sup>438</sup> Watts Chapel Notebook 4.

<sup>439</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, Unpaginated. Frederick Charles Maisey, *Sánchi and its Remains: A Full Description of the Ancient Building* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Col, Ltd, 1892). Mary Watts's sketch appears to be a reproduction of Plate III. A similar plan for a smaller sthupa is on Plate XXIX.

symbolism that has been so tightly connected to Christianity in modern scholarship was actually inspired from Eastern architecture.

The mortuary chapel architecture is unique. The design was clearly seen as quite different from contemporary architecture as *The International Studio* article describing the building apologizes for the difficulty in conveying its form. It reads, “Its shape is so unfamiliar that it is hard to explain in words the effect of the arms of the cross rising above the dome, which forms such a striking feature of the building itself.”<sup>440</sup>

### 3.3 The Circle as a Wheel: Circumambulation and Symbolism Extending into 3D Space

The Compton mortuary chapel’s simple but unique structure indicates the participation of the architectural design within the symbolism of the chapel. The architecture has been carefully designed to fit within the iconographical program of the interior and exterior decoration. The symbolism of the chapel architecture is conceived with a unique mastery and cognizance of three-dimensional space. The design of the building has been considered from all angles, even from an aerial perspective which would have been an impossible view from human eyes at ground level in 1898.<sup>441</sup> However, not impossible in the cardboard model made by Mary Watts in June of 1895.<sup>442</sup> Moreover, the design of the building participates in the dialogue on the cycles

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<sup>440</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel” 236-7.

<sup>441</sup> The overwhelming extent to which the architecture fits into the iconographical program of the chapel and the entire built environment calls into question the descriptions of the chapel in *The Buildings of England: Surrey*, which seem to rely on unfounded opinion without supporting explanations. The description of the chapel as “not architecturally great either, because ornament and structure are not really related to each other” (170) seems particularly amiss. See Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Surrey*, second ed. Revised Bridget Cherry (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1971).

<sup>442</sup> Veronica Franklin Gould, “Mary Watts and the Creation of the Watts Chapel,” *An Artist’s Village*, 70. Gould notes that Mary finished her model by June and counselled with George Redmayne, FRIBA at the beginning of August. See also, Gould, *Watts Chapel* 4-5.

of life that permeate the built environment. The circular shape of the building divided by the cross are designs based in the iconographical program of life cycles in the mortuary church.

Visitors outside of the chapel are also encouraged to physically participate in the circular symbolism of the chapel. Mary has arranged terracotta panels which encircle the building. The title of the series, *The Path of the Just*, requires the visitor to follow the path, circling the chapel in order to follow the iconographical program envisioned by Mary Watts. This participatory circumambulation is voluntary and may arise with seeming spontaneity for the visitor, yet it is a carefully curated space and intentionality is inferred by the title of the project as a “path.” The circular movement is continued in a spiral from the outside to the inside of the chapel as interior walls also encourage a circular rotation of the space.

Circumambulation may encourage the unity of the community if participated in groups, a similar idea celebrated in the Islamic ritual of Tawaf. To others, it might symbolize the journey of life and perhaps a progression to a more spiritual state. Circumambulation is a ritual in many religions including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. An 1881 article from *Scribner’s Monthly*, which Mary Watts references in her notes taken from Maisey’s *Sanchi*, notes the custom of the ancient Scottish Highlands and connects it to disparate cultures.<sup>443</sup> St. Columba was said to have participated in the sunwise, or clockwise, circumambulation around a sacred mound where the dead were placed at “every funeral procession”<sup>444</sup> in Iona, the location of the cross inspired in the doorway, as stated in *Word in the Pattern*.<sup>445</sup> In the article, the rite is

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<sup>443</sup> Julie Rahrig connected Sanchi imagery on the Limnerslease ceiling to overlapping ideas of pilgrimage. See Rahrig 32-3.

<sup>444</sup> “The Wheel as a Symbol in Religion,” *Scribner’s Monthly* Vol 22.5 (September) 1881, 736. See pages 733-749. This article was mentioned in Maisey 40. It was noted by Mary in her notes as well under the subject of the “wheel.” See Chapel Notebook, unpaginated. Both sources contain inaccurate references, however, listing Volume II instead of Volume 22. Regardless, the tradition was written about and well understood, as demonstrated by Mary Watts’s notes. *Scribner’s Monthly* is available online through <ebooks.library.cornell.edu>.

<sup>445</sup> *Word* 24.

associated with cultures around the world, including Islam and Shintoism. Concerning overlaps in religious devotion between the Celts and the Brahmins, Scribner's remarks,

It is somewhat singular that these two races, so widely separated by time and by distance, should not only have adored the Almighty under the same name, but also have symbolized their worship of Him by the use of figures representing the revolving sun, generally under the image of a wheel.<sup>446</sup>

The circumambulation outside and inside the chapel can be understood as an essential part of the symbolism of cycles, a rather remarkable extension of symbolism to three-dimensional space. Visitors follow the built environment as it manifests natural cycles, a participatory material manifestation, or sign, of the Infinite within the iconographical pattern. It also demonstrates Mary Watts's awareness of the connection between the Scottish Highland tradition of circling a funeral bier three times in a sunwise direction and the diverse use of the wheel, as in Japanese scripture wheels or Thibetan prayers as related by Scribner's.<sup>447</sup> The imagery of the circle as a sun wheel is perhaps the most important and prevalent symbol of the Watts chapel, imagined both in two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional space and understood as a crucial link between the customs of peoples present and past. The layout of the chapel can be seen as two rotating wheels in the interior and exterior chapel design. It is also explicit in the pottery's circular stamped logo in which the words are written, "Their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel," as also expressed in Ezekiel 1:16 (Figs. 57 and 58).<sup>448</sup>

Built from the natural clay deposits on local land,<sup>449</sup> the Watts Chapel was built from Compton dust by Compton hands to symbolize life's journey for those who would be laid to rest

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<sup>446</sup> "Wheel" *Scribners* 735.

<sup>447</sup> "Wheel" 735-6.

<sup>448</sup> Irene Cockroft also associates this symbol to the sun symbols prevalent in feminist artwork in the period. See Cockroft *New Dawn* 13.

<sup>449</sup> Mrs. Erskine claims that the clay was taken from the Watts' own property. See Mrs. Steuart Erskine, "Mrs. G. F. Watts' Terra Cotta Industries at Compton, Surrey, England." *House and Garden* (1903): 158, offprint from an unrecorded journal, Watts Gallery Archive, in Shelagh Wilson, "Watts, Women, Philanthropy, and the Home Arts," *Representations of G.F. Watts*, ed. Colin Trodd et. al. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004): 181-2.

and to offer the hope of resurrection for those who mourned there. Concerning the Jerusalem site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Mary records,

It is interesting to notice that the round church, built over what was believed to be the site of the Holy Sepulcher, was called Anastasis, or Resurrection, for not the thought of death, but the thought of life, the promise of life eternal, was to be suggested by these sacred walls.<sup>450</sup>

A reminder of Genesis, the entire creation process of the Watts Chapel reflects the journey of the mortal body from dust to dust. However, Mary Watts hoped to move beyond the material body of the clay chapel to offer a glimpse of the eternal truths that survive generations and cut through cultural boundaries. She borrowed from a broad cultural heritage of symbols but expressed them in the language that she knew how to speak which often took the form of a Celtic language that she considered her own expressed through a filter of modern aesthetic experience. The symbols within the clay were designed to be infinite and universal, to move the viewer beyond the material realm into the spiritual realm. The suggestion is explicit in the title of her book on the Chapel symbolism, *The Word in the Pattern*. Deeply interested in the idea of spiritual knowledge, or truth that survives material degradation, Mary Watts's designs provide the mourning chapel visitor with the hope of discovering the Word as a detectable sign or symbol of God as the Infinite through the intricate symbolism of the cycles of life and death in the chapel and surrounding natural environment. Furthermore, the cycle of life, death, and resurrection also implied the continuation of generational cycles arising from the dust of the ones that came before. This might also be considered as a responsibility on previous generations to create an atmosphere amenable to the peaceful creation of future civilizations.

As curator Mark Bills wrote in his article introduction to the republication of *The Word in the Pattern*, when Mary titled her book and used these words for the internal decoration, her "late

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<sup>450</sup> *Word* 25.

Victorian audience would have instantly understood” the reference to John 1:1.<sup>451</sup> The verse was inscribed onto the cross in the circle pattern on the cover of the book (Fig. 59) as well and used in the interior wall decoration which repeats the symbol four times with portions of the verse in each circle, “In the beginning was the Word,” “The Word was with God, “The Word was God” (Fig. 60), and “The Word was made flesh.” The implication is that access to spiritual knowledge of the Infinite lay within the patterns designed in the chapel space. Furthermore, the emphasis on creation made flesh has a maternal resonance. It can also be understood as a feminist turn. Lucy Ella Rose writes of an *écriture féminine* within the circularity of the chapel structure and its symbolism, saying, “the structure of the chapel itself complicates the phallogocentric linearity and patriarchal symbolism.”<sup>452</sup> The circular nature of the chapel participates within a gendered language of the iconography within the chapel. Mary Watts emphasizes the shape of the chapel, connecting it symbolically with the idea of resurrection or the cycle of rebirth apparent in the general built environment. Lucy Ella Rose argues the extension of the metaphor for maternal creation in the symbol of the circle itself and the “womb-like walls of the circular interior.”<sup>453</sup>

The emphasis on “word,” however, is interesting in a sense outside of St. John’s specific usage in relation to the Christian story of incarnation. George and Mary Watts wrote of communicating through art as if it was a language. In this case, “the word” functions as a sign or a way to signify meaning. The “word” becomes “a symbol” in the pattern. Mary Watts referred to her patterns as hieroglyphs to emphasize the quality of symbolic communication, bound up with inferred and associative meanings.

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<sup>451</sup> Bills, “Word,” *Word* 16. Bills discusses the importance of the book of St. John in the iconography, noting the portrayal of the Tree of Life as, in Mary Watts’s words, ““that mystic tree of St John’s vision,”” (21) as well as the presentation of John as an Eagle on the pillar capitals featuring the four Evangelists (20). Bills concludes, “Mary finds an ecumenical Christianity that encompasses the cosmic and mystical” in the theology of St. John (22).

<sup>452</sup> Lucy Ella Rose, “Women in Nineteenth-Century Partnerships: The ‘Significant Other,’” PhD dissertation, (University of Surrey, 2015): 200.

<sup>453</sup> Rose *Women* 200.

Eugène d'Alviella's *Migration of Symbols* is an important work in understanding the significance of Mary Watts's choice to utilize symbolism in the chapel decoration and to the Symbolist movement in general. At the end of the book, d'Alviella writes of artistic symbolism in terms of signs of associated meaning. He writes in a manner resonate to George and Mary's discussions of the language of art, saying, "symbolic representations are all inadequate, inasmuch as they attempt to explain the inexplicable."<sup>454</sup> Mary expresses a similar sentiment by apologizing for the use of symbolism within the chapel by saying, "they may appear too trivial as a mode of serious suggestion."<sup>455</sup> However, symbolism is considered as having the possibility of "bringing us closer to the Supreme Reality" through associative power. D'Alviella suggest that symbols "awaken the ideas of the Good and of the Beautiful."<sup>456</sup> He proposes that symbolism will become increasingly important to society as "it corresponds with a necessity of the human mind" in finding a middle ground between abstraction and material reality. D'Alviella calls this "the secret impulse" which draws interest into symbolism and which contains the power of modernity to move "new generations to break with the commonplace conventions of superannuated traditions, as also with the superficial platitudes of false realism."<sup>457</sup>

For many designers at the end of the century, art was in need of a new, versatile language capable of conveying complicated modern ideas. Symbols, like those discussed by d'Alviella and used by Mary Watts, had been used repetitively by different cultures and had proven resonance while also capable of manipulation which allowed for expanding suggestions of meaning. Like a sound or a "Word," symbols are physical manifestations of an idea and often suggest similarities of thought across the cultures that use them in a similar manner, however, the associative

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<sup>454</sup> Goblet d'Alviella 268.

<sup>455</sup> *Word* Part II unpaginated.

<sup>456</sup> Goblet d'Alviella 268.

<sup>457</sup> Goblet d'Alviella 268-9.

meaning of a symbol is also capable of change with time and context, deepening with thought and meditation. Symbolism was considered by some at the end of the century to be the new mode of art capable of conveying complicated and dynamic modern ideas. Mary Watts defends symbols saying,

they carry their suggestion to the mind along a somewhat disused pathway...as in the case of parable and metaphor, these little tokens dwelt upon earnestly and lovingly have a fire of thought within them which has the power to flash new light upon the soul. A symbol may be compared to a magic key.<sup>458</sup>

The Symbolist element of design in the Compton chapel is intended to broaden spiritual perspective. The use of symbols provokes more than a singular Christian theology with the perspective that the world's beliefs were changing and becoming less dogmatic. Mary Watts wrote in her diaries of a belief in "a fuller development of the idea of universal brotherhood," which she felt was encompassed within Christian doctrine, but restricted "by dogma and creed."<sup>459</sup> The incorporation of symbols, understood to resonate with a variety of philosophies and religions, suggests the allowance of freedom of thought within a community of acceptance.

The bold declarations by d'Alviella and by Mary Watts assist in understanding the fascination with symbolism at the end of the century. It was understood as mind opening because it leaves room for interpretation. This was contrasted with conventional formalism in which the rules were already strictly made, and often found to be insufficient. The open interpretation of symbols suggested ideas deemed important enough to pass through generations, connecting human experience. However, they also allowed flexibility to future generations to build upon their meaning and tailor their appearance and their significance to resonate with contemporary experience. Furthermore, as d'Alviella stated, religious symbolism, in particular, was "a

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<sup>458</sup> *Word* Part II unpaginated.

<sup>459</sup> MSW Diaries 5 Feb 1887.

powerful ally of the religious sentiment against the immobility of dogma, and the tyranny of the written Word”<sup>460</sup> because it allowed for flexible interpretation. Mary Watts, did not have the “ready pen” to explain religion in the work of George Watts. However, she did have the “powerful ally” of cultural symbolism. Mary Watts writes that “no endeavor is made to fix particular thoughts to the old symbols” because the symbolism is intended to “remain free...”<sup>461</sup> Mary Watts and d’Alviella’s discussions of symbolism and the idea of the word as a sign in the pattern will become increasingly significant as the multicultural nature of symbols are discussed in contrast with the absence of intercessory Christian figures in the following chapter.

A recognition of the multicultural influences upon the unusual architectural style of the chapel architecture and the interest in world cultures and symbolism demonstrated in the artist’s notes, necessitates a consideration of influential styles and philosophies outside of the Western tradition. Current literature on the mortuary chapel often presents the design as predominantly Celtic in style and Christian in dogma. These are crucial elements of the chapel design, as discussed in these final chapters. Mary herself often speaks of the chapel in these terms. *The Word in the Pattern* acknowledges worldwide influences; however, it privileges the discussion of symbols in terms of Christianity, often quoting biblical passages and emphasizing the Celtic influence. An adept writer, Mary was aware of her audience and it is no surprise that she would emphasize those elements of the chapel that would resonate most with her predominately Christian audience. Furthermore, she utilizes a language and culture that primarily reflected her own experience and conceived heritage. The Romanesque style of the chapel architecture, the influence of Celtic art, and Mary Watts’s Christian heritage are all very important aspects of the chapel that will be discussed further in the study of iconography. However, such readings often

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<sup>460</sup> Goblet d’Alviella 267.

<sup>461</sup> *Word* Part II unpaginated.

overshadow the other religious and cultural influences within the chapel. It is possible that these elements were actually more visible to contemporary audiences. Interestingly, an 1898 journal article describes the chapel as looking uniquely Eastern while quickly defending its concurrence with its Western setting, saying, “Although the first sight of the chapel suggests Oriental influence, it does not jar with the English pastoral scenery around it.”<sup>462</sup>

The designs of the chapel are often drawn from the Christian cultural heritage of Mary Watts’s experience in Great Britain. However, much of the uniqueness in the chapel might be attributed to Eastern influence as well. Mary read extensively in addition to her travels and the archive at the Watts Gallery contains her notes from a variety of works, but focuses predominately on religions relating to Indian culture, including Buddhism, Brahminism, Jainism, and Vedism. This may have been inspired, in part, to her connection to the East India Company. As Mary Watts was born in India and many of George Watts’s patrons had an interest in India, both artists maintained the friendships of other British citizens who were influenced by the cultural traditions of India.<sup>463</sup> Additionally, both George and Mary Watts looked outside of Christianity for examples of virtuous living. As George said on their honeymoon in Egypt, “if faith is to be before reason then the Buddhist & Mohammedan is superior to the Christian. The belief in exclusive salvation produced Christian persecution.”<sup>464</sup> Mary and George were very interested in religious inclusivity. When Josephine Butler visits, Mary specifically mentions that Butler’s conferences will include all who are “on the side of the cause of purity” with the inclusion of the Brahmin, remarking that the Watts’s believe this to be “very lovely, in an

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<sup>462</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel” 236. Beazley describes the alternation between plain brick and high decoration akin to “Seljuk buildings, whose decoration is so intense that it can only be taken with large areas of plain walling as a foil” (172).

<sup>463</sup> George Frederic lived with the Thoby and Sara (Pattle) Prinsep, both considered “Anglo-Indian,” for twenty-five years. Both families befitted from British rule over India, with John Prinsep, Thoby’s father, making a tidy fortune in the trade of indigo. See Dakers 21-22.

<sup>464</sup> MSW Diaries 23 Jan 1887.

‘orthodox’ believer in our angelic Christianity, as she is.” “The kingdom of heaven is for all,” writes Mary Watts.<sup>465</sup>

Mary Seton Watts writes of seeing all organized religion as containing truth as well as dogma. Perhaps best explained in the Buddhist concept of the Middle Path as described by contemporary scholar, Thomas Rhys Davids, from which some of Mary Watts’s notes are taken in her notebook on world religions. The Middle Path is described as having superstition on one side and worldliness on the other. The Middle Path between extremes must be taken. The imagery is not unique to Buddhism, as noted by Davids. But, perhaps the most interesting aspect to the multicultural context of the chapel symbolism, Davids notes that Buddha emphasized the idea that the Middle Path is not taught by the study of Vedas nor by the teachings of others. The Middle Path does not require an intercessory. To the contrary, the suggestion is that progress is hindered by dogma. The Path is found only through the light of reason and intuition.<sup>466</sup> The description is reminiscent of Mary’s journal entry recording George Watts’s declaration upon seeing the light streaming through the window in 1887, “light & warmth—as religion should be.”<sup>467</sup>

In her book on the history of religions, Mary writes about Buddhism, “Universal tolerance was the very essence of Buddhism. ‘The beloved of the gods honours all forms of religious faith. There ought to be reverence of one’s own faith & no reviling of others.’” She continued, “Buddha gave the right hand of brotherhood to all the world, inviting all to join his fraternity of celibate monks. He abolished ‘sacrifices,’ & devotion to ‘personal gods’ & in place

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<sup>465</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Aug 1896. “Orthodox” is in quotes—George and Mary Watts probably considering themselves less “orthodox” by this late period.

<sup>466</sup> This was described in Thomas Rhys Davids, *Buddhism* 47-48. Davids is a contemporary scholar on Buddhism and Mary seems to take notes from his books in her notebook dedicated to the history of religions. This page, in particular, lists the eight principles of the Middle Path, as similarly outlined in Mary’s notes.

<sup>467</sup> MSW Diaries 24 Jan 1887.

of them set meditation [and] moral conduct as the true way.”<sup>468</sup> It seems likely that in her condensed summaries of lengthy books, Mary records the notes she deems most important historically as well as those that might resonate with her work. This particular passage from a book on Buddhism continues to explain that Gautama was opposed to “priestcraft and superstition,” touting the leader’s contribution to religion as “victory over one of the most inveterate propensities in human nature—the tendency to seek salvation through a mediatorial caste of priests,” which was “a wonderful achievement.”<sup>469</sup>

Mary considered herself as quite “orthodox” growing up, but finds her faith changing especially after her marriage to George Watts. In 1891, Mary is reading an article from the agnostic Leslie Stephens as he points out fallacies of traditionally held beliefs about the creation of the Bible and the information contained therein. Mary writes,

My head goes with what he says, but my heart aches—I loved the old unreasonable faith, & when I shut the book I had to make an effort to keep myself from crying—We cannot accept Newman’s...happy faith that his church is the infallible guide for the world—reason prevents us....<sup>470</sup>

The Anglican Priest turned Catholic Cardinal, John Henry Newman had died less than a year previous to this diary entry. Mary Watts’s spiritual questioning seems to be a part of the context in which she lives. Newman is gone and the age of scientific skepticism has begun. Furthermore, the international context in which she lives provides new religious perspectives.

By the time that Mary builds the chapel, she is often finding more spiritual truth in nature than in her weekly Sunday service. However, she continues to attend formal service as a symbol

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<sup>468</sup> MSW/3/History Notebook/unpaginated. Compare to Monier-Williams 90-96.

<sup>469</sup> Monier-Williams’s praise of Gautama might be considered as taking part in the tradition of “exceptionalism” in which the dominant culture points to one heralded individual as outstanding and, in so doing, the wider population is denigrated. Monier-Williams does not speak highly of the Buddhist monks in general terms, but these passages do not appear in Watts’s selections. Mary Watts’s notes consist of selective passages from this work as well as other authors. This selection of the text from which she quotes fits within her own writings on spirituality and the danger of religious dogma.

<sup>470</sup> MSW Diaries 6 Feb 1891.

of the importance of the spiritual in her life.<sup>471</sup> George did not attend. He said directly to Mary on a particularly difficult day, “I hate theology...it has made the world hypocritical, cruel, insane--.”<sup>472</sup> Despite these strong feelings, Mary found a careful balance between the “incense of the church” and a “little of the fresh air”<sup>473</sup> in her religious beliefs. Meanwhile, she continues to study world religions, finding parallels across cultures—for good and ill. She compares what she reads about Judaism to the “strict ‘Free church’ in Scotland—‘Burdens hard to be borne’ indeed.”<sup>474</sup> Mary writes that as she learns more of Judaism, she understands it be much like all religions and specifically mentions Brahminism and Christianity. “We have our narrow but sweet souls, believing in impossibilities & they have,” she writes. She concludes that all religions contain the good and the bad, “...so in all I feel sure & has been” across time.<sup>475</sup>

The following month, Mary Watts records telling her idea to George of “a chain of hands holding one another to remind that the Divine is within all & must be stronger than anything else.”<sup>476</sup> The Compton mortuary chapel is part of a larger project and built environment intended to bring local community together under the philosophy of virtuous work and creation formulated in the Arts and Crafts Movement. However, it is also a building with international

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<sup>471</sup> See MSW Diaries 27 Mar 1891. She explained her attendance to church service saying, “though service is often against reason, I have left off feeling hypocritical about it, for I go there to show I cannot do without the spiritual life, without the outward recognition of the Inconceivable Creator of the universe....”

<sup>472</sup> MSW Diaries 24 May 1891. Mary herself relates mixed emotions at the passing of a prominent religious figure, their Arch Bishop, in 1896. After noting the sadness that his death brought to those around them she writes, “We did not feel that he was a great director in his high place, & in these great times--.” See MSW Diaries 12 Oct 1896.

<sup>473</sup> MSW Diaries 5 Aug 1887. The words are in reference to M de Vere who is said to have a strange combination of visionary experience with too much reliance on formal church observance. She describes him as having too much of the incense and too little of the fresh air.

<sup>474</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Oct 1896.

<sup>475</sup> MSW Diaries 17 Oct 1896. The full quotation reads, “they have the same classes – so to speak, of spiritual aspiration as we Xtians – we have our hypocrites –& they have – we have our narrow but sweet souls, believing impossibilities & they have – we have ours revolting against it & so have they – They have their beautiful high souled enthusiast preaching universal Judaism as we have, They have their Montefiores who see that there are many paths but they all lead Godward! So it is in Brahmanism so in all I feel sure & has been—I think of Olive Schreiner Soul unclothed.”

<sup>476</sup> MSW Diaries 19 Nov 1896.

reach in attempting to bridge a gap felt unnecessarily dividing humanity by political, social and gendered borders. The circling imagery of chapel figures takes part in Mary Watts's vision to create a symbolic image of unity in which disparate people are connected like a chain and respected for the divine "within all." It is within this context of shifting spirituality and hope for a more united humanity that the iconographical study of the chapel begins in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4.

### Material Inscriptions: The Exterior and Interior Walls of the Chapel

Thine are these orbs of light and shade;  
Thou madest Life in man and brute;  
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot  
Is on the skull which thou hast made.  
--Tennyson, "In Memoriam"

Mary Watts's work within the mortuary chapel might be considered her grand oeuvre, a culmination of Arts and Crafts, Symbolist, and late Pre-Raphaelite influences. The building is a prime example of the emphasis on community, the value of labor, and the use of local resources heralded by the Arts and Crafts Movement—perhaps to an unparalleled degree. The symbolism used by Mary Watts can be understood within the context of turn of the century anxieties in terms of gender and culture as an artistic progression from a more linear positivistic construction of history into a much more dynamic, circular interaction of cultural contributions across time with an inclusive emphasis on female creativity. The building of the community chapel at this moment on the edge of worldwide social upheaval is a remarkable testament to new ideas regarding the role and makeup of gender and society at both communal and global levels. Finally, Mary Watts's social contacts with prominent Victorian artists, especially the second wave of Pre-Raphaelite influenced artists, is reflected stylistically in the presentation of the figural body. This may also be considered as a contribution to the effort to realign gendered space during the period and Mary Watts's own interest in the suffrage movement. This chapter will be an object-oriented study of the exterior brickwork and interior panels of the mortuary chapel as it is within the symbols themselves that the contextual meaning becomes most striking. It is within Mary Watts's language of symbolism that modern society might also find hope for progress through dynamic conversation and the inclusion of diverse voices. These issues will be

discussed as they enfold from the chapel itself as it is approached from the door, encircled clockwise, and entered into the interior space as it would be observed in a natural progression.

#### 4.1 Romanesque Doorway: Shifting Stylistics

It is within a context of Mary Watts's interest in world religions and inclusive spirituality that the exterior door of the chapel is first approached. The visitor to the Compton cemetery is led up a path to the front door of the chapel with the predominant cross in the circle design. The bottom half of the door features Thomas Steadman's expertly rendered carving of a powerfully beautiful and menacing dragon, "smitten through" with the cross that extends from the upper half of the door (Fig. 61).<sup>477</sup> The merging of cross and sword is a Celtic tradition, also seen in the upright cross monument at Limnerslease (Figs. 62-64).<sup>478</sup> The cross on the door is unique and made of overlapping images. It participates in the cross in the circle design concept discussed in the three-dimensional architectural structure of the building. In her book on chapel symbolism, *The Word in the Pattern*, Mary discusses this important symbol first. She describes it as the "plan of the chapel;" it is "the Circle of Eternity, with the Cross of Faith running through it."<sup>479</sup> Mary notes that in this symbol, early Christians might have seen the power of God's redeeming light and love available to all four corners of the world with the promise of eternal life bound within the circle. However, the symbolism of the cross in the circle is older than Christianity and is used inclusively to reference a broad history of cultural beliefs.

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<sup>477</sup> As a reference to St. George slaying the dragon, it may have had a personal resonance to Mary Watts as an emblem of hope at her husband's death, as he was called St. George by the Thornycrofts. MSW Diaries 4 Sept 1887.

<sup>478</sup> Mary may have used Brindley & Weatherly in her cemetery designs, especially Celtic crosses. See especially Scottish crosses on pl 101 and pl 33. The book features several interesting comparisons, including a representation of the cross at Iona on pl 102 specifically mentioned by Mary as noted by Mark Bills, *Chapel* 34-5.

<sup>479</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 4.

*The Word in the Pattern* states that viewers should see the “tau” in the iron hinges, which attach the cross to a cultural significance outside of its sacred and authoritative status in Western Christianity. Within the tradition of interweaving and overlapping symbolism in which the chapel takes part, the tau might be seen at the end of the scrollwork of the metal hinges and also within the metal cross at the intersection of the doors or even the double barred crosses at each end. In a Christian context, these double crosses refer to the Patriarchal cross, which included two crosses in remembrance of crucifixion with the small bar referencing the inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” or INRI and INBI in reference to the Latin and Greek phrase. However, in suggesting that viewers search for the tau within the metalwork, Mary suggests a much broader symbolism that existed outside of Christianity. Indeed, the Crucifixion story may not have held the strong symbolism to Mary as it did for many others of the Christian faith. Shortly before Easter, she says, “The clergyman preached upon the crucifixion, ‘the greatest tragedy ever known’ - but he must know that when he said it, it was contrary to reason & to fact. There have been far more torturing deaths....”<sup>480</sup> However, Mary is not advocating agnosticism or necessarily disavowing Christianity. She finishes her thoughts saying, “through the omnipotence of the God—nature revealed the intensity of the world’s sorrows, it must also have revealed the glorious end of a few hours of suffering—the return to His Father—.”<sup>481</sup> In the statement and in her iconography, Mary Watts seems to be making room for various beliefs and interpretations while recognizing worldwide sorrow and suffering.

The use of the overlapping tau in the cross is used again in the angel corbels circling the exterior which visually echo the cross and the door and which also use the same symbolism of the Tau as the mast of a ship (Fig. 65). In describing the Tau within the door, *Word* reads, it is

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<sup>480</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Mar 1891.

<sup>481</sup> MSW Diaries 27 Mar 1891.

“the sail as the breath of life, with the T (tau) cross for the mast.”<sup>482</sup> The book suggests a relationship between the cross and the Tau, describing it as “the cross of faith and key of eternal life.” Furthermore, Mary Watts evades religious dogma in order to link humanity once again, writing, “another link in the great chain of aspiration forged only of these little concrete signs, but stretching far down the ages from human heart to human heart...”<sup>483</sup> The mixing of signs can already be seen as an effort to emphasize the unity of human experience, rather than to isolate a single meaning or experience.

The cross in the circle is a common symbol for headstones and crosses across the British Isles. Brindley & Weatherley’s book on cemetery monuments includes many examples from the simple English headstone in pl. 68 to the more elaborate on the Isle of Man from plate 38.<sup>484</sup> However, Mary Watts also notes that this symbol did not originate in Christianity. Rather, this was a far more ancient symbol that travelled from East to West. In the footnotes, she quotes a Sanskrit Hymn, “Infinite in the East, Infinite in the South, Infinite in the West, Infinite in the North, above, below, everywhere, Infinite. Thus it is said, He who is in the fire, he who is in the heart, he who is in the sun, they are one and the same.”<sup>485</sup> The words of the ancient poetry seem to encompass the conception of a united humanity as well as the idea of a Divine Infinite. In adding this poem to the footnotes of her discussion, Mary Seton makes available the connection of Eastern and Western cultures, as well as the connection between humanity across time. Mary Watts writes that the prevalence of this symbol across cultures is a witness of “the eternity of religious aspiration,” linking the human impulse to strive for wisdom across time and culture.

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<sup>482</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 26.

<sup>483</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 26.

<sup>484</sup> Brindley and Weatherley unpaginated.

<sup>485</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 3-5.

This prominent symbol is intended to be an inclusive invitation of Love, “with arms outstretched to all the world.”<sup>486</sup>

The cross in the circle design first appears in Mary’s sketchbook with her study of draped figures in Egypt (Fig. 66). However, the idea is explored in depth later in her notes on solar crosses from d’Aviella’s *The Migration of Symbols*. Within these pages, Mary sketches different versions of the circle and cross from Assyrian monuments, Central America, and even to a four-square symbol of the Earth in China. Mary Seton records d’Aviella’s findings that this symbol can be found all over the world.<sup>487</sup> She observes that they “may mean 4 positions of the sun,” a statement that will be conveyed more poetically as “the path of the swift sun in his course” in *The Word in the Pattern*.<sup>488</sup> One of the sketches includes rays in all four directions and three inner circles. It is almost identical to the earlier Limnerslease ceiling panel on symbols from various cultures across time, which may have been the basis for her research. Mary notes similar designs signifying the power of the sun on ancient Indian coins. This specific symbol also makes an appearance in the central cross of the *Hope Frieze* on the exterior panels which make up the *Path of the Just* (Fig. 67). These notes and sketches signify that these symbols were not to represent a single culture in isolation, but to encompass ideas that linked humanity across times and cultures.

Surrounding the wrought iron cross placed on the door is a carved decoration suggesting a wattle cross. *Word* specifically attributes the carved wattle cross to be inspired from Iona. More specifically, Mark Bills notes the representation of the Argylshire cross represented in Brindley and Weatherley (Fig. 64).<sup>489</sup> The wattle cross is an interesting choice as it is considered a

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<sup>486</sup> *Word* (1905) 4.

<sup>487</sup> WGA, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated. See Goblet d’Alviella 13-14.

<sup>488</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 4.

<sup>489</sup> Bills *Chapel* 35.

unique style related to the early Celtic churches of Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England. These early churches are thought to have been built of wattle, or woven sticks and reeds. The variety of knotted decorations carved into stone crosses and illuminated on manuscripts were all thought to come from the prized art of weaving and understood as unique to the Northern isles of Britain.<sup>490</sup> Mary Watts writes that the carved cross on the door of the chapel “is copied from a grave stone at Iona, in Argyleshire, and evidently a transcription from rude wicker work or ‘wattle,’ links this building with the first Christianity in Britain, when from rude churches built of wattle our forefathers’ voices rose....”<sup>491</sup> Among the most famous of these woven buildings and decorations would be that of St. Brigid’s community in Kildare. St. Brigid, “the organizer of female communities,”<sup>492</sup> often adored as “One of the Mothers of the Lord,”<sup>493</sup> is understood to have built her church of wattle beneath a favorite oak tree and attracted a community of women and men.

While *Word* does not mention St. Brigid specifically, it does link the cross and the building to those “woven in wattle.”<sup>494</sup> Mary Watts knew of St. Brigid and her cross, as a wattle cross is sketched into her notebook. Interestingly, the *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society* notes the tradition on St. Brigid’s day “of women making a circlet of green rushes, having a cross of the same materiality internally. This was called...’Bridget’s ring.”<sup>495</sup> Bridget’s ring is identical to the circle in the cross pattern. It was pinned to the thatched

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<sup>490</sup> John Hill Burton, *The History of Scotland from Agricola’s Invasion to the Extinction* Vol. 1, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1905): 155-159.

<sup>491</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 24.

<sup>492</sup> William Sherlock *Some Account of St. Brigid and of the See of Kildare, with its Bishops, and the Cathedral, Now Restored* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1896): 11.

<sup>493</sup> Sherlock 16.

<sup>494</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 24.

<sup>495</sup> “Folklore of the Months,” *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society*, Vol. 1, Second Series (Cork: Guy & Co. Ltd., 1895): 416.

home and a new one was made each holiday.<sup>496</sup> Indeed, as a woman of Celtic heritage, Mary Watts would have been aware of her reputation and may have even seen something of herself in Brigid as an early community builder. More importantly, however, Mary Watts embraced the identification of the Chapel with ornamental beauty and described her architecture in terms of the traditionally feminine art form of weaving and embroidery. In fact, George reportedly made the same comparison as Mary writes in her biography, “If I were ever to make a symbol of the Deity, it would be as a great vesture into which every-thing that exists is woven.”<sup>497</sup>

“Needlework, which has existed since the days of Penelope,”<sup>498</sup> was largely aligned with the feminine arts in the nineteenth century. By identifying the Chapel walls with needlework, the feminine arts begin to displace the association of architecture with the masculine. Melanie Unwin notes that although decoration would have been considered part of the architectural design of the building, “Mary Watts consciously maintains a position outside the architectural profession” by emphasizing her role as designer and aligning her work with handicraft, “a traditional site of femininity.”<sup>499</sup> A female genealogy is subtly implied through Mary’s connection of the Chapel with the sepulcher at Jerusalem, which she states was built “at the suggestion of his [Constantine’s] mother,”<sup>500</sup> and the wattle crosses of St. Brigid, who was able to convert others through the art of weaving,<sup>501</sup> reminiscent perhaps of Mary’s own efforts.

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<sup>496</sup> “Folklore” 416.

<sup>497</sup> MSW *Annals* II 245.

<sup>498</sup> MSW *Annals* II 7. This quote is from a letter by G.F. Watts and appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* March 1881. George was asked to defend “the so-called lesser arts, held by him to be of vital importance to great art. ‘The work of a good craftsman was,’ he said, ‘as necessary to the life of a fine art as the root is to the tree’” (6). His letter in behalf of needlework is at the request of Lady Marion Alford, Lady Brownlow, and Mrs. Percy Wyndham, who petitioned him to write on behalf of the School of Needlework at South Kensington.

<sup>499</sup> Unwin “Significant Other” 246 and *A Woman’s Work* 26.

<sup>500</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 24-25.

<sup>501</sup> Mary sketches St. Brigid’s wattle cross and swastika in her sketch book. MSW/Chapel Notebook, Unpaginated, Watts Gallery Archive. Mary Watts also connects the Chapel to early Christianity and wattle buildings, suggesting that the cross on the doorway to the chapel should evoke the wattle cross. See MSW *Word* (1905) 24.

The question of gender in the chapel is also inspired by one of the most prominent architectural features—the Romanesque doorway. The three orders of decorated stone are clearly inspired from early ecclesiastical decoration, however the choice of decoration within the arch is unique to the chapel. As *The International Studio* explained, “Its style, recalling early Romanesque work both by the round arches and the rich decoration of the mouldings of the doorway, is only suggestive of earlier work...”<sup>502</sup> The ways in which Mary Watts’s design builds upon and departs from traditional architecture is revealing within contemporary discussions of gender and can be more fully understood by a comparison of her Romanesque doorway to the styles of eleventh and twelfth century buildings from which it is thought to be inspired.

St. Caimin’s Church on the Holy Island, or Inis Cealtra, off of the shores of Lough Derg in Ireland is one among many mentioned in Mary Watts’s sketch book. These ancient ruins, among which the Romanesque doorway of another monastery associated with St. Brigid also stands, became the site of an annual pilgrimage and was written about and sketched in Stokes’s *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland*. St. Caimin’s Church features an arched doorway at the West entrance with three orders of inclined jambs, similar to the Compton chapel entrance (Fig. 68). The third order of the arch contains sixteen voussoirs with “radiating human heads.”<sup>503</sup> The arch dates to the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but only seven of the heads are originals. Restorations were made in 1879 and 1970-80.<sup>504</sup> The portrayal of bodiless faces was not unusual

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<sup>502</sup> “A Mortuary Chapel” 236.

<sup>503</sup> Architectural expertise mixes with crowd sourcing for up-to-date images and information in London’s King’s College website, The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture of Britain & Ireland, or CRSBI. See “St Caiman, Inishcealtra, St Caiman (Inishcealtra, Holy Island),” *CRSBI*, King’s College London, 2018, [crsbi.ac.uk/site/199/](http://crsbi.ac.uk/site/199/), Accessed 20 May 2018.

<sup>504</sup> The 1879 restoration placed heads as keystones in the three orders of the arches. More information on the details of restoration efforts for this doorway, see Liam De Paor and Deidre Glenn, “St. Caimin’s, Inis Cealtra: Reconstruction of the Doorway,” *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 36 (1995): 87-103. An illustration of the 1879 restoration is on page 94.

to Romanesque churches and similar arches can be seen at Desert O’Dea in Claire and Inchagoill in Galway.<sup>505</sup> The use of the human head as a keystone is also common in Irish Romanesque sculpture.<sup>506</sup> Geometric shapes, especially chevrons, also decorate arches as seen at St. Caiman’s, and St. Lachtain in Freshford, among others.<sup>507</sup> Stoke’s *Early Christian Architecture* reproduces many such images, including bearded and moustached heads at Ardmore and Rahen. The comparison to the Watts Chapel is striking. Mary was clearly familiar with the styles of these early Romanesque churches. However, while there is a distinctive similarity in the successive images of heads and geometrical shapes on the voussoirs making up the arches, the depiction of human heads in early Christian examples are definitively masculine, usually with prominent beards and moustaches.

It is not unusual to see male prophets or saints around the English Romanesque entryway either, as in the magnificent carvings at Kilpeck (Figs. 69 and 70). The red sandstone blocks with intricate Celtic carvings and many overlapping themes, is a visually interesting comparison to the Compton Chapel. At St. Mary’s Kilpeck Church, the South nave arch is only two orders deep, however, the keystone features a phoenix and an angel, with a tree of life in the tympanum, symbols that also feature prominently in Mary Watts’s designs. The other bodies featured in the work are visibly masculine. For example, “Welsh Warriors” are found on the ornately decorated exterior column, coordinating with the androgynous kneeling figure on the Compton pillars (Fig. 80 and 82-3). An interior doorway at Kilpeck features saints with moustaches and beards layered one on top of another to create a pilaster.

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<sup>505</sup> See “St Caiman, Inishcealtra” *CRSBI*.

<sup>506</sup> See “St Lachtain, Freshford,” *The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture of Britain & Ireland (CRSBI)*, King’s College London, 2018, [crsbi.ac.uk/site/185/](http://crsbi.ac.uk/site/185/), Accessed 20 May 2018.

<sup>507</sup> CRSBI also lists comparative arches at Clonkeen Limerick and Aghadoo in Kerry. See “St Caiman, Inishcealtra,” *CRSBI*.

More traditionally, Christ would often be placed above the door in a tympanum as in St. Peter at Pedemore, Worcestershire or the Parish Church of St. Peter in Rowlestone where the face has been destroyed by iconoclasts, but the beard remains (Fig. 71). This is surprisingly common. The carved human head at St. Mary the Virgin at Aldermaston, Berkshire, has also been defaced by iconoclasts, but once again, the moustache and beard remain prominent (Fig. 72). Men with beards and grotesques are also featured in the voussoirs at St. Peter's at Adderley, Shropshire. However, a series of androgenized—or perhaps feminized—angels, like those at Compton, are unique. The occasional feminine face might be found, like the man and woman voussoir at Adderley. A beardless man is also occasionally represented, as in the Romanesque font at St. Peter in Ashwater, Devon; however, they are severe with squared heads and distinctively short hair. They are described as “Norman heads with rounded jowls, fierce expressions,” and “severe hairstyles.”<sup>508</sup> While the Celtic knots and fanciful beasts occasionally find an echo in the Compton Chapel, the simple and severe Norman figural stylizations are a distinct break from the curving forms of Mary Watts’s figural stylizations. Perhaps the most striking difference between the old Romanesque doorways of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and that of Compton’s doorway lies in the representation of gendered bodies.

The Compton Mortuary Chapel, or Watts Chapel, decoration is dominated by figural images. In both high and low relief, bodies emerge from the interior and exterior walls and are bound together by the appearance of knotted strings and vines which are created in the illusion of terracotta knots on the exterior and a unique gesso application on the interior. Yet, within these figures, there are no obvious male bodies anywhere on the exterior chapel decoration. God is not represented in any figural form, rather, he is only suggested by the signs of blessing on the pillar

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<sup>508</sup> “St. Peter, Ashwater, Devon,” *The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland (CRSBI)*, King’s College London, 2018, [crsbi.ac.uk/site/2990/](http://crsbi.ac.uk/site/2990/), Accessed 20 May 2018.

capitals. The four evangelists are referenced only symbolically as angel, lion, ox, and eagle. The altar, wellhead, and *Tree of Life* tiles feature bodies that might be characterized as masculine, as will be discussed. They do not feature beards and the bodies are still softened, however, there is a suggestion of armor and faces are perhaps less rounded with a square jaw. Interestingly, both instances are used in reference to mortal folly in contrast to the divine. The altar emphasizes man's search for the divine within the physical mortal realm and the wellhead features the masculine image within the reference to Adam and Eve in the "garden." This usage suggests that Mary Watts may have been using the symbol of her slightly more gendered figure of "man" in a similar manner to the tradition of using the word as a universal for "humankind." The subtly gendered visual adds some ironic humor to the omission of the female sex in mortal experience. While many of the stylizations of the chapel can be traced to early Christian architecture with Celtic stylizations, the Compton chapel's distinctive lack of masculine bodies marks a rejection of traditionally gendered iconography from the traditional sources directly quoted in the Compton Chapel.

The Watts Chapel arch is made of angelic faces formed into terracotta. Each of them wears a crown of stars with a costume of peacock feathers that spreads outward, from around the neck to the second and third order of pillars above into which is also woven hearts pointing to the four corners with crosses in the center. Peacock feathers are described in *Word* to symbolize "watchfulness" in their visual similarity to eyes.<sup>509</sup> Mary Watts also notes peacocks as sacred in Brahminism and Buddhism in her chapel notebook.<sup>510</sup> The terracotta noses of the angelic faces are delicately carved and straight. While the clay is left rough and unpainted, the bowed lips, cheeks and chins of the angels are softly rounded. All of the angels have similar features however, the direction of the angels' gaze varies, with eyelids open and closed (Fig. 73). Eyes

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<sup>509</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 13.

<sup>510</sup> She also writes, "legend of Buddha as King of Peacocks." MSW/Chapel Notebook Unpaginated.

are modelled in deep relief, but without a prominent eyebrow. As the visitor passes beneath the arch, the gaze of the angels seems to shift to a closed or open position. In her book Mary Watts explains simply, “the archway rises with its choir of angels; angels looking downward in sympathy or upward in hope.”<sup>511</sup> However, each angel seems to shift between looking up or down depending on the perspective of the viewer. The androgynous, perhaps even feminized, images of the Watts Chapel iconography supplant traditional images of bearded prophets. The closing eyes of the encircling angels signify the entrance of the visitor past the limited veil of human eyes and into sacred space. The androgynous and undogmatic bodies suggest a space available to all.

The stylization of the terracotta angels mark a sudden departure from the stoic Norman figures of Romanesque architecture and demonstrate a relationship between Mary Watts’s designs and the stylized figures of artists associating with the Wattses, and sometimes described as participating in a “second-phase” of Pre-Raphaelitism.<sup>512</sup> These artists often portrayed subjects associated with early Britain, drawing upon British history in a manner similar to Mary Watts’s use of Celtic art.<sup>513</sup> Art after mid-century by artists like William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal, Marie Spartali Stillman, and Eleanor Fortescue-Bricksdale,<sup>514</sup> for example, celebrated Arthurian legends while the Celtic revivalism celebrated

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<sup>511</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 13.

<sup>512</sup> For further discussion of the problematics in defining the boundaries of Pre-Raphaelitism, Prettejohn 87-101.

<sup>513</sup> Early civilizations were seen as adding vitality to art. Some, like W. B. Yeats, saw Celtic art as related to Arthurian legends so often illustrated by Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal, and others. Celtic culture was understood as inspiring the passionate element in diverse art and as a kind of predecessor to all great English literature. This is contrasted with “the Greek Way” which is “without ecstasy” (216-7). See W. B. Yeats, “The Celtic Element in Literature,” *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats: Ideas of Good and Evil* (Stratford-on-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1908): 210-229.

<sup>514</sup> Mary writes of George Watts admiring Fortescue-Bricksdale as her art was “in the same direction as mine” in a letter to Lady Georgianna Burne Jones, 12 Jul 1902, Heinz Archive, GFW/1/5/14. Kate Bunce, Marianne Stokes, and others could be added to this list. For more on women artists that fit within this second phase Pre-Raphaelitism, see Elizabeth Prettejohn, “Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood,” in *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* 67-86; Jan Marsh & Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women*.

by Mary Watts pushed further back into British history. The two were connected, however, in the “very roots” of human emotion and the “influence on the spirit of chivalry and the spirit of romance,” described by W.B. Yeats as coming from “the cauldron of an Irish god.”<sup>515</sup>

The renewed interest in tapestry and embroidery is related to these interests and tied to women, not only in practice, but also in representations of women bending over needlework. The images are often sculptural in the straight lines that render the bodies completely still despite their supposed activity. The stillness becomes iconic in the intense focus on individuals or small groupings, often leaning in with strange angles of the body which intensifies the stillness captured in the moment that might otherwise demonstrate dynamic action within the scene. Siddall’s *Lady Affixing a Pennant to a Knight’s Spear*, for example, portrays action in the title as well as in the inclusion of tools. However, the leaning bodies convey stillness. They are heavy and static, and the tan arms of the woman lead the gaze into a circle that unites the two figures conveying steadiness and unity. The same stillness is conveyed in D.G. Rossetti’s *Before the Battle*, in which a woman ties a pennant onto a soldier’s flag, but does so with incredible stillness in her upright body. The side profile of her face is set off by the jumble of material in the background, associating the figure with embroidery as a feminine art and giving her an iconic presence. This is even more true in Burne-Jones’ *Blessed Damozel* which features a golden halo around the woman’s head. Mary Watts’s figures present the same stillness and the same iconographic profundity in the presentation of the figure with intense focus in an androgynous, late-Pre-Raphaelite ideal in the face—aqualine nose, strong jaw, bowed lips and heavily lidded or recessed eyes.

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<sup>515</sup> Yeats 226. Yeats draws the connection from Celtic culture through Arthurian Legends, and up to Sir Walter Scott, Richard Wagner, William Morris, and Heinrich Ibsen (226-7).

The use of the eyelids as a veil to represent consciousness and spirituality is also related to this group of artists working at the second half of the century within second-phase Pre-Raphaelitism or sometimes described as part of the Symbolist movement. The veil of the closed eye is explicitly used in D.G. Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (Fig. 74), in which the deceased Elizabeth Siddal is portrayed, a poppy brought by a bird on her arm, with eyes closed and chin turned heavenward to symbolize the "ideal of the subject" in the midst of "a trance or sudden spiritual transfiguration." Dante Rossetti explained to his patron, William Graham, that Beatrice, as Siddal, "is rapt visibly into Heaven, seeing as it were through her shut lids...and in sign of the supreme change, the radiant bird, a messenger of death, drops the white poppy between her open hands."<sup>516</sup> The shut lids signify the inner vision, or spiritual state. As F.G. Stephens wrote, "She is herself a vision—her corporeal eyes losing power of outward speculation—the heavenly visions of the New Life are revealed to the eyes of her spirit."<sup>517</sup>

Transfiguration is similarly symbolized by open and closed eyes in Simeon Solomon's *The Moon and Sleep* in which Endymion has been sent into a trance of eternal sleep and is visited by the moon goddess (Fig. 75). Waterhouse's *Lady of Shalott* is portrayed half-lidded as she makes her journey and Holeman Hunt's *Shalott* is also trance-like in her downward gaze as she physically breaks through the web of threads that binds her to her physical place in the tower. The veiled gaze is an oft-used trope, but the attachment of heavy-lidded eyes and effeminate bodies is particularly prominent in late-century symbolism. The clay angels looking down upon mourners from the chapel portico are emblematic of D. G. Rossetti's description, "The shadowed

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<sup>516</sup> Letter from D.G. Rossetti to William Graham, 11 Mar 1873. Published in Frances Horner (Lady), *Time Remembered* (London: W. Heinemann: 1933): 25. See also Christopher Newall, "Themes of Love and Death in Aesthetic Painting of the 1860s," *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Watts*, ed. Wilton and Upstone, 38.

<sup>517</sup> F. G. Stephens, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London and New York: Seeley and Co, 1894): 62.

eyes remember and foresee.”<sup>518</sup> The androgynous, or perhaps even feminized terracotta faces looking down upon chapel visitors reflect more closely the tradition of “the noblest poetry”<sup>519</sup> of the prophetess and sibyl, embracing a new iconology of interior mysticism, in the place of the old patriarchy of organized religion with its appeal to authority and judgment. This shift in artistic style signifies the shift in gender ideology at the end of the century and can be read in the context of Mary Watts’s artistic effort to make new spaces for women, erasing traditionally gendered boundaries.

#### 4.2 Garment of Praise: Woven Symbols

A symbolic reference to needlework is perhaps most distinctively used in the triangular spandrels surrounding the arch which was titled by Mary Watts “The Garment of Praise,” and is made up of rectangular tiles like a patchwork quilt (Fig. 76). In representing her sculptured design as a woven clothing, or garment, Mary Watts again draws a parallel between her work in designing the chapel and the work of women who, like St. Brigid, used weaving and needlework to clothe and decorate sacred spaces. Mary Watts describes her work on the outside of the Chapel as “the wall veil... intended to represent an embroidered hanging.” She describes the sculptured terracotta decoration as “woven symbols.”<sup>520</sup> The first row of clay panels depicts angels with trumpets and harps. These angels are stylistically closer to the angels depicted on Romanesque buildings with flowing gowns, sash, cropped hair in hat, and instruments. A comparison with Kilpeck also reveals the depiction of the phoenix, a more stoic version of the

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<sup>518</sup> Quoted by Stephens 74. This is taken from D. G. Rossetti, “The Portrait.”

<sup>519</sup> “The Aims of Art” in *Annals* Vol. III 231. The quote reads, “It is not possible to regard the Prophets and Sibyls in the Sistine Chapel without feeling that they are on a level with the noblest poetry....”

<sup>520</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 13-14. Mary Watts references “wall veil” as Ruskin’s words.

one represented by Mary Seton just below the angels. Crowns, oil vessels, lamps, hearts, and stars are woven into quilt-like squares, the threaded knots uniting disparate symbolism.

*The Word in the Pattern* divides the panels into seven sections which borrow from Isaiah 61:1-3, a passage which speaks of rebirth in terms of the building and raising of “old wastes” and “desolations of many generations.” However, the symbolism itself is very loosely correlated with these seven elements. Indeed, eight symbols are actually outlined separately from the passage. In fact, the format of the list is much closer to the one contained at the beginning of *The Programme for Christianity* by Scottish minister Henry Drummond. It was a favorite piece of writing read multiple times by George and Mary Watts.<sup>521</sup> In this pamphlet, the minister makes the case for the Nineteenth-century establishment of the society as an organizing body. Drummond declares that Christ himself started the society and that “The Kingdom of God is purely social...It acts, not by commandment, but by contagion; not by fiat, but by friendship.”<sup>522</sup> While the minister imagines Christianity as the vehicle for this “friendship,” Christ also becomes something of a symbol in an optimistic hope of a future undogmatic and uniting principle. As Drummond writes, his typology of Christ “has a purpose for mankind...beyond churches and their creeds, beyond Heaven and its saints.”<sup>523</sup> Christianity is used as a vehicle for social change and, while Drummond often privileges both his sex and his culture,<sup>524</sup> he also speaks of “every man and woman born, every kindred and nation formed” and concern of “their welfare in every part, their progress, their health, their work, their wages, their happiness in this present world.”<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> See MSW Diaries 13 and 14 Jul 1904.

<sup>522</sup> Drummond, *Programme* 55.

<sup>523</sup> Drummond, *Programme* 11.

<sup>524</sup> See, for example, Henry Drummond, “*First!*” *A Talk with Boys* (New York: James Pott & Co, 1891). This was a talk given specifically to 400 members of the Glasgow Boys’ Brigade and later published for boys of America.

<sup>525</sup> Drummond, *Programme* 11.

*The Garment of Praise* can, in this context, also be considered a type of dedication to The Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) and like-minded societies.

While the Celtic knots, sometimes with hands reaching under and through, feature heavily in the Garment of Praise, Mary Watts's interest in symbolism from around the world is also featured. Checkered trumpets are designated as symbolizing "day and night ("the red day and the black day") from the Rig Veda. The checkers are also part of Mary Watts's Egyptian decoration in her notebook and in the ceiling panel at Limmerslease, demonstrating the shared culture in which she understood these symbols.<sup>526</sup> Perhaps most significantly in terms of Eastern influence, however, is the Egyptian winged circle. Placed centrally above the arched doorway, these three tiles of the *Garment of Praise* are made up of a circle with wings, most famously used in Egyptian art. The description in *Word* focuses on the three stylized "S" shapes inside the circle of the central panel, explaining it as "a Celtic monogram for the Sanctus or Holy, Holy, Holy!" The three "S"'s signify the triple Sanctus, the Latin word for "Holy," taken from liturgic ritual. This circle with the Sanctus makes up the center of the three tiles, the other two forming "wings of the Spirit on either side,"<sup>527</sup> according to *Word*.

However, the central disc surrounded by wings is distinctly Egyptian, both visually and in terms of placement within the chapel. Mary Watts wrote of this symbol during her honeymoon and of using it in later designs, which she records doing at both Little Holland House and Limmerslease.<sup>528</sup> The Egyptian ceiling panel is the object of many of Mary Watts's conversations, including one with her stepmother. "Looking at the winged sun, Mama had said she had read such an impressive sermon beginning with a description of the gate of the

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<sup>526</sup> The checkers are part of the Limmerslease Egypt panel beneath the goddess Maat and sketched in the Chapel Notebook. They seem to be inspired from an image of Maat kneeling on lilies from the tomb of Ramses III.

<sup>527</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 14.

<sup>528</sup> MSW Diaries 15 Feb 1887. See also previous discussion in Ch. 2 on Egyptian influence.

universe.”<sup>529</sup> A more in-depth conversation is recorded a few years later when the winged sun is connected to scientific discoveries about the sun’s heat. Mary Seton writes, “Only late science has revealed truly the fact of the revivifying power of the radiating heat from the sun. Akhenaten knew it.” Her personal fascination with ancient Eastern cultures in Egypt and Assyria is clear in her enthusiasm as she continues, “Mr Petrie’s face itself interests me – it is the type of an old Assyrian – ‘Where do you come from ?’ was on my lips to say! If I see him again I will. ‘Living in the Truth’ is Akhenaten’s motto–written everywhere–.”<sup>530</sup>

Again, during the early designs of the chapel in 1896 as Mary is reading “The English Walt Whitman,”<sup>531</sup> Edward Carpenter, on “The Return to Nature,” Mary declares, “Since Egypt, my desire to say something in art has been a casting back, to send out a shoot from the root again & I find myself, in this, a sort of harmony with things generally, of this time—If this is so then my little effort is alive—at least—.”<sup>532</sup> Mary Seton’s love for ancient symbols is connected to her interest in nature and a thread of harmony that she finds connecting nature to culture throughout time. Specifically, Mary explains that the winged sun is symbolic of the scientific principles on movement. Even color theory is understood as participating, as light waves came to be understood as vibrations akin to sound. The wings emanating from the sun, the energy source, were understood by Mary Watts to capture this principle which moved through all of life, connecting humanity not only to the sun, but all of nature. She explained, “that theory of movement being the first principle, or the second rather, is very beautifying to the symbol of the

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<sup>529</sup> MSW Diaries 8 Jun 1891. Mary fills Signor in on her conversation with her mother, who was on her way to visit Nelly.

<sup>530</sup> MSW Diaries 10 Oct 1893.

<sup>531</sup> Title bestowed by *The Literary Digest*, see “The English Walt Whitman,” *The Literary Digest* 24.5 (1902): 145-146.

<sup>532</sup> MSW Diaries 30 Aug 1896.

winged sun, as the wings may well be taken as the symbols of motion—. <sup>533</sup> The symbol is seen throughout the chapel as it will further unfold: on the crown of at least one interior angel, in the altar decoration, above the interior recessed arms of the transepts, and crowning the bell tower at the top of the chapel. In her conversation with her mother under the winged sun, Mary records,

she & I wondered at the strange power the human mind has of convincing itself against reason of what it already believes, of seeing small things as great ones & great ones as small – a want of imagination, or of reason, in not seeing things in true perspective. What a danger there is in the mind of going along beaten tracks of thought, highways easy to run in. <sup>534</sup>

In chapel iconography, the resonance of images over time and through various cultures demonstrates truth and the existence of this truth which has always run through nature. The winged sun is fundamental to this expression, as it was understood to have been altered and used throughout time and represented the elemental principle of human life as science was continuing to explain energy from the sun's heat.

Mary Watts's "casting back" to Egyptian art is subtle, however, there are definitive lines of Egyptian influence in her art and it shows up most boldly in these panels above the central arch of the chapel. At the Temple of Kom Ombo, the Hathor Temple at Dendera, and others, the sun with wings sits just above the doorway in a similar fashion to Mary Seton's stylized sun and wings. This is a symbolic location that Mary Watts would have seen repeatedly in her travels and her inclusion of the symbol at the apex of the doorway is certainly no coincidence. Alongside Mary Seton's sketches of the winged sun, she has written that the winged sun was "placed above the Temple entrance" by the Egyptian god, Toth, himself to symbolize the triumph of good over

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<sup>533</sup> MSW Diaries 10 May 1891. Mary seems to be conversing with Sir William Bowman who she describes as "a man of science" and they discuss movement as "the primary law of vitality, a truth divined by Lucretius, only to be worked out now!—colour produced by movement!" Mary makes the association of movement with the winged sun.

<sup>534</sup> MSW Diaries 8 Jun 1891. Mary Watts fills Signor in on her conversation with her mother, who was on her way to visit Nelly.

evil.<sup>535</sup> The symbol is understood as “the Egyptian symbol *par excellence*,”<sup>536</sup> but also “one of the most widely spread and venerated in the whole of Western Asia.”<sup>537</sup> The many scrolled knots in the Garment of Praise, which are predominately considered Celtic, may also have an Egyptian element, for Mary writes that spirals and scrolls were one of “the greatest element of Egyptian décor” and symbolized “the wanderings of the soul.”<sup>538</sup> For d’Alviella, scroll shapes “whose extremities curl upwards and thus produce the effect of two horns, not straightened out as in the Egyptian symbol, but curved in the manner of an inverted Ionic column” were simply another representation of the winged sun symbol.<sup>539</sup> He sees a similar device used on a vase in Cyprus,<sup>540</sup> which might be compared to the type of scrolling used in the Watts Chapel.

As a comparison, the Hathor temple at Dendera, one of the best preserved in Egypt, has the winged sun carved above the door as in other Egyptian temples and in the same location as at the Watts Chapel, as well as repeated in gold and blue succession on the ceiling. The Hathor Temple also portrays the goddess Hathor with the sun disk and scrolling horns in her crown carved in low relief above the door. Hathor was a powerful goddess and her image is found in carvings and hieroglyphics throughout Egypt as well as artifacts in the British Museum. Mary Watts sketched Hathor with her sun disc crown in her notebook, along with other powerful Egyptian goddesses like her mother, Nut, “personification of Heaven,” and Maat, “goddess of Justice” (Fig. 77) who is also featured on the Limnerslease ceiling Egyptian panel.<sup>541</sup> Egyptian

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<sup>535</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook, unpaginated. The passage is taken from d’Alviella’s *Migration of Symbols* 205. The words “good over evil” are underlined in Mary’s writing. She also references H. Brugsch’s *Die Sage* (1868-1869) as mentioned in d’Alviella’s footnote 2.

<sup>536</sup> Goblet d’Alviella’s words. In *Migration* 205. The sun symbol is also discussed in Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism, Myth* (London: Percival & Co., 1892): see especially pg 180.

<sup>537</sup> Goblet d’Alviella *Migration* 206.

<sup>538</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.

<sup>539</sup> Goblet d’Alviella *Migration* 212.

<sup>540</sup> Goblet d’Alviella *Migration* 209.

<sup>541</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.

goddesses and queens are even sometimes depicted wearing a feathered headdress in ancient hieroglyphics, as noted in Mary's Chapel Notebook among sketches of Egyptian queens and goddesses (Figs. 78 and 79). It's possible that Mary Watts had in mind the many delicately rounded faces of Egyptian goddesses, like Hathor who is carved onto each face of the pillars at Dendera to face the cardinal directions, as she carved her own angels at all four faces of the chapel. The winged disc is certainly derived from Mary Watts's Egyptian experience, as is her devotion to "simple & sublime" architecture.<sup>542</sup>

### "I AM" pillars

Mary Watts was an avid researcher, as surviving detailed notes and sketches in the Watts Archive indicate. She read extensively, had many opportunities to travel, visited libraries and museums, and had countless intellectual conversations on contemporary issues with her husband and their circle of influential friends. The chapel design was well thought-out and inspired by the artwork that Mary Watts saw on her travels as well as through the contemporary British art world including much library research. She records, "A long morning with Miss Jackson, & then to the Brit Museum where she got a Mr. Soulsby to introduce us to the head librarian – & we poked out books from brick work none very good –."<sup>543</sup> Mary Seton's love for Celtic art is well documented in her own writing as well as recent scholarship written about her work. Growing up in Scotland, she must have seen many Celtic stone crosses and monuments. However, she may have come to know Celtic illumination late, at least in their original form, as she records seeing "the first Celtic M S I have ever seen—'The Book of Darham'" in 1896, describing it as

—a wonderful work! It takes one's breath away to think that all devouring love of beautifying & enriching the book is the holy man poured over it & wrought those

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<sup>542</sup> Words written by Mary Watts describing Egyptian architecture in a conversation with George. See MSW Diaries 15 Apr 1887.

<sup>543</sup> MSW Diaries 7 Sept 1896.

marvellous lines & coloured in that delicate tender way his beautiful devices – under the magnifying glass only can one realize what the finish & perfection was...<sup>544</sup>

Mary found the lines of Celtic illumination to be “delicate” and “tender” under the magnifying glass, a work of “finish & perfection.” We see these lines rendered in terracotta in the “I AM” pillars on either side of the doorway. The pillars contain three orders, with the central order containing the words “I AM,” as suggested by *Word*.<sup>545</sup> The letters overlap one another to form an artistic rendering of the message that might be invisible to the casual observer, a technique perfected in the *Book of Kells*, most famously in the Chi Rho page. The two pillars surrounding the words are decorated with kneeling figures holding orbs symbolizing the natural environment. Top and bottom angels point inwards, as if worshiping around the central panel, while the middle two angels point outward in opposite directions around the chapel. The panels on the left and right of the door are almost mirror reflections of one another, moving the pattern from the outer pillars towards the inner pillars in a parenthetical framing of the chapel door which moves the observer predominately inward, and then around (Fig. 80).

The bodies of the kneeling figures of the entryway pillars are made of ribbons of lines rather than filled shapes. They can be difficult to decipher but are better understood through a comparison with Celtic illumination. In comparing Folio 2r in *The Book of Kells* to the façade of the chapel, for example, several striking similarities are worthy of discussion (Fig. 81). Firstly, the tables of scriptures in Celtic illuminations are often architectural in design. Folio 2r is designed as if it is an architectural structure, featuring pillars, tympanum, and spandrels. The pillars on either side of the Compton chapel doors echo the architectural motif of painted pillars

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<sup>544</sup> MSW Diaries 9 Sept 1896. Desna Greenhow writes expertly of Mary Watts’s symbolism, especially the Celtic influence in “The Symbolism of Watts Chapel,” *An Artists Villiage* 87-101. Gould mentions Mary studying a “facsimile of the Book of Kells and Celtic objects at the British Museum” in *Heroine* 39.

<sup>545</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 11.

separating canonical lists in the manuscript. The second and third pillar in folio 2r contains kneeling figures stacked one atop the other and woven together with Celtic knots. The figures face inward, focusing attention on the central pillar in which a peacock symbolizes the redemptive power of Christ, functioning in a similar manner to the “I AM” panel in the Compton chapel (Fig. 82). The two pillars on either side represent “mankind,” or humankind, kneeling in a symbolic worship of the Creator, both on the chapel façade and in the introductory pages of the Book of Kells. The men in the Book of Kells have well defined legs bent beneath them and are bound together in columns by hair from the head and beard, as well as feathers from intermingled peacocks. Similar images are found on folios 1v and 3v, however, 2v adds birds which attach to the figures’ legs. The Watts chapel figures are more symbolic with an Art Nouveau element contained in the linear strands of terracotta curving to suggest a bowed knee and seated legs. Once again, they are stacked vertically to form columns, or jambs, around the portal. Even the linear design of the cap of hair, which curls once in front and divides into two strands in back, is visually similar in design. Mary refers to the kneeling parishioner as “the man on his knees,” probably in the sense of the traditional substitution of “man” as a generic or universal pronoun capable of taking either gender because although the Celtic figure is clearly male, Mary’s version is androgynous if not suggestive of the feminine.

All of the kneeling figures in the canon of table pages at the beginning of the *Book in Kells* feature prominent beards, however, there is no such reference anywhere in the chapel iconography. While terracotta hair curls around the chin to knot in fluid circles like the *Book of Kells* motif, the line of hair is quite clearly continuous from behind the head. Exchanging pulled beards for the suggestion of curling hair results in a feminine turn, rendering the image closer to powerful sibyls than to bearded male prophets. The sharp nose and bearded lip and chin profile

of the illuminated male priest is developed into an aquiline nose of clay which softly curves into the cupid's bow of the lips, small chin, and rounded cheeks.

Once again, Mary's figures depart from the ancient roots of her symbolism to access contemporary language related to the figural bodies of second-phase Pre-Raphaelitism, aestheticism, and symbolism. Waving lines suggest the kind of supernatural tendrils of Holeman Hunt's *Lady of Shalot* (Fig. 83). The lines form circles of webs, fluidly merging into the suggestion of knees and arms wrapped in rings around symbolic plants, stars, hearts and butterflies rather than pulled beards. The feminine head bent in a sign of interior spirituality might be compared to Marianne Stoke's *Candlemas Day*, which also uses rough strokes and the green-blue and orange palette of the Aesthetic Movement which will be used in the interior chapel as well.<sup>546</sup> The finely carved figural body winding into symbols of nature with the suggestion of hair and inward mysticism fits within a contemporary language of spirituality that was aligned with the feminine and Mary Watts accesses this iconographic language in her stylistic shift from past to present, suggesting space for women and characteristics labeled feminine within sacred space. In this environment the feminine body might play an untraditional role in the discovery of spiritual truth, a rare alignment of the spiritual with the material body as discussed by Lucy Ella Rose.<sup>547</sup>

The knotted hair of the Compton chapel's angelic terracotta parishioners derives only from the head. The beard, sometimes a euphemism for manliness, denotes God's power and authority, if not patriarchy, in the many disparate cultures quoted iconographically within the

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<sup>546</sup> Alexander Fisher may have had influence here as well, advising Mary Watts and knowledgeable about the enameling of terra-cotta. See Cockroft 11. Fisher's triptych, *Voices of the Night*, is an interesting comparison to Mary Watts' artwork. It was covered in an article following one on George Watts in "Studio Talk," *The Studio* 14-16 (1902): 198.

<sup>547</sup> For more on feminist theory within the chapel space, see publications by Lucy Ella Rose, especially "Subversive Representations of Women and Death in Victorian Visual Culture" *Visual Culture in Britain* 17.1: 47-74.

chapel. The subject of the beard was, in fact, a point of prominent discussion in the latter half of the century as it held significance related to gender, religion, and politics. Facial hair gained prominence as the century closed, which can be seen in George Frederic Watts's famous portraits of eminent men including himself, Leighton, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Algernon Swinbourne, Thomas Carlyle, William Morris, and the list continues. Facial hair far outweighs the cleanly shaven in his portraits and most of those without full beards sport heavy sideburns.

As Christopher Oldstone-Moore has shown, facial hair came to represent "masculine virtues" after 1850 in connection to a new masculinity associated with nature to emphasize the natural and rugged strength attributed to one sex over the other. The trend is apparent in the writings of Charles Dickens and Thomas Carlyle, as well as articles in *The Times* and *London Review*, and even in *Punch* cartoons.<sup>548</sup> T. S. Gowing's *Philosophy of Beards* contrasts faces in a description which associates line and color to gendered character traits. Women's faces are described as having a delicacy of line, a changeability—or blushing—in color, and as having a demure eye. Whereas men have "the bold enterprising [*sic*] brow—the deep penetrating eye—the daring, sagacious nose, and the fleshy but firm mouth." The beard adds "expression" to this face.<sup>549</sup> In the appendix to *An Apology for the Beard*, the writer argues that a beard is a natural part of God's creation, adding politics to religion by stating that the beard is surely "better than the scraped cheeks of the Romish priest."<sup>550</sup> Beards are a dominant feature of the male bodies depicted within the Book of Kells, Romanesque architecture, and early Christian ecclesiastic

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<sup>548</sup> See Christopher Oldstone-Moore, "The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain," *Victorian Studies* 48.1 (Aut 2005): 7-34, especially p. 24.

<sup>549</sup> Qtd in Oldstone-Moore "Beard" 22-5.

<sup>550</sup> Artium Majister, *An Apology for the Beard* (London: Rivingtons, 1862): 91. Shaving is understood as a modern fashion that entered the church at "the age of Roman corruptions" (94). Shaving is also blamed on the corruption of the French as a fashion brought by Louis Quatorze (40). The beard is, therefore, a signifier of British virtue in contrast to French and Italian decadence. The beard is even used as evidence that men were designed to teach while women listen, as the beard naturally protects the vocal cords to allow better speech. "It is man's duty to teach by the voice. It is the woman's to 'learn in silence.'" See *Apology* 70.

decoration. While there are some male figures represented without beards, they are usually associated with angels and ecclesiastical authority is often emphasized through striking representations of the beard. This is particularly true for representations of the body of Christ.<sup>551</sup> Folio 292r of the Book of Kells is the beginning of St. John's gospel and features a Christ with bearded points (Fig. 84). This is a page that may have held significant meaning for Mary Watts as she studied her own facsimile version of the Book of Kells since it features the Latin phrase, "In principio erat verbum," or in the beginning was the word in reference to the theme of the mortuary chapel and the title of her book on chapel symbolism, *The Word in the Pattern*. The ornate page features many of the Celtic patterns that Mary uses in various chapel niches and corbels.

Mary Watts has replaced the male prophet with the androgenized angel body and utilized contemporary iconography that established the feminized body as one of spiritual transportation. Mary's kneeling parishioners in terracotta commune with the mortuary visitor akin to Evelyn de Morgan's powerful image of the *Angel of Death I* (1880) (Fig. 83). To utilize Gowings description, Mary's angelic heads mix the demure bow of the head with a "penetrating" unwavering depth of gaze. Delicacy of rounded lines forming hair and cheek are counterbalanced with the straight line of nose and jaw. In this merging of characteristic "male" and "female" traits, Mary Watts joins the line of artists making room for broader images of gender in the public imagination.

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<sup>551</sup> In the table of Canons, folios 2v and 4r are both presided over by a Christ-like figure, each with beards so dark that they visually dominate the faded figures. Folio 2v features an aureole containing three crosses and beards with three points on each side. The image on f 4r holds a book with crosses in each hand and features a dark, three-lobed beard. Christ on folio 32v wears a mid-length beard with curling knots of hair, very similar in depiction to folio 114r of Christ on the Mount of Olives. Folio 292r is the beginning of St. John's gospel and features a Christ with bearded points.

Similar techniques in representing mystical or inner spirituality are mapped onto the male body in several paintings by Simeon Solomon as well, demonstrating the exploration of boundaries guarding historically gendered traits. *Heliogabalus* represents the Roman emperor as a priest to the sun deity, Emesa, with prominent bowed lips and drooping eyelids.<sup>552</sup> *Annunciation* zooms into the picture plane to focus on the two figure busts of the Virgin Mary and the Angel whose similar facial features are differentiated by the closed eyes of one and open eyes of the other using the eyelid veil as a sign of spiritual transference (Fig. 85). Similarly, *The Sleepers* (Fig. 86) portray three heads in Solomon's exploration of "states of consciousness from alertness, through degrees of somnolence, to complete unconsciousness" similar to his *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego*. The biblical version features three states of the gaze from closed, half open, to widely open in a progression similar to the experience of walking under Mary Watts's arch of angels (Fig. 87). In *Sleepers*, two figures have eyes completely closed while the watcher's widely open eyes are unfocused, and perhaps, "unseeing."<sup>553</sup> Within the Compton chapel, polished and curving lines of the Art Nouveau Movement, with its resonance to nature, are attached to late-century iconography surrounding the spiritual body as feminized, with heavy lids and downcast head. Together, this mixture of styles and genres symbolize the inward spiritual vision of personal religiosity accessed through nature and observation.

In fact, the panel further cuts off the line to patriarchal church authority by emblemizing spiritual learning from the surrounding world rather than from a church, priest, or ecclesiastical book. Mary Watts explains spiritual revelation in terms of art and nature, writing, "I argue that there are no new truths about God & man, but there are new interpretations...like a picture of Turners. He paints an English sky & sea & yet he reveals something I should not have

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<sup>552</sup> Wilton 140.

<sup>553</sup> Wilton 141-2.

known but for him—.”<sup>554</sup> While *Word* often quotes scriptural passages in describing the chapel, the iconography itself is much more vague and Mary Watts states that the kneeling figures in the chapel panels are learning parables from the surrounding world, or from “the book of nature,” which testifies of life after death without the intercessory priest or scripture. The design encourages chapel visitors to observe the blade of grass springing up from a “dry seed, seemingly, dead and buried” at the bottom left panel. Next is the butterfly “rising with shining wings from its little tomb, the chrysalis.” Followed at the top by the human heart “owning to itself its spiritual birthright,” which emblem is a heart made of scrolling trumpets as often illustrated in the Book of Kells. The two circles within the heart form a taijitu or “yin yang” symbol reminding of the good and the bad, the darkness and light, that make up human nature as well as the surrounding natural world. Below, a triangle and a curl might symbolize the refining fire, the highest of the four elements, as Mary equates the two in her sketchbook.

The medallions might also be inspired, in part, from those decorating the railing of Stupa 3 at Sanchi, which was sketched by Mary Watts as part of her research from Maisey’s book on the subject (Fig. 88).<sup>555</sup> The sequence of panels suggests the cycle of life coming from death and transforming from a physical to a spiritual body. Continuing to the other side of the “I Am” panel, the bottom panel begins with a flower “that closes with the setting sun, and opens again when darkness is past.”<sup>556</sup> The eyes rise to see stars “in their courses.” *Word* records, “‘Oh God,’ said Kepler, when he discovered the laws of planetary motion, ‘I think again Thy thoughts after Thee.’”<sup>557</sup> For Mary, scientific observation is a witness to immortal laws of creation. The

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<sup>554</sup> MSW Diaries 1 Oct 1887.

<sup>555</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook Unpaginated. Mary Watts has drawn the railing with medallions. See Maisey Plates XXX and XXX1.

<sup>556</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 12.

<sup>557</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 12.

observation of the natural world testifies of the order of life, death, and resurrection. In the next section, Mary notes Sir Norman Lockyer's theory of "Meteoritic Hypothesis" which she describes as the following:

...by the law of gravitation, the first nucleus [*sic*] of a new star lies in the shattered fragments of other stars, believed by many to compose the cosmic dust which modern observation is showing to exist throughout space. If this be so, then the parable of life and death and re-birth is written in the great firmament of heaven.<sup>558</sup>

This section ends with a flower "in full faith casting off its petals that the seed may ripen, and once more renew life."<sup>559</sup> The chapel visitor, therefore, travels from the flower looking up in faith to the physical fulfillment of that faith through the shedding of the physical body with knowledge concerning the resurrection of life. The cycle begins with faith in the creator, observation of the laws of the creator, and finally the full participation in the renewal of creation through death. The sequence is repeated on the opposite side of the chapel arch in reverse. It begins at the top with the flower following the cycle of day and night and ends with the flower shedding its petals in preparation for new life. However, the central panel of the stars is replaced with the three phases of eclipse as witnessed by our physical eyes in the phases of the moon and demonstrate that while darkness reigns in one area, light shines in another—and this cycle is always changing. "Light, Twilight, and Night" writes Mary, "In loneliness the human heart still asks, 'Watchman, what of the night?'" and the answering cry is still, "The morning cometh." The natural progression matches human understanding in the opening and closing eyes in the chapel arch. *Word* also reminds that "in as much as there is night only over one-third part of the earth, while two-thirds are always in the light."<sup>560</sup> The "I Am" panel and human heart series are subsequently repeated, replaying the message of the cycle by creating a cycle of its own.

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<sup>558</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 12.

<sup>559</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 12.

<sup>560</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 12-13.

Within this small section of panels, we see an explicit break with the Book of Kells which takes the form of a rupture with patriarchal church authority. Speaking of the interweaving knots, Mary writes “whatever meaning may have been attached to it in those early times, is here used as the symbol of the unity of a divine life and law, running through all things.”<sup>561</sup> For Mary Seton, the Celtic knot is a useful decorative pattern borrowed from ancestral tradition; however, the symbol would lose value if its meaning were restricted to a single interpretation. Mary Watts’s design utilizes past traditions mixed with contemporary styles to project issues of her own time and circumstance. Within this space, gendered authority and dogmatic religion have been dismissed as unification seeks a degree of equity between things. Creation and the laws that govern life and death are equally bestowed and differences are largely complimentary. Mary writes that these symbols speak for the Creator, who governs the beginning and the end of time, by stating, “I have girded thee though thou hast not known me.”<sup>562</sup> In the chapel decoration, all of creation is tied together by the same laws observable in nature. The structural continuity of life forms abiding by strict natural principles suggests a connection between cultures and between times. The chapel symbolism accesses this shared human experience and offers comfort in the repetitive nature of death followed by life.

#### 4.3 The Tree of Life: a Ladder to Enlightenment

The four arms of the Greek cross design which emerge from the rounded body of the church are less intricate in decoration than the friezes circling the building. *The Word in the Pattern* refers to these four sides as “buttresses,” however they do not form a physical support for the architecture in the traditional sense. Elizabeth Beazley explains, “the drum is only about

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<sup>561</sup> MSW *Word (1905)* 11.

<sup>562</sup>MSW *Word (1905)* 11.

two-thirds the height of the main walls (for this reason, the projecting ‘transepts’ cannot be thought of as buttresses.”<sup>563</sup> They are, perhaps, supportive of the overall conception of the design, however. Both the West, containing the door, as well as the East side of the chapel feature pillars around the two narrow windows with capitals containing a triskele with a symbol in each triangular section: three overlapping circles, star of David, and the encircled triangle. All three are images which combine the circle with the triangle. Bills notes the three symbols appearing in Audsley’s *A Handbook of Christian Symbolism*, plate III.<sup>564</sup> As Christian symbols, the three in one would instinctively symbolize the Trinity. The base of the pillars features a maze made up of four “Tau” symbols. The pillars on each arm of the transept are the only place in which words are featured on the exterior façade rather than pictorial signs. The decorative moulding atop the three pillars at the West and East end can be read from left to right, “Now Through / A Glass / Darkly” (Fig. 89). Like the “Word in the pattern,” spiritual truths are presented as a dim part of physical experience, yet visible still. The words might also have a self-referential aspect as these are the words Mary uses in speaking of George Watts and his artwork as underappreciated.<sup>565</sup> These mouldings on the North and South end read, “Holy / Holy / Holy” (Fig. 90). This is the same sentiment of the triple Sanctus as discussed previously in the Latin form within the three “S” shapes in the sun disk above the chapel door. The art of the chapel often speaks through figures yet art reverts to words in a silencing of the image of God. Mary herself seems to have been unsure how to imagine God but yearned for a higher power. The triple Sanctus fulfilled this need in her personal life as she records on her honeymoon in 1887,

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<sup>563</sup> Beazley 172.

<sup>564</sup> Bills *Chapel* 38.

<sup>565</sup> See MSW Diaries 1 Feb 1887. This statement is inspired by a meeting with an American artist who commented on the influence George Watts was sure to have on American Art. She saw his work as producing an important reaction against the French Impressionists. She writes that she asks herself, ‘Do I know what I hold & have?’—alas—only ‘in a glass darkly’ as yet—.”

“We heard the cry to prayer this evening...I said surely one ought to answer to it.” George questioned all established religions, so his reply is in terms of espousing goodness rather than a particular doctrine. “‘Yes,’ he said, ‘prostrate ourselves before the principle of Goodness.’” Mary says that she needs more but admits not knowing what form it should take by answering, “I need a spirit I can speak to even if I can only say Holy Holy Holy.”<sup>566</sup>

At the North and South end, pillars around windows feature a difficult to see and somewhat enigmatic image which *Word* calls a “dove surrounded by an aureole,”<sup>567</sup> the blessing hand with three fingers lifted to signify the trinity in heaven, and a cross in the circle (Fig. 90). All of these pillars feature letters, rather than words, in Greek and in Latin. The feathered dove contains an “S” on either side, perhaps for “Sanctus” once more. The blessing hand contains the Omicron Omega Nu, traditionally written in the halo surrounding Christ in the Greek Orthodox tradition in reference to “the one who is,” the vague definition of God given to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Finally, the last capital contains three letters “I, X, C” which combine around the circle and cross to form the “IC XC” Christogram from the Greek translation of Jesus Christ. The chapel’s refusal of pictorial images of Christ is apparent in his absence in these last two symbols, replaced by the blessing hand and the symbol of the cross in the circle as will also be seen at the apex of the interior of the chapel. The two Greek messages were often combined in the haloed figure of Christ Pantocrator as in the dome of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (Fig. 91). However, the Compton chapel refuses to imagine a figural form of Christ.

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<sup>566</sup> MSW Diaries 20 Apr 1887. George and Mary Watts are both dissatisfied with their conceptions of the traditional Christian ritual of prayer as well. Mary writes of these conversations in her journal and says, “I cannot bear the prayers which are either asking for some temporal good for oneself, or are confessing oneself a worm, nothing but vileness, & not really thinking it a bit - It produces a false state of things in one’s own mind...” See MSW Diaries 1 Apr 1891.

<sup>567</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 16.

The sides of the protruding brick transepts, or arms of the cross, are decorated with a tree of life or ladder symbolism. *Word* mentions the Tree of Life made up of all creation symbolized as twelve fruits,<sup>568</sup> the number being associated with a complete year or one for every month, coming from the tree of life which was bordered by the “water of life” in Rev. 22: 1-2, as it is also depicted on the chapel. The panels are divided into a lower section of eight panels and an upper section of twelve, bordered on each side with pillars decorated with waving lines indicating “running water.”<sup>569</sup> *Word* suggests a ladder symbolism within the branches when it is described as “a climbing creation, rising from flower to fruit, from shell to fish, serpent, beast, bird; sun, moon, stars, and angels.”<sup>570</sup> Visually, the tree rises in symmetrical tiles with a branch and a circular “fruit” on each side much like the rungs of a ladder. The tree of life is represented alongside a ladder to represent Buddha’s Bodhi Tree under which he attained enlightenment, symbolically climbing from one realm to another, in Mary Watts’s sketchbook.<sup>571</sup> *Word* notes the unknown ancient roots of the symbolism of the tree. It is associated with an Accadian Hymn in which a holy tree grows into heaven.<sup>572</sup> Archibald Sayce’s translation, quoted in part by *Word*, records that a tree grew in Eridu “in a holy place...Its foliage was the couch of Zikum the (primaeval) mother. Into the heart of its holy house, which spread its shade like a forest, hath no man entered. (There is the home) of the mighty mother who passes across the sky.”<sup>573</sup> Mary Watts has chosen to begin with roots, an important element of the chapel iconography as they

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<sup>568</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 5.

<sup>569</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 7.

<sup>570</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 5.

<sup>571</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook Unpaginated.

<sup>572</sup> *Word* is here referring to Professor Sayce who found a parallel for Garden of Eden in the Babylonian garden of Eridu. Interestingly, a *The Expository Times* notes a somewhat heated debate over the parallel with Mr. R. Campbell Thompson disagreeing with the comparison. See James Hastings, “Notes of Recent Exposition,” *The Expository Times* 15 (Oct 1903-Sept 1904): 50-51.

<sup>573</sup> From Archibald Henry Sayce, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*, The Hibbert Lectures (London: Williams and Norgate, 1897): 471.

represent the cycle of spinning life from death, the reference to thread explicit in the Celtic stylization and perhaps participating in the tradition of representing life as measured thread. The roots work “in the darkness of the earth, converting all it meets with, even death and decay, into a rising stream of life, sent up again into the topmost bough...”<sup>574</sup> The next level of tiles is filled with flowers—trumpet-shaped lilies emerging in three directions from curling stems in a triskele design. Next, round balls of fruit emerge; snails fit into the iconography with their curling shells and playful features, little round eyes and antennae; and finally, fish with curling scaled bodies and wide eyes make up the top of the lower buttress of creation (Fig. 92 and 93). A scalloped roof decoration separates the lower panels from the higher. Even this detail, as *Word* records, is intended to “express the feeling of peace” by suggesting “the breast feathers of the mother bird, a simile made so beautiful and pathetic by the words, ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not.’”<sup>575</sup> The phrase is filled with both compassion and rebuke, a reminder that all of creation is linked, and yet, mankind chooses to divide.

The capitals on the lower portion of the pillars feature an eagle and an angel. They coordinate with the upper capitals featuring a lion and hooved calf-like creature (Fig. 94). The capitals visually reference the four evangelists, especially in their Celtic iconography visible in a comparison with the painted tympanum in *The Book of Kells f. 2r* (Fig. 95.). The evangelists are also referenced in *Word*, but only subsequently as an attribution to Revelations 4:7 in which the throne of God is described in symbolic terms. The lion, king of the jungle, is a symbol of power and dominion, the calf, a strong and stable beast of burden, man with dominion over the creatures of the earth, and the eagle with the majestic power of flight. Albert Barnes’s

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<sup>574</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 6.

<sup>575</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 10-11.

commentary on the Bible notes the same cultural scholars studied by Mary Watts, particularly Layard, and found overlapping symbolism in Eastern cultures like ancient Assyria and Egypt.<sup>576</sup> The upper panels begin with creation labeled simply “serpent” featuring a coiling body, but oddly angular head, a reminder that this is not a serpent in naturalism but in symbolism. The serpent, or creeping thing, is followed by the winged bird, and then a beast looking like a striped tiger. After beast, man is featured in a much more angular and roughly carved design that the kneeling figures of the “I AM” panel (Figs. 96 and 97). These bodies are more clearly delineated with the curve of the foot clearly visible amongst circling vines. The ladder has now led from the soil beneath the ground and into the heavens with the sun, moon, stars, and angels. The heavenly orbs are symbolized in the triskele of the sun, intertwining circles and crescents for the phases of the moon, and three stars within circles. Finally, two angels rise to the top with human heads and winged bodies, a feathered, scrolling heart making up the torso. Their features seem to vary in the face and crown, with the angel at the right possibly having a more rounded face and more clearly delineated hair.

### Bell Tower

A bell tower rises from the south side of the chapel. The height makes it difficult to be seen from the ground, especially on a cloudy day, however, the decoration is treated with the same intricacy as the rest of the building. Doves circle the cornice with a unique frontal design in which they look as if they are standing figures with head bending forward, beak to chest holding a ribbonlike olive branch creating a garland connecting the birds, and wings forming a heart shaped halo which enfolds their bodies (Fig. 98). *Word* elaborates, saying that they are “signs of the presence of the Spirit of God, speaking unutterable words of peace to the mourner, of healing

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<sup>576</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible* (1834), *Internet Sacred Texts Archive*, [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com). Accessed 20 May 2018.

after fiery trial....”<sup>577</sup> The bell is inscribed with the words, “Be my voice neither feared nor forgotten” attributed to George Frederic Watts, simply called “the donor” in *Word*.<sup>578</sup> The combined description suggests that the peal of bells is intended to remind the chapel visitor of spiritual truths communicated immaterially through the peaceful sound of music, in much the same manner as iconography. Wings with the familiar eyes of the peacock fill up the triangular tower stretching heavenward with flame-like curls replacing any material body between them. Beneath these wings are another set of wings emanating from a sun disk, another reference to the powerful Egyptian symbol at the apex of the chapel. This is even more clearly delineated in the sketch made for *Word in the Pattern* (Fig. 99).<sup>579</sup> The arch of husks is also more clearly in the shape of a heart in the sketched version for publication. *Word* describes, “wings rising out of the heart of a great seed husk, which, with the trumpet-shaped capitals of the small columns supporting the belfry roof, are designed to suggest that ultimate word of triumph. ‘It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.’”<sup>580</sup> The belfry can thus be considered the completion of the tree of life ladder which began with the roots planted beneath the soil and finished its task of regeneration. Mary brings this all together in words written in her biography for George Watts. When George Watts died in July of 1904, Mary Seton wrote,

the casket lay at the chapel at Compton, heaped with signs of love and reverence, and once a day the bell. . .was tolled. . .the ashes were laid. . .All was in harmony, nature serenely radiant, and such lovely voices as he would have liked to hear. . .while just beyond the labourers where at work ploughing fresh furrows for the harvest of another year.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 23-4.

<sup>578</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 23. MSW *Annals* Vol. 3 xii.

<sup>579</sup> Interestingly, the sun disc in the tower is not directly discussed in Mary Watts’s book, *The Word in the Pattern*. Mary Watts expressed much frustration over the illustrations made for *Word* by Louis Deuchars. It can be seen as a struggle between *disegno* and *colore* or between a scientific and mimetic draughtsmanship versus creativity and intuition. George Frederic suggests, “What you want is not form but the impression of form.” Mary writes, “What I want is the flexibility of the terra cotta work to suggest beauty.” See MSW Diaries 3 Dec 1898.

<sup>580</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 24.

<sup>581</sup> *Annals* Vol III, p. xii.

In her description, as well as in her mortuary design, harmony is found in the continuation of life as demonstrated in nature. An invisible truth, like sound or the vibrations of color, reverberates through the materiality of life. In her written passage, the voice of the bell harmonizes with the labourers ploughing the dirt of the field, preparing for another seasonal harvest.

#### 4.4 Path of Just: A Participatory Prayer Wheel

A visitor to the mortuary chapel would naturally follow the path up the hill to the front door of the chapel, and then might make a circular path around the building from the door in a clockwise fashion to follow what Mary calls “The Path of the Just.” Sketches for the footprint layout of the design in the chapel notebook seem to acknowledge this rotation as roman numerals I-IV on the outside of the circle correlate with internal panels numbered 1-8 (Fig. 100).<sup>582</sup> The circular design of the chapel allows for entrance and exit along the path at varying points and suggests continuation in contrast to a linear entry and exit. However, numbers are used to mark out the sides of the building to corresponding iconographical decoration in the chapel notebook sketches dating from around the time that the interior panels were being designed.<sup>583</sup> Mary Watts’s notes begin numbering panels for placement at “1” to the right of the altar or the SE side, suggesting a beginning at this point. Interestingly, this corresponds to the point at which Mary’s description of the exterior frieze begins in *The Word in the Pattern*. In her book description, Mary Watts follows the *Path of the Just* from *Hope, Truth, Love*, and finally, *Light*. In this

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<sup>582</sup> It is unclear whether these numbers correspond to the internal panels or the external frieze. Panel I is sometimes described as the NW interior quadrant. However, these panels are described as numbers 5 & 6 in Mary Watts’s notes. See Bills *Chapel* 64. The roman numeral may, therefore, correspond to the exterior frieze, aiding the alignment of the exterior frieze with the interior panels.

<sup>583</sup> An amateur sketch of a maze amongst Mary’s drawings is labeled “A Maze by Neil boy. Ap 7<sup>th</sup>, 1899,” indicating the plans were made around this time, after the outside of the building was completed. MSW Chapel Notebook Unpaginated.

progression, the visitor begins at the rear of the church, corresponding internally with the altar, perhaps making this a symbolic starting and stopping point.

However, within the physicality of the space, the visitor approaching the chapel from the path through the lych-gate might more naturally begin circumambulation at the NW corner of the building from the door, turning left to follow the path from *Love, Light, Hope*, and finally, *Truth* falling at the SW corner and the setting of the sun. This path also matches the path of the eye reading the emblem emblazoned on the cover to *The Word in the Pattern* (Fig. 59). The phrase “In the beginning was the word,” begins and ends at the Western arm of the cross, the location of the doorway in the mortuary plan, leading the eye around the circle in order to read the words in the same direction that the visitor might follow along the path around the chapel. Upon finishing the external path around the chapel at the *Truth* frieze, the visitor may pass through the door to find the interior space opening up to face the altar.

The domed roof emerges from the chapel drum like an umbrella over the four panels making up the Path of the Just (Fig. 101). Each panel is supported by three corbels in the shape of angels holding shields and are repeated in identical form at each side of the chapel (Fig. 102). The three angels have similar facial features; however, crowns and shields vary. Working clockwise around the building, the first angel holds a labyrinth which *Word* entitles “The Way,”<sup>584</sup> and Mark Bills notes as identical to one drawing in Lethaby’s *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth*.<sup>585</sup> The central angel carries the ship with double crossed mast against an orb. *Word* describes “The Truth” as “the boat of the sun.”<sup>586</sup> Mark Bills notes a “Scandinavian ‘sun boat,’ a Viking ship with a setting sun.”<sup>587</sup> This shape is also reminiscent of Egyptian themes, however,

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<sup>584</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 17.

<sup>585</sup> Lethaby 151.

<sup>586</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 17.

<sup>587</sup> Bills *Chapel* 46.

again mixing the iconography of East and West. The checkered boat described as “day and night” is very similar to the checkered platform of Maat in Mary Watts’s Egyptian panel and the ship with double crossed mast was first sketched in the Egypt portion of Mary Watts’s sketchbook. The boat is also emblematic of the journey of life and death from Brahmanism and Buddhism as indicated in Mary Watts’s chapel notebook.<sup>588</sup> Finally, the remaining angel carries a vine forming Mary Watts’s familiar scrolled heart design intercepted by crosses, cones, and flowers. *Word* calls this shield “The Life” and quotes John 15:5, “I am the Vine, ye are the Branches.” However, the decoration is more akin to the cone used in the tree of life imagery of Assyrian and Buddhist art discussed by d’Aviella and Maisey rather than the grape, resulting in a strange mixture of vine, cone, flower, and tree.<sup>589</sup>

Above the corbels, delicately carved angels lean out of the building in high relief sculpture. In each of the panels, their wings form ninety-degree angles to finish the tau and cross symbol dividing the central panels. The format is the same on each side, however, the crowns change along with the birds symbolizing each frieze and their attending virtues. The panel of *Love* is symbolized by the pelican (Fig. 101). *Word* tells the story of the mother bird “who draws blood from her own breast to feed her brood.”<sup>590</sup> The long neck of the bird reaches in circles to curl back and pick at its own feathers in Celtic stylization similar to one sketched in the Chapel Notebook (Fig. 103). The theme will be used again in textile form in Mary Watts’s *Pelican Rug* (Fig. 104). Knotted clovers and darts surround the panels and hide scurrying creatures, a mouse and a frog. The attendant virtues are symbolized by angels with varying crowns, holding circular orbs much like the angels in the “I Am” panels and also like the angels inside of the chapel.

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<sup>588</sup> Mary Watts writes “symbols common to Brahm & Budd” at the top of the page followed by a passage on the boat in which she describes “a boat on the ocean of life & death.” MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.

<sup>589</sup> See Goblet d’Aviella 192-4 and Maisey 85.

<sup>590</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 21.

Following clockwise, Love's attendants are Purity (the lily in the heart) (Fig. 105), Peace (the dove with an olive branch), Joy (symbolized by ringing bells), and Service as the wheel (Fig. 106). Angel heads in the outside panels begin low, drawing the eye upward and inward toward the central panels.

Light (Fig. 107) is symbolized by the eagle who, *Word* explains, "can look at the sun."<sup>591</sup> The stylization is again reminiscent of Celtic manuscripts, in which the bird is also associated with St. John, who wrote, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." The attendant spirits of Light are God-like, God-ward, God-lit, and God-ship (Figs. 108 and 109). In contrast to the material embodiment of the Love, these panels do not feature any animals, but only light and fire. Suggesting transformation, they may respond to the internally approaching altar and the rising sun on the East side of the chapel.

Hope is symbolized by the peacock (Fig. 110), whose feathers adorn all of the angels on the outside of the chapel. It is, after all, the hope of the resurrection and an invisible spiritual life that most inspires the space. *Word* describes the eye-like designs on the feathers which "looked ever upwards" while being "trailed along the earth."<sup>592</sup> Hope is accompanied by Patience whose little spider bides time spinning a web (Fig. 111), which is quite appropriately placed in its natural environment as the terracotta panels are often covered in webs. It is accompanied by other creatures of the earth, the lion representing Courage (Fig. 112), a hart representing Aim or aspiration, and a dove for Comfort.

Finally, Truth is emblemized as the owl, "whose eye can see through darkness."<sup>593</sup> Perhaps the most intricate carvings are found in this panel decorated with keys made of Tau

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<sup>591</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 22.

<sup>592</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 18.

<sup>593</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) 19.

symbols that form mazes within the central cross (Fig. 113). Truth is the maze through the key of life, in comparison to Love, hearts around circles and cross, Light, the sun and moon, and Hope, the anchor and star. The “servants” of Truth are Liberty as the flying fish (Fig. 114), Justice as scales, Unity as the seashell which is like the universe itself,<sup>594</sup> and Law (Fig. 115), as “the old Scandinavian symbol of the boat, of the sun, and the moon” as encompassing Law of the Universe.<sup>595</sup> Truth is the strange amalgam in which earthly elements, like fish and shells, mix with the abstract, like law and justice. Truth is inspired by the surrounding world, in which the material inspires knowledge of the immaterial. Furthermore, all of nature is ruled by Truth, scientific and spiritual law imagined as one. It is at this point that the visitor circling the chapel returns to the door in one complete round and can pass from the outside world into the chapel interior under watchful terracotta eyes.

#### 4.5 Chapel Interior

Passing under the portal of angels and the garment of praise, the inside of the chapel is dimly lit with double windows, tall and thin, placed in each of the four arms of the cross design. Because the windows are placed inside of the protruding armed cross of the transept, they give the impression of thick walls. However, this is not true and, in fact, the opposite is true as an effort was made to use small, thin bricks to create space—or the illusion of it. As Beazley explains, “the impression thus given to anyone inside the building is of immensely thick walls, since the window reveals are the full depth of the arms of the cross from its extremities to the

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<sup>594</sup> MSW *Word (1905)* notes inspiration from Wordsworth, “Far murmurings within were heard,/ Mysterious union with its native sea. / Even such a shell the universe itself/ Is to the ear of Fatih: / and tehre are times, / I doubt not, when to you it doth impart / Authentic tidings of invisible things; / Of ebb and flow, and ever during power.... (19-20).

<sup>595</sup> MSW *Word (1905)* 19-20.

inner surface of the drum.” The result gives “apparent weight of masonry with minimum material.”<sup>596</sup>

From inside the door, the visitor faces the altar in the East. Rotating sunwise around the room, the visitor finds a spiral from outside, working inwards, not unlike the planned spiral design sketched in Mary Watts’s chapel notebook for her Limnerslease ceiling design (Fig. 116). Although the ceiling panels are built upon a grid of squares, Mary Watts has circled the square conceptually. The ceiling panels are designed to move from the center outwards in a march around four sides labelled “The Heart,” or “sensibilities, goodness, incorruptibility,” “The Mind,” “Hand” or “the senses,” and “The Spirit,” ethical. These parts of the body, are reminiscent of the themes within the chapel. They are also the qualities of the self that must work together for fulfillment in the Arts and Crafts philosophy as mind, hand, and heart find harmony in creation.<sup>597</sup> These sections of the ceiling feature many of the same attendants found in the chapel as well, such as owl and pelican, the tree of knowledge, and virtues like hope, faith and love. Mary writes about the Limnerslease ceiling saying that one section “begins the cluster of qualities after which the better side of human life must always aspire. Symbol of the faith in a life beyond this life.”<sup>598</sup> The same description might be used in reference to the chapel as well. However, the chapel decoration encompasses more than just human life as it connects mortal experience to plants, animals, and the natural surrounding world.

Floorplan sketches from Mary Watts’s notebook suggest careful planning concerning the symbolism of virtues that will encircle the interior of the chapel and perhaps even coordinate

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<sup>596</sup> Beazley 172.

<sup>597</sup> See discussion in chapter two. Jebb, “The Home Arts,” 297 and Ruskin, *Two Paths*, “The Unity of the Arts,” first given as a lecture at Manchester, 14 Mar 1859. “Then Fine Art is that which the hand, the head, and the *heart* of man go together.” John Ruskin, “Lecture II: The Unity of Art,” *The Works of John Ruskin: The Two Paths*, Vol X (Sunnyside, Orpingham, Kent: George Allen, 1878): 49.

<sup>598</sup> MSW Chapel Notebook unpaginated.

with the exterior friezes making up The Path of the Just. Lists made by Mary Watts suggest that she had particular virtues in mind when designing the chapel, which she then put into eight categories. The categories were reworked with virtues crossed out from one list and put into other columns (Figs. 100 and 117). The sections are divided by “real sensuous perception,” or material experience, and “ideal mental conception,” an intellectual or spiritual experience which also fit to the exterior Path of the Just. These two sides of experience, the material and immaterial, are brought together under the idea of “the Word made Flesh,” or the “Logos” circle emblemized on each panel.

The eight interior chapel panels are divided evenly into four sections. The four quadrants of the chapel are physically divided architecturally by the cross-plan design with windows and come together in a point at the top to form triangular sections (Fig. 118). Mary writes at the top of the floor plan that a triangle divided by lines to form an “A”-like section might symbolize “one great heaven” or unity.<sup>599</sup> Each of the four sections contains a tree of life with roots at the bottom, a golden ribbon forming the ground level, six messenger angels carrying attributes, an upper section with a single angel surrounded by another six attributes, (Figs. 118 and 119) finally leading up to the center of the ceiling which contains a circle in a square (Figs. 53 and 120). Benches sitting below the tree roots place the visitor firmly within the physical realm of the chapel (Fig. 119). Each section also contains part of a phrase from the Wisdom of Solomon and a *Logos* medallion, or a circle within a circle divided by a cross echoing the architectural design of the chapel, the emblem on the cover of *Word*, and the culminating symbol at the top of the interior chapel which represents the Creator.

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<sup>599</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.

The four domed sections are divided conceptually as well as physically by the crossed transept. Surviving sketches demonstrate Mary Watts's process in working out the philosophical designs of each section. On a page divided into four sections, she has broad labels of "Body and Soul, Mind, Nature, and Natural Evolution"<sup>600</sup> written at the top of each column followed by the three sets of opposites held by the messenger angels at the lowest level of the chapel, the Logos symbol, and the six attendant virtues accompanying the seraph in each of the four sections at the top. Three of the sections belong to all of the natural world while the SE quadrant just past the altar belongs to "man only."<sup>601</sup> Mary explains that, in general, the interior represents humankind's relationship to nature as it rises towards the Infinite.<sup>602</sup>

The interior panels, for which Mary Watts is continually apologizing alternatively for being "too trivial," or other times as too complicated,<sup>603</sup> are ruled by figural bodies. The bodiless angels of the exterior are given arms and torso in the interior figures, though not legs as suggestive of heavenly status. As in the exterior, each of the faces are similar in feature and androgynous or perhaps more characteristically feminine in the thin arch of eyebrow, bowed lips, and narrowly curved chin. The four seraphs surrounding the central circle in the ceiling are identical (Fig. 121). Their halos resemble both sun discs as well as umbrellas, an oft-used Buddhist symbol which Mary Seton records as a precedent to the halo.<sup>604</sup> A cap replaces any indication of hair; eyes are closed in spiritual communion, and each hand makes a sign of blessing to the visitor standing below on the chapel ground. They are the color of fire—orange-red with curling wings that are also flames forming a vesica piscis. If feminine in shape, these

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<sup>600</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.

<sup>601</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II, unpaginated.

<sup>602</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II. "Of human life in its relation to Nature, rising together towards 'the Eternal relation of man with God,' these patterns would speak..."

<sup>603</sup> Mary Apologizes to George for busy wallpaper and in *Word*, "an apology for so large a use of symbolism may not be out of place, for to some they may appear too trivial as a mode of serious suggestion" (unpaginated).

<sup>604</sup> MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated writing in purple pencil alongside notes on the wheel.

powerful seraphs rule creation in a complete inversion of the crude Sheela-na-gig carved into Romanesque churches. They echo the shape of George Frederic Watts's *All-Pervading* planned for the altar but trade the mysterious black palette for the burning red of creation and destruction. *Word* describes them as "four Seraphs clothed in the crimson colour of love and life."<sup>605</sup> These closed-eyed angels are not the sleepy and languid classical figures of Leighton's *Flaming June*, for example.<sup>606</sup> They rule heaven and earth and, despite closed eyes and silent mouth, actively communicate with powerful expressions of beneficence in their hands. Creative growth is further suggested in the entanglement of seed-shaped bodies with surrounding vines as if attached by roots.

Below the four seraphs, who rule over forces of creation and destruction on earth, are twenty-four "winged messengers, alternately presenting light or the dark side of all things" standing side by side around the four panels.<sup>607</sup> The messengers and seraphs have similar facial features and figural shapes. However, each of the twenty-four messengers are individualized with headdress, unique crowns, and halos. They vary in color and alternate in direction, creating a pattern around the circle of the room. The orange-red, green, and blue palette is familiar to second-phase Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes. The same blue-green atmosphere is used by Simeon Solomon, D.G. Rossetti, Evelyn de Morgan and George Frederic Watts in paintings of spiritual communion like *The Sleepers*, *Beata Beatrix*, *The Storm Spirits*, and, *Time, Death, and Judgment*. Perhaps not surprisingly, George Frederic Watts's image of Death is particularly resonant (Figs. 122 and 123). Watts's figure is directly echoed in the circular disc of "death"

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<sup>605</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II.

<sup>606</sup> For more on the complicated depiction of women at the turn of the century, see Susan P. Casteras, "The Victorian Lady's Domestic Threat: The Good, the Bad and the Indifferent Female Adversary in Contemporary Art," *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House*, Ed. by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (London: Macmillan Press, 1998): 186-208.

<sup>607</sup> *Word*, Part II, unpaginated.

carried by an angel in the NE quadrant (Fig. 124). The dark, heavy-lidded death is also visually similar to the dark headed messenger angels in the interior of the chapel. Instead of lifted apron, however, the chapel angels carry a golden balance perhaps like the one carried by George Watts's Judgment, combining symbolism into single figures. These golden scales, however, represent the balance of darkness and light inherent in life without any hierarchal judgment. Interestingly, there is no separation between the good and the bad as familiarly featured in church depictions of judgement. Fear is replaced by the acceptance of the balance of all things. This concept may have roots in Egypt for Mary as she understood the concept. She writes, "Read with great delight of the old Egyptian symbol of two brothers" which represented "'good' & 'evil' as necessary parts of the existing order of things—'evil' was not compounded with sin..."<sup>608</sup>

The jeweled tones of the chapel gesso might also be compared to Burne-Jones, especially his *Frieze of Eight Women* in oil, gesso, and gold (Fig. 125). The panel features eight bodies, rather androgynous in presentation, wearing robes and turbaned hair against the swirling branches. The flattened composition and decorative background space resembles tapestry design. William Morris & Co.'s *Pomona* or *Flora* are good comparisons (Figs. 126 and 127), featuring a single woman in a decorative tapestry surrounded by swirling vegetative vines. These might, in turn, be inspired from medieval tapestries of figural women in the foreground representing abstract images, like the sixteenth-century examples at the V&A featuring female embodiments of Time and Death, and The Three Fates (Fig. 128). However, where Death, Flora, or Pomona gather apples and flower petals in contemporary panels of relative idleness, emphasizing connection to the earth rather than inherent power over it, the interior chapel presents seraphim

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<sup>608</sup> MSW Diaries 31 Mar 1887.

floating above the heads of the chapel visitor with the power to bridge heaven and earth. These figural angels hold the balance of the earth in their hands and actively bless the visitors below. They are much more closely aligned with the Three Fates who are active in measuring, cutting, and trampling. These are not gentle angels of the house, but almighty spiritual giants floating high above the viewer in space, facing forward in jeweled flatness reminiscent of byzantine icons, but with the vegetative curve of feminine creative power.<sup>609</sup>

The messenger angels are grouped in pairs. Interestingly, one angel faces the viewer while one turns away, presenting only the back of the head, crown and halo to the viewer.<sup>610</sup> The result is visually similar to the angels of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, whose faces were covered with a star to prevent the appearance of idolatry. While faces are clearly a key part of chapel iconography, it is an interesting similarity given the reluctance to represent a figural image of God in the Compton chapel decoration. Unlike the chapel angels facing forward, the backs of the angels' heads are textured suggesting cropped hair encircled with a crown, sometimes in the shape of a cross, sometimes resembling a laurel wreath.<sup>611</sup> The two messengers share the burden of carrying attributes which are held like scales between four hands, balancing attributes with oppositions like "day" and "night" in the first section. The two pairs work together, requiring opposition for balance. They are like the "orbs of light and shade" as Tennyson describes creation in "In Memoriam," the poem that Mary Watts recited to George Frederic as he lay dying on July 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>612</sup> The messenger "presenting the light" is given a detailed crown and halo full of

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<sup>609</sup> "Angel in the House" is the iconic poem of the Victorian separation of male/female spheres by Coventry Patmore. For an exploration of this subject, see *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House*, Ed. by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (London: Macmillan Press, 1998). "Angel in the House" is also briefly discussed in terms of images of the Watts' images of death in Rose, "Subversive," 57.

<sup>610</sup> Conservation has shown that the faces and hands of the angels and putti were done separately. See WGA MSW/5/7.

<sup>611</sup> Conservation work in 1963 by Campbell, Smith and Co. addressed damage to halo medallions, as well as other medallions and putti. See WGA MSW/5/7.

<sup>612</sup> MSW Diaries 1 Jul 1904.

symbolism. It is here that another powerful testament to Mary Watts's admiration of the ancient Egyptian aesthetic is also visible, with at least one of the angels clothed in fiery red and black feathers, wearing the winged disc crown, almost appearing as a goddess of Egypt (Fig. 129).

#### 4.6 Circumambulation and Natural Evolution

The panels in the NW quadrant are labeled five and six by Mary Watts. This is a natural beginning point in the circumambulation from the door and it also marks the beginning of two worded messages encircling the interior. The Wisdom of Solomon, verses one and three, are written into the corbels, requiring the visitor to circle the interior in order to read the entire message. It begins with two phrases on each side of the quadrant, "But the/Souls of the," and continues, "RighteousAre/in the" "hand of God/Their hope" "Is Full of/Immortality" (Fig. 130).<sup>613</sup> The other written message within the panels is in the crossed circle medallion, which Mary Watts called *Logos* in her sketches. "In the beginning was the Word," reads the first medallion, placed between the corbels and separating the lower section of the panel from the upper section. Following the panels clockwise, the medallions read, "The Word was with God," "The Word was God," and "The Word was Made Flesh" (Figs. 60 and 131). "The Word," therefore, makes the conceptual spiral downward, condescending from the Immaterial realm of the Infinite in the shape of the crossed circle in the square, downward into material form. Traveling in the opposite direction, the tree symbolism begins with roots below the "golden girdle" and rises with the chapel arches. This tree is developed into a decoration of swirling vines with grapes.

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<sup>613</sup> Mark Bills notes that the scripture was traditionally used at memorial services. See *Chapel 60*. The Book of Solomon is thought to have been written around the first century and is part of the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament.

The lowest section of the panel is filled with the first order of angels holding balances of opposing forces. In this Northwest quadrant, messenger angels hold “Day/Night,” “Ebb/Flow,”<sup>614</sup> and “Growth/Decay” (Fig. 132). All three sets can be understood in terms of life and death, however the second set is perhaps the most mysterious. Mary Watts may have been drawing on the Buddhist analogy to life as a trip on a boat. After George Watts passed, Mary Seton describes, in great detail, “a little boat being got ready for launching...the man in the boat is ready to use the oars, the second...fixes the rudder & she off swiftly down the path of light.” She then explains, “How wonderfully like the lives of men & women—I think of Mary and Evelyn—The man at the oars is the body, & man at the rudders the soul.”<sup>615</sup> Concerning the other two pairs, the words of G.F. Watts to Gladstone seem prescient. He writes,

the sense of the four great conditions of our existence Life and Death, Light and Darkness, so dominate my mental vision that they almost become material entities to me and take material forms dwarfing and casting into shadow ordinary considerations, over the two first, human efforts broadly speaking, avail nothing; but we have it in our power to modify the two last.<sup>616</sup>

The seraph in the “upper hierarchy” is surrounded by attributes, many of which were previously seen in the Truth panel outside of the chapel: Unity, Order, Law (as a boat), Truth, the scales of Justice, and Power.<sup>617</sup> These attributes encircle the bottom half of the seraph (Fig. 131).

Although neither messenger nor Seraph has feet, *Word* compares the six circles to “footprints of a beneficent Creation,”<sup>618</sup> which may be inspired by the tradition of representing the decorated footprints of Buddha inside temple decoration, as drawn by Mary Watts in her sketchbook (Fig. 133).<sup>619</sup> These are laws understood to govern “Universal Nature” and belonging to the

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<sup>614</sup> This may be linked with “Truth” frieze—see Wordsworth poem: ebb and flow, unity.

<sup>615</sup> MSW Diaries 13 Jul 1904.

<sup>616</sup> GFW to William Ewart Gladstone, 4 Oct 1884. Heinz Archive GFW/1.

<sup>617</sup> “Upper Hierarchy” is taken from Bills, *Chapel* 59.

<sup>618</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II unpaginated.

<sup>619</sup> Mary Watts also wrote of “Buddha’s walk” in her notebook, noting that “Sakya after he obtained Buddhahood, remained seated under the Bodhi tree for 7 days. He then rose & walked up & down from east to west—taking 18

surrounding world. They seem to rule over the evolution of the natural world in the revolutions of day and night, ebb and flow, and growth and decay below.

Approaching the altar, in the NE quadrant, messenger angels carry Life & Death, Good & Evil, Rest & Labour. While the paired terms are understood as contrasting to some extent, they are more aptly described as balancing two sides. They lack the hierarchy of the binary opposites.<sup>620</sup> They are attended by attributes reminiscent of the exterior *Love* and *Hope* friezes in the exterior *Path of the Just*. These attributes, circling the lower half of the orange-red seraph, are Intuition, Obedience, Innocence, Love, Hope, and Faith. This section was labeled “Body & Soul” in Mary Watts’s sketchbook. However, it has been changed significantly with the original messenger angels who carried “Spirit & Flesh,” and “Strength & Weakness.” It seems as though these characteristics were understood as particular to humankind rather than “All Creatures,” which ultimately came to describe this section and led to the trading of these characteristics with the next section. These attributes are, therefore, related to the animal kingdom whereas the previous section was more specific to the natural world. The next section relates specifically to mankind and the last section belongs to all of nature like Truth on the exterior panel.

Passing the altar, the messenger angels of the SE quadrant carry “Joy /Sorrow,” “Spirit/Flesh,” and “Real/Ideal.” The notebook sketch associates this section with “Mind,” and the attending attributes in the upper section are associated with the mind of humankind. They are Inspiration, Aspiration, Meditation, Balance, Sacrifice, and Mercy. Finally, the last set of panels on the SW side are associated with all of nature. The theme fits well with the *Logos* separating

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paces. Under each foot print sprang a flower. ‘Then he created between the throne and the spot where he had stood a cloistered walk and he spent seven days in walking up and down in that jewelled cloister which stretched from east to west, and that spot was known as the Dagoba of the Jewelled cloister’—.” MSW, Chapel Notebook, unpaginated.  
<sup>620</sup> For an in-depth discussion of binary oppositions within the chapel context, esp. in terms of Cixous and feminist theory, see Rose *Women* especially pages 21-28.

the lower and upper sections, reading, “the word was made flesh.” The messenger angels carry “Freedom/Limit,” “Union/Conflict,” and “Stability/Change”—traded out with “Real/Ideal” which was instead placed in the previous set. The attendant virtues on the upper section include many of the same themes and virtues displayed in the *Light* panels on the exterior side of this wall, both, perhaps, participating in a culmination of ideas. Starting with Light, as an Eagle, and moving to Peace (featuring a dove akin to the *Hope* panel’s Comfort), Wisdom as an owl, Progress as a wheel (as in the Love panel’s wheel of service), Patience as a brooding hen, and a lion for Courage.

#### 4.7 Alchemy of the Altar

The altar is central to the space, but within the dimly lit interior, it is difficult to discern the rich symbolism within. It is dark and mysterious, crowned with George Frederic’s *All-Pervading* and wrapped in stylized symbolism borrowed heavily from Celtic tradition, but also incorporating an interest in world religions. Unlike the other parts of the chapel in which figural images reign, the altar is largely made of vegetal shapes. Birds set in vegetation dominate this space, although small figural images do help to make up the decoration on the front of the altar. The front of the altar space is divided into three arches featuring angels that are stylistically similar to the corbel angels on the exterior of the chapel (Figs. 134 and 102). However, only the final angel carries the same symbol of the maze as in “The Way,” to symbolize mortal life. The first arch features the triskele, a flaming shape that radiates outwards and is accompanied by three angelic heads. The middle angel embraces Mary Watts’s signature heart, which is also repeated between the arches. Above the three arches, looking architecturally like the exterior colonnade, are the four figures from the exterior capitals. These figures are intended to evoke the four evangelists in Christianity, however, their symbolic form leaves them relatively undogmatic.

The bottom of the altar features the final set of words within the chapel space and once again conveys the idea of the Word made flesh, or that humankind can find evidence of an Infinite spirituality within the material of life experience.

This lower section of the front of the altar is the most playful in the chapel, recalling the Celtic knots of illuminated manuscripts and portraying the most explicitly male gendered images within the most human of the figural images within the space. “The Tabernacle of the Lord,” is written in the first panel with letters of varying size embraced by curling, serpentine lines weaving in and out of the letters, disrupting the visual message. “The Tabernacle” is suggested in the imagery of a mountain of wings crowned by the circular triskele encompassed by angel wings. The next passage continues the message, “Is with men” with two figures conversing, their square jaws, helmets, and pants making them more literally “men” than simply “humankind” (Fig. 135). Like the *Tree of Life* wellhead illustration and the mankind panels from the exterior *Tree of Life* chapel panels, the men wear rounded shoulder armor and feature a square jaw and curling cap comparable to a small character on the Chi Rho page of the *Book of Kells* (Fig. 136). The words are obscured, and the visitor is forced to look to the natural vegetation to find the message hidden within the gilded portrayal of the natural environment. The word, “men” is entangled with the only human limbs featured in this knotted environment (Fig. 137). Two sets of little toes extend out through letters “m-e-n” which attach to the backsides of praying figures with ill-defined buttocks sitting upon the word in a somewhat feeble act of worship at the altar. The decision to put the angel with the curling heart above man in this panel suggests the centrality of Love as the essential attribute in the mortal realm. Love links humanity together in a common search for access to divine knowledge, or infinite truth, within the natural environment. Within this heart is the flaming lamp, suggesting an alchemic change taking place through these

feeble efforts. The final panel reads, “he shall dwell with them,” which pairs with the labyrinth of life and the three angels wrapped around and supporting the maze of mortal life. Above this decoration is a dedication to the people of Compton and recognition of Mary Watts as designer. It commemorates the design date of 1896, although the exterior of the chapel was not finished and dedicated until 1898 and the interior was not finished until 1904. It reads, “This chapel designed by Mrs. Watts, wife of G.F. Watts, OM. R.A. was built in 1896 by her and the people of Compton: It is dedicated to the memory of all who rest near its walls.”

The retable behind the altar features a built-in shelf decorated with seven doves symbolizing “seven gifts of the spirit” (Fig. 138). These gifts are comparable to cardinal virtues. Four are considered intellectual while the remaining three are moral or ethical. They are wisdom, “comfait” or knowledge, understanding (a compliment of faith), “counynging” or council (a compliment prudence or good judgement), “pittie” or piety and reverence, strength or fortitude, and “dreede” or fear and reverence before God. The Seven Gifts of the Spirit is a traditional part of devotional literature and often represented in manuscripts as doves and associated with the Tree of Life. The imagery of Isaiah 11:1-2, which lists the virtues, is that of the spirit of God which, like a dove, rests on the branches of the tree sprouting from the root of Jesse. A contemporary example is in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary which was built c. 1899 in Lourdes, a dome-shaped building with circle in the cross symbolism on the ceiling, also illustrates the seven gifts of the spirit featuring angels comparable in style to the Compton angels (Fig. 139). In Mary Watts’s design, each dove faces downward with wings spread, forming an arrow to the tip of the beak pointing to two interlaced circles featuring the written attribute and a symbol of each held within medallions stylistically resembling the balances held by the surrounding angels (Fig. 140).

Rising from the shelf is another remarkable attribute to the Egyptian sun disc beloved by George and Mary. The gilded disc with serpentine knots on each side twist to form Celtic knots in Mary Watts's unique intercultural language of ideal decoration. The disc rises to a position of centrality, supporting G.F. Watts's painting of the *All-Pervading* which was meant to "speak" symbolically with the other chapel symbols, "to the ear of heart and mind"<sup>621</sup> (Fig. 141). The wings enfold the All-Pervading Love within a protected mandorla or vesical piscis, the intersection of two discs emblemizing transcendence. It is this shape which contains all of the angels in space, giving them dominion over the two spheres of heaven and Earth. George Watts's All-Pervading is enthroned with the monumental lap of creation and interdiction, containing the "gigantic nobility" of Michelangelo's Madonna of the Pieta or the Cumaean sibyl.<sup>622</sup> This lap holds the universe with "the guiding Hands of Love."<sup>623</sup> The painting is enshrined in an architectural frame with vine covered pillars and an arch filled with scrolling hearts. The rectangle is filled with birds and vines. A pair of pelicans, emblems of *Love* from the exterior panels, occupy the lowest section, while birds rise to the top, perhaps doves followed by peacocks. The altar is encompassed about by side walls with the "seven-branched candlestick," framed by "the symbol of the soul of the Eucharist, the bird feeding on the grapes" (Fig. 142).<sup>624</sup> *Watts Chapel* recognizes the candlestick from Mary Watts's sketchbook and describes it as "one of the few images in Mary's chapel to be recognizably based on Egyptian designs"<sup>625</sup> (Fig. 143). It is a loose representation, like all of the symbols, and is associated with ancient Assyrian as

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<sup>621</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II unpaginated.

<sup>622</sup> "Thoughts on Art," in MSW *Annals* Vol. III 49. The quote reads, "Michel Angelo passionately strove to impress on his designs the character of gigantic nobility."

<sup>623</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II unpaginated. Lucy Ella Rose makes the connection between Mary's angels and female sibyls in "Subversive" and *Women*, especially the discussion of Mary Watts's bronze of *The Messenger* in Rose *Women* 169.

<sup>624</sup> MSW *Word* (1905) Part II unpaginated.

<sup>625</sup> Bills *Chapel* 75.

well as Egyptian designs. It is one of many indications of the influence of Eastern cultures on Mary Watts designs.

Most importantly in terms of Egyptian influence, however, is the repeated use of the winged sun disc. The sun disc changes once again, adding a face to the center disc and is repeated over again in the step-like platforms leading up to the windows (Figs. 144 and 145). These are difficult to see from the ground of the chapel within the dimly lit interior. The winged sun is repeated three times across the top and gilded. This version of the sun symbol features a face, somewhat like the Assyrian conception of a figure rising from the circle. The panel above features the three-headed ox, much like the sketch of the baptismal font in Mary Watts's sketches, and Celtic beasts with curled tongues.

The Compton mortuary chapel is more than a small building or even a building within a larger built environment. It represents the possibility of building community alongside architecture. At the turn of the century, amidst anxieties of commercialization and the creation of new public spaces for men and women to work alongside one another, the chapel project represents a hope for a symbiosis between people as well as nature. These issues are communicated by the designer, Mary Watts, in shifting choices between stylistics. The change from older ecclesiastical styles, particularly the Romanesque, to contemporary presentations of androgynous figural bodies works like a language—utilizing the vocabulary of different periods to express different values. The faith of old Christianity is used to express human striving towards discovering those infinite truths that the Watts' feel running through time. However, when values are represented allegorically, they no longer belong to a specific dogma or a specific gender. They are removed from the language of patriarchal culture and imagined in contemporary forms as androgynous, creative, and available to all. While the language of the

chapel retains an intimation that Christianity will play a role in bringing humanity together, the chapel space also offers a hope that moves beyond specific dogma and positivistic progression. By imagining and representing symbols as common to a variety of cultures through time, and by privileging the cyclical nature of forms, the Compton chapel proposes that truth is not newly attributed to any one culture or dogmatic power. Rather, it has always been there. Divine truth is compared to natural forms, like the sea and the sky, always accessible and available to rediscovery.

## Conclusion

### Pulling at the Margins: Traversing and Uniting Boundaries

“The light of the sun hides the stars—  
as the light of reason hides the higher & farther off the spiritual—  
I add ‘Use the sunlight to make own telescopes!  
& then under the dark quiet of night  
see more than ever—’  
Use reason, & then rest...”<sup>626</sup>  
--Mary Watts

Mary Seton and George Frederic Watts’s move to Compton can be understood as a significant element of the couple’s social and moral philosophy that made up their artistic aesthetic. Rather than a simple removal from the bustle of city life for reasons of health and retirement, George and Mary Watts sought a different societal model which they can be seen enacting within the small community. Like many intellectuals of his day, George wrote and painted of the demoralization of urban life with its artificially constructed rhythms created by industrialization and the needs of the machine rather than the individual. For George and Mary Watts, art was bound to the nature of modern society. A society which did not value art did not value an essential element of creativity within humanity. The result would be social disharmony, as George wrote, “landlord and tenant more and more in opposition, by destroying a connecting link of great value.”<sup>627</sup>

George Frederic’s essay, “Present Conditions of Art” takes up the issue of modern society in relation to art—the two shown to be inextricably connected. Mary Watts’s republished article in *Annals* calls attention to this piece and writes that it was “probably the one upon which Mr. Watts bestowed most pains. It was the result of the accumulated thought of a lifetime.”<sup>628</sup> As

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<sup>626</sup> MSW Diaries 10 Mar 1887.

<sup>627</sup> MSW *Annals* III 157.

<sup>628</sup> MSW *Annals* III 148.

discussed briefly in chapter two, the essay outlines fears of national greed over human welfare as industrialism threatened natural rhythms of labor and rest couched in the language of aesthetics. George states, “the tendency to discourage our natural safety-valves for superabundant national energy will only leave open the fields of manufacturing and commercial enterprise, neither in these days favourable to gaiety.”<sup>629</sup> Mid-century witnessed the creation of the schedule based on the time clock instead of the sun, as minutes began to be counted in terms of train schedules and the twenty-four hour needs of the factory. To meet the needs of the machine, modern industrial workers are required to divide their lives into rigid shifts of time according to the clock and the desires of corporate ownership. Movement away from rural areas also often meant a removal from the natural cycles governing day and night and periods of work and rest. No longer ruled by the cycle of natural creation of which humankind was wrought, the machine age became the god of time with no use for cycles of rest.

The imbalance of power between the factory worker, who once worked in coordination with the natural cycle of seasons and individual human labor, and the god of profit made up of factory owners and their governing bodies, was often embodied in the character called Mammon. Edmund Spencer’s *Faerie Queen* called Mammon “the greatest God below the Sky,” the creator of kings and kingdoms. Wearing a rusted iron coat “enveloped with Gold...And in his lap a Mass of Coin he told...And round about him lay on every side / Great Heaps of Gold that never could be spent,” Mammon is the embodiment of greed for which “guiltless blood” was “pour’d off on ground.”<sup>630</sup> As we have seen, Spencer’s Mammon is the perfect character for Carlyle’s critique of England’s economic system in *Past and Present*. Carlyle describes the working

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<sup>629</sup> MSW *Annals* III 157.

<sup>630</sup> Edmund Spencer, *Faerie Queen*, Book II, Canto VII.

industry in Britain as “a serious, most earnest Mammonism grown Midas-eared.”<sup>631</sup> He writes scathingly of a supply and demand system in which cotton is produced more cheaply than ever before, yet “bare backs were never more numerous,” saying:

Let inventive men cease to spend their existence incessantly contriving how cotton can be made cheaper; and try to invent, a little, how cotton at its present cheapness could be somewhat justlier divided among us. Let inventive men consider, Whether the Secret of the Universe, and of Man’s Life there, does, after all, as we rashly fancy it, consist in making money? There is one God, just, supreme, almighty: but is Mammon the name of him?—With a hell which means ‘Failing to make money....’<sup>632</sup>

George and Mary Watts saw the greed of British industrialism as Mammonism in similar terms, although they may not demonize nor align with one particular political or economic policy. Mary records George’s words, “‘I am no Radical or Socialist,’ he said; ‘I find Conservatives and Liberals are equally to blame for not holding the standard higher, they are much alike in doing just what is expedient.’”<sup>633</sup> George Frederic’s version of *Mammon* embodies the imagery of both Spencer and Carlyle. Terrifyingly unattractive and yet with the power to bend beautiful bodies beneath hand and foot, perhaps symbolic of Spencer’s “loyal truth” and “guiltless bloud,” Watts’s *Mammon* holds bags of gold in his lap and is also Midas-eared (Fig. 25). For Carlyle, “brutal Mammonism” is the opposition to “god-like Labour” which he hopes will someday take the throne in Britain.<sup>634</sup> Mary recalls that George “would often preach against Mammon worship, and the hypocritical veiling of the daily sacrifice made to this diety.” George’s words were, “Holy Mammon,” interchangeable with “Sacred Dividend.” To fellow Academician Briton Riviere, George Frederic proposed erecting a statue to Mammon in Hyde Park where his

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<sup>631</sup> Carlyle 212.

<sup>632</sup> Carlyle 229.

<sup>633</sup> MSW *Annals* II 146-7.

<sup>634</sup> Carlyle 212.

worshippers could “bow the knee publicly to him.” Riviere replied, “You make the statue, and I am sure you will find worshippers.”<sup>635</sup>

Immediately upon moving to Compton, Mary Watts found her community project which would begin to restore labour to its proper position. The creative impulse understood as central to humanity could be given expression through Mary Watts’s Home Arts classes in Compton to help build a place of memorial in the construction of the cemetery. Local resources would be used, but the people would work in harmony with the land on the small-scale project to fulfill basic needs without overpowering the natural environment. The project can be seen in reaction to George Frederic’s fears that “the beauty nature gave and materialism ruthlessly destroyed” would leave England “as Rachel weeping for her children, the things that are not.”<sup>636</sup>

The cemetery fit a practical purpose much needed in the area and the project encouraged the cooperative combination of heart, hand, and head advocated by the Home Arts. When George writes to Riviere in 1896, he advises him to arrange his visit to allow him to be there on a Thursday evening from seven to nine when “my wife has pretty nearly the whole village” at her Home Arts class. It is not simply art instruction that interests the group, however, but the social model upon which it is built. George writes of “stimulating interest in the country life and home of the people.”<sup>637</sup> The endeavor can be considered alongside the artistic legacies in painting, sculpture, and design as it was probably intended by the couple. Mary Watts’s diaries confirm George’s desire that any funds leftover after Mary’s own expenses be left to the Postman’s Park project to commemorate everyday heroism and to the Home Arts and Handicrafts.<sup>638</sup> The artist couple hoped to enact social and economic change through their artwork. George and Mary

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<sup>635</sup> MSW *Annals* II 149.

<sup>636</sup> MSW *Annals* II 168.

<sup>637</sup> Letter from GFW to Briton Riviere, 6 Feb 1896, NPG, Heinz Archive, NPG, GFW/1/13/127.

<sup>638</sup> See MSW Diaries 23 May 1891.

Watts supported the Home Arts movement with their time, energy, and patronage.<sup>639</sup> Mary Watts was especially dedicated to the movement and hoped that it would help society to replace materialism with human joy. She writes, “a cottage made home-like with those one loves, makes life as happy & happier than in a palace.”<sup>640</sup>

Mary Watts often expressed her hope that living in Compton would be helpful to the community there. The move from city to rural community can be understood as part of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic as it participated in the critique of the British system of economy. While the artist couple could have remained in London and enjoyed a larger patronage due to convenience of location, the decision to move was at least in part an effort to help create small pockets of industry in rural areas. The participation of the chapel project in the HAIA movement, the emphasis on community volunteer work within the dialogue surrounding the chapel project, and even the subsequent building of the Compton Pottery Guild, evidence a participation with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic which valued rural space and individual labor. The chapel project addresses contemporary issues of labor which were understood as part of the aesthetic. It is the embodiment of philosophies as written by Ruskin and Morris which encouraged artwork made from localized resources. Labor is valued as an end in itself—it is valuable because it creates. These ideas work in opposition to the factory work taking place within the city, in which labor is consistently devalued as a natural result of an economic system in which the lowest price in manufacturing results in the greatest reward. In this system, labor is valued based on the cheapness for which it can be obtained. It is divorced from both quality and creative process. The

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<sup>639</sup> Mary records commissions and purchases from the Home Arts in her journal. For example, she sketches a table which will be made by the Home Arts for their home on 14 Jan 1891 and of delight over things purchased on 6 and 8 June 1891. “Thompson brought back the Six days of Creation from the H. Arts, & my other purchases—Signor pleased with them especially with the copper hot water jug—the first really useful household utensil! I have seen made by the Home Arts—” (8 June 1891).

<sup>640</sup> MSW Diaries 16 Aug 1893. Mary’s writings even suggest interest in starting a convalescent home on 17 Aug 1893.

construction of the mortuary chapel and subsequent pottery guild can be understood as a disruption to commercial, large-scale manufacturing processes that create distance between people and the process of creation, or between labor and natural resources. This disharmony was not understood as sustainable and fear for the happiness of the individual as well as the welfare of Britain as a country was at stake. Intellectual communicators like Ruskin and Morris called for actionable reform. The Compton chapel project is an answer to that call. The gallery can still be seen as continuing to work to fulfill societal needs within the rural community with The Big Issues Project which sponsors artwork from those considered at the margins of society.<sup>641</sup>

The impossibility of categorizing the Compton mortuary chapel within a single style or art movement has been a source of anxiety in past scholarship. Pevsner, Nairn, and Cherry express frustration in locating a single style and describe the use of various influences as a weak “attempt at finding a style.”<sup>642</sup> They find fault in an English society that resisted homogenization, saying “had the artistic climate been homogenous Mrs Watts would naturally have used it [Art Nouveau]. But in England each small advanced group was working separately, so the chapel desperately attempts Art Nouveau effects from the outlandish standpoint of Celtic Revival.”<sup>643</sup> Confused by the unique combination of styles used by Mary Watts and others at the period, the book concludes that the chapel must have been a feeble attempt at Art Nouveau with an inexplicable element of Celtic Revivalism evidencing the fact that artistic groups had failed to create a united stylistic. However, this aspect of the chapel, and of the unique expression of

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<sup>641</sup> The program sponsors community and youth groups as well as some prison inmates. This division of the gallery aims at supporting “artist-led workshops to vulnerable and socially excluded people.” For example, the Michael Varah Memorial Fund sponsored ten women prisoners to take part in a 2016 program to make and sell Christmas cards in an effort to support artistic skills by those marginalized by society. For more information, see the Watts Gallery Artists’ Village website on community outreach, “The Big Issues Project,” Watts Gallery Artists’ Village, [wattsgallery.org.uk/learn/community-engagement-outreach/big-issues-project](http://wattsgallery.org.uk/learn/community-engagement-outreach/big-issues-project), Accessed 20 May 2018.

<sup>642</sup> Ian Nairn, Nikolaus Pevsner, and Bridget Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Surrey*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002): 170.

<sup>643</sup> Nairn 168-170.

artistic groups across England, is key to understanding the work being created at the period. The diversity and individualism of artistic groups was part of a movement against homogenized Industrialization. The movement away from the city and large-scale production through the creation of Home Industries classes is also manifest in a movement away from a single style and the embracement of unique stylizations. The Compton mortuary chapel is impossible to categorize. It takes elements from Neo-Romanesque, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Celtic Revival, Symbolism and second-wave Pre-Raphaelitism. However, this is not a thoughtless recombination. To the contrary, varying stylistics are intentional and each can be understood as containing a part of the dialogue extended by Mary Watts's designs for the mortuary space.

The Compton mortuary is a building designed to communicate the hopes and anxieties of the British community in a language most expressive of the time in which it was created. This was understood as a crucial part of artistic stylizations by Mary and George Watts. George Frederic Watts's writings express the strong belief that the artist "should speak the language of his time, not only because he can only naturally find expression in it, but because of the direct appeal it makes to those whom he addresses."<sup>644</sup> This context explains the significance of Mary Watts's words to James Morton that "It [Celtic art] is ours." Celtic art was understood as a language belonging to the artist-designer as a Scot. Furthermore, it was capable of uniting a divided Britain in which the "Celtic Fringe" felt the anxieties of diminishing culture, political, and economic influence.

The Celtic stylizations are also tied into the cultural influence of early Christianity. Mary Watts recognizes Christianity as a foundation for British cultural values and utilizes religion as a language of signs to convey values rather than dogma. In the same manner, Mary Watts also

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<sup>644</sup> "The Present Conditions of Art," In *MSW Annals* III 159.

accesses the stylizations of Byzantine and Romanesque Architecture. However, as the turn of the century approaches, these stylizations are no longer sufficient in themselves. They do not speak of the present conditions of art. The Compton chapel seeks a united worldview in a search for values that are understood as shared across time and culture. The early Christian stylizations accessed in the chapel design are removed from dogmatic meaning through a refusal of traditional canonical stories or Western representations of God and his prophets. Mary Watts writes of her enjoyment and solace in church “prayer & psalm,” but the peaceful feeling is disrupted by preaching “on the ‘Christian Church’ & that oft repeated measurement of its ‘world-wide importance.’” Mary Seton records her strong opinion of “the pettiness of it, the cruelty” of such a limited view. She finds George Birdwood’s perspective on religion as more hopeful because she understands it as “uniting points between the religious thought of man from east to west, from north to south, & hopes as we do that one day the dawn of religious unity & true brotherhood is to rise.”<sup>645</sup> Therefore, the Neo-Byzantine and Neo-Romanesque architectural influences give way to Mary Watts’s own unique stylistics drawing on contemporary symbolic language understood as open-ended and participatory which would allow future generations freedom of thought.

The Compton Chapel designs embrace newer stylizations like the Art Nouveau and second-phase Pre-Raphaelitism to speak to contemporary issues of social upheaval. A feminist turn can be detected in the shift from ancient architectural stylizations to contemporary styles emphasizing vegetative decoration and androgynous forms, providing room to align the feminine material body with spiritual insight. Furthermore, the move away from specifically Christian iconography manifests a widening of religious perspective. The repetitive use of androgynous

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<sup>645</sup> MSW Diaries 29 Oct 1893.

figures and rejection of any representation of traditional ecclesiastic male intercessory, or even traditional biblical stories, results in a dethronement of the patriarchal authority of established religion in favor of a personal search for connection with knowledge and understanding of one's self within in the world at large. In 1898, Mary records George saying, "The next divine teacher who visits this earth will not say 'blessed are they who have not seen & yet have believed.' He will say 'blessed are they who see and believe, meaning that they have seen & perceived the brotherhood of all created things.'"<sup>646</sup> The iconography of the Compton chapel embraces a connection between created things, however, it cannot be George Frederic Watts's brotherhood as traditionally gendered attributes combine without a privileged masculine hierarchy. Mary Seton Watts's designs embrace George Frederic's ideas on evidence-based knowledge and unity of creation, but without the inherently gendered hierarchical language.

The Symbolist movement provided Mary Watts, and other artists at the turn of the century, with an artistic language of signs capable of new meaning as society was understood as moving away from specific dogma to a more open-ended manner of thinking. Symbolism allowed for individual interpretation from diverse experience. It embraced the participation of the visitor or observer. A principle uniquely expressed in three-dimensional form through the architectural design of buildings as well as environment, particularly in the encouragement of circumambulation, in the Compton mortuary space.

Not only does the chapel defy the categorization of artistic and religious languages, it is also nonlinear in its conception of time. Mary Seton's design conveys the invisible loop of time through experiential space in her design. This departure from a traditionally linear, Western, hierarchal, and perhaps even Industrialized conception of the world, lends itself to period

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<sup>646</sup> MSW Diaries 11 Jan 1898.

concerns over balancing the roles of men and women in the public sphere. Mary held strongly to the opinion that women should have a public voice and played a role in the suffrage movement by acting as president of the Godalming arm of the Women's Suffrage Society after George Frederic's death. Through both the androgynous, and perhaps even feminine, imagery within the chapel, as well as the practical cooperation between men and women in building the chapel, the built environment conveys a vision of the balance between genders as well as cultures. In the multiple stylistic languages of the chapel, men and women, regardless of gender or creed, follow the same path of birth, death, and rebirth and suffer the same emotion and attachment to life through perceived positive and negative forces of experience.

In conclusion, the mortuary chapel at Compton does indeed display a multiplicity of voices. It is within this tangle of voices that Mary Watts provides a place for the freedom of individual contemplation within a community of artistic symbols that encourage a consideration of the cyclical nature of human life and the surrounding environment. The Art Nouveau vegetal stylizations are found in harmony with the Celtic knots found to both unite and confuse the connections between living things and the materiality of life. Invisible faith is a powerful force in shaping perception and an important element upon which British culture is abstractly based, but also symbolically acts as a physical base upon which the architectural program is built. As structures of dogma and gender ideology become more fluid, however, these stylistics give way to a modern artistic language uniquely developed by Mary Watts and the Compton community.

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