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between Painting and Architecture, Greece, Rome,
Florence, and France, c.1870-1910*

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The New Sculpture and the Old: British Sculpture between Painting and
Architecture, Greece, Rome, Florence, and France, c.1870 -1910

Thomas Nicholas Couldridge

Abstract

The New Sculpture was, in a sense, no such thing. All the major figures of the movement turned in varying ways to tradition and the past to justify and inform their practice in the present. In this self-conscious ‘revival’ or ‘renaissance’ of forgotten principles, the elements of rediscovery and continuity with the traditions of the past were taken seriously, though the leading figures, including Alfred Gilbert, William Hamo Thornycroft, Edward Onslow Ford, and Thomas Stirling Lee, were both different among themselves and eclectic in their actual work. As individuals, all looked to French Sculpture, which had seen a momentous neo-Florentine revival from the 1860s onwards, yet the Quattrocentist mode, with its gradual apotheosis of Donatello, in particular, was paired with an enduring admiration for fifth-century Greek and Hellenistic sculpture, increasingly seen as having pictorial qualities in line with modern naturalism alongside the qualities of breadth, purity, and serenity associated with an earlier neoclassicism. As modellers, all aimed in varying degrees for a picturesque, colouristic handling of form that was explored in the monumental sphere as well as in small scale-works for the interior. Ruskin’s ideas, too, were more important for the New Sculpture than has been recognised. The movement produced very varied results in the field of architecture.

The New Sculpture and the Old: British Sculpture between
Painting and Architecture, Greece, Rome, Florence, and
France, c.1870 -1910

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Thesis Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
PhD

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May 2024

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Introduction

At the inaugural meeting of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, which took place in Liverpool in December 1888, the sculptor Alfred Gilbert, serving as President of the Sculpture Section, attempted to frame his own work and that of his closest associates in terms of continuity with the past:

The conditions of life—social, moral, physical, and even political—were so vastly different to those of our present time that I admit, were I advocating merely a slavish imitation of the great masters of the past, I should be laying myself open to just objections. It is rather the spirit than the letter of the age that I would advocate, and that this spirit should enter into our souls, just as the influence of classic letters and art fired the souls of those great teachers of the Middle Ages, to whom we must be eternally grateful, not only for the legacy they have left us through their own labours, but for all we know of the great classic times. Such an example on their part lays upon us an obligation to carry on and hand down the great work they have bequeathed to us to future generations, and it is our duty to work to such an end that posterity may receive the rich legacy in its entirety, further enriched by the imprints upon it of our time, just as our forerunners enriched what they received from the great ancestors of art.

Art is an old republic, yet it has been given the grand secret of the elixir of everlasting life, which for ever has been denied to man, its founder. It is as young to-day as it was centuries ago. Its existence is a curious mystic one, at

once retrospective and progressive. Its every movement forward is a reflection sent back from the mirror of the past. Its life is a constant reflection, backwards and forwards, in this mirror of ages. Its every act is a mere reflection of itself. Its future is written in the magic word “tradition,” formed by the rays from this mirror upon the impenetrable veil which shrouds hereafter from our view, and this word, with its mighty significance, will ever remain the “Sesame” of Art’s every onward movement.’¹

As an orator, lecturer, man of letters, and conversationalist, Gilbert was much as he was in his sculpture. With pen in hand, as well as in situations in which he was required to extemporise, the sculptor tended to turn to myth and allegory, to his dreams, to lofty abstractions, figurative language and to violent contrasts in imagery or motif to convey his meaning. Adrian Bury, the sculptor’s nephew, remembered a man who, later in life, was subject to dramatic changes not only in mood, but also in thought – sometimes irascible, sometimes sweet in temper: ‘he could state an opinion one day and completely reverse it the next’.² ‘It is easy to read too much into Gilbert’s often perversely enigmatic statements about his art,’³ says Susan Beattie, who describes another of the sculptor’s speeches as ‘[c]haracteristically nebulous and emotional’.⁴

¹ Gilbert, 1888, 100-1.

² Bury, 1952, 55.

³ Beattie, 1983, 143.

⁴ Beattie, 1983, 83.

Gilbert found lecturing a taxing business, was largely hostile to journalism, and seems to have considered – as he thought Pygmalion did – that his work ‘should speak without the aid of an exhibition catalogue.’⁵ Yet Gilbert’s language in this carefully wrought passage is not so nebulous as to cast a completely ‘impenetrable veil’ over his meaning. Richly coloured as his pronouncements often were, verbal and in print, with their allusive echoes of the Arabian Nights, of Tennyson, Ruskin, Carlyle, Swinburne, Leighton and the ancient poets he loved so dearly – with their talk (as here) of elixirs of everlasting life, of mystic existences, mirrors of ages, magic words and so on – the sculptor’s range of metaphors are not much more fanciful or romantic than their equivalents in academic literature on the subject of reception theory, which has also often resorted to metaphor as a means of conceptualising the relationship between the past and the present. We shall return to classical reception towards the end of the introduction, but for now it is worth noting that there is a sort of continuity between the sculptor’s attempt to frame his own work and that of his peers in terms of reflection and some of the imagery that later scholars have selected to explore the connections between antiquity and later periods. Imagery of reflection, or mirroring, may be augmented by that of enlightenment, for instance, or by ideas of mutual illumination – also implied by the ‘rays’ emerging from Gilbert’s word, ‘tradition’. Scholars, like sculptors, have sought to grounding abstractions in familiar, relatable, and observable terms.

We have suggested that Gilbert was in this scenario speaking not only for himself, but on behalf of his peers. It is no coincidence that the following year his

⁵ Hatton, 1903, 24.

colleague and sometime rival, Hamo Thornycroft, would model as his diploma piece for the Royal Academy (he had in 1888 been the first of the so-called New Sculptors to gain the status of Academician), a relief entitled *The Mirror*, which would be shown at last in 1890. Gilbert's metaphor was here expressed in human terms, with a simple mother and child group combining French, Greek, and Florentine influences. As the infant toys with a handheld mirror, her mother, who sits on a gracefully curvaceous *klismos*, gazes down serenely at her child and sees her own reflection – in life as in art. In other words, there was emphatically and even unavoidably a place for the *old* in the *New Sculpture*.



Fig.1. William Hamo Thornycroft, *The Mirror*, 1890, Marble, 74×76.5cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The passage excerpted above from Gilbert's speech offers something of an entrance – a *Sésame, ouvre-toi* – to this thesis, which is concerned with tradition and 'the presence of the past'⁶ in the lives, work, and thought of a number of sculptors – including Gilbert – operating in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. During this period artists were coming to terms with new information about ancient sculpture, and also, it is generally thought, questioning or rejecting what was understood to be its legacy. Alongside the reassessment of classical antiquity, throughout the course of the nineteenth century, came the discovery (or rediscovery) of the arts of other times and places, and a new appreciation of early Christian painting. Rome and its environs, along with its sculpture, sometimes proved a disappointment to visiting artists, Gilbert included; the painter Jalabert, a student of Delaroche, wrote complainingly of Tivoli in 1845 that 'les Anglais, par leur présence, ont détruit toute la poésie que ce pays pourrait inspirer avec la solitude'.⁷ Mid-century Rome was saturated with artists and artistic culture; Seymour Kirkup, who was living in Florence in 1861, eyed Rome in sideways fashion: 'I hate the cant about *Art* and *artists*, her art and my art, artistic art, artistic gossip of art and artists and early art and primitive art, love of art, &c., &c. I never called myself an artist; I said painter at once; I had rather have added glazier than artist. All the tea-drinking old maids were full of their pretty artists and

⁶ This neatly contradictory expression is widely associated with T. S. Eliot's often repeated claim, originally made in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), that: 'the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'. Eliot's 'presence' refers both to the continued attendance, as it were, of the past in the present, as an active and almost physical entity, and to the *actualité*, or currency, of the past for the present-day poet. Of course, the phrase was used before Eliot, and is now common enough. It is employed here in an active manner, preserving something of the verbal force of the word 'presence', much as it is in the title of Richard Thomson's recent monograph, *The Presence of the Past in French Art, 1870-1905: Modernity and Continuity* (2021).

⁷ Charles Jalabert (1818-1901), *Prix de Rome 1841*: Reinaud, 1903, 49.

all the little drawing masters, daubers, and parasites of art were full of the name, whilst the great were always sneering at it. One told me he had a clever artist travelling with him. It was his cook. A lady bestowed the title on her hairdresser. It is not that I care for such classification, for I am very democratic, but I am sick of the vulgar cant, and find that others are so too, so if you publish anything avoid it. The word is prostituted and blackballed.’⁸

Sculpture was by no means exempt from the sense of art-fatigue and by the late nineteenth century the neoclassical productions of Canova, Gibson, and company, indelibly associated with Rome and the quarries at Carrara – pure in outline and contour – were widely felt to be formulaic, lacking in human qualities, in energy, warmth, and vitality. Little by little, the names of other cities than Rome grew louder on the lips of the studios and the strident alike among the artists of Europe: Venice; Naples; above all, Florence, and Tuscany more broadly, acquired a prestige, that, if not wholly new, was nevertheless believed to be. Throughout the nineteenth century Paris became the training ground for young painters and sculptors, oscillation between monarchy and republicanism doing not very much to dull the dazzling achievements of its painting, architecture, and sculpture, or to soften the exceptional rigour of a Beaux-Arts education.

At exhibitions in Paris and London, sculpture was perceived as having sunk into a lull – ‘the very depths of desuetude’ as Edmund Gosse put it – and as having done so, moreover, in subservience to the classical as then conceived.⁹ By the time

⁸ Sharp, 1892, 267.

⁹ Gosse, 1894, 138.

Gilbert delivered his Liverpool address, there was, however, widespread chatter of a revival; at the same conference of painters, sculptors, and architects, his friend Edward Onslow Ford spoke on the ‘Modern Renaissance in Sculpture’: Ford began his paper by referencing and expressing his gratitude for the *Saturday Review*’s assertion, made two years previously, ‘that sculpture in this country had arisen from a long sleep and was alive amongst us.’¹⁰ The article in question, whether Ford knew it or not, had been written by Gosse.

It was Gosse, better known as a literary critic, who became the great champion of the young sculptors who, from the 1870s onwards, transformed this glum picture of sculpture in Britain. He issued forth article after article during the 1880s, some anonymously, culminating in an 1894 history of what he termed now for the first time ‘The New Sculpture’, published in serial form in *The Art Journal*. In due course, other voices chimed in, signalling accord with the principal outline of Gosse’s account or modifying it in minor particulars; foremost among these was Marion Harry Spielmann, editor of *The Magazine of Art* from 1887 to 1904, whose *British Sculpture and Sculptors of To-Day* (1901) offered an ambitious survey of the subject. The question of why Gosse opted for an appellation like ‘The New Sculpture’ – and any connected questions concerning the appropriateness of this title either in 1894 or for all time – are not ones that need detain us for long, though we will encounter again the themes of novelty and its opposite *in* the New Sculpture. Newness, in 1894, was inevitable. Peter Green presents a pertinent vignette of an

¹⁰ Ford, 1888, 111.

animated Henry Harland, American novelist and soon-to-be editor of *The Yellow Book* (published from 1894 to 1897):

[e]nthusiastically he held forth to the company in the drawing-room about starting a magazine which should represent—ominously familiar phrase—the ‘New Movement’. ‘New’, in fact, was the operative word; everything acquired it as a prefix in the Yellow Decade. There was the ‘New Woman’, the ‘New Morality’, and, of course, the ‘New Paganism’. Wilde wrote of the ‘New Remorse’; H. D. Traill, in an article on the New Fiction, declared that ‘not to be *new* is, in these days, to be nothing’. A penny weekly ‘with a humanitarian and radical objective’ was called *The New Age*. The world of art and literature was in a conscious ferment of reorientation, and what Harland did was simply to crystallize this new feeling by providing an appropriate vehicle for its expression.¹¹

The terms ‘New Journalism’ and *l’Art nouveau* had already been in currency during the late 1880s, and Gosse himself had published his *New Poems* in 1879. Gosse’s choice of the word ‘New’ in 1894 to describe the movement must also be seen as having been motivated by a recognition on his part that the term ‘Modern’ would have evoked too strongly Ruskin’s great five-volume opus, *Modern Painters*. Throughout Gosse’s criticism of the New Sculpture, the term ‘new’ is frequently employed as a synonym for ‘modern’, even where the change introduces a flavour of contrivance into the text. Gosse admired Ruskin’s early work but, like many of his contemporaries, could not embrace his later writings with the same enthusiasm. ‘If

¹¹ Green, 1982, 97; cf. Calè – Evangelista, 2018, 3.

the student rejects for the moment,' wrote Gosse in 1897, 'as of secondary or even tertiary importance, all that Mr. Ruskin has written for the last forty years, and confines his attention to those solid achievements, the first three volumes of 'Modern Painters,' the 'Stones of Venice,' and the 'Seven Lamps of Architecture,' he will find himself in the presence of a virtuoso whose dexterity in the mechanical part of prose style has never been exceeded.'¹² If Gosse's remarks remain for the greater part limited to what he calls the 'olla-podrida of divergent mannerisms [that] goes to make up the style of Ruskin', he does nevertheless attempt to cut a view through the obscuring clouds of literary form to the animating forces that act upon and determine the characteristics of this style. So he fixes upon the 'incessant sheet-lightning' of 'vivid moral excitement that dances' through even the passages of descriptive prose that meet with his approval, and discloses something of his personal investment in the subject by allowing that Ruskin 'was the greatest phenomenal teacher of the age; [...] dowered with unsurpassed delicacy and swiftness of observation, and with a mind singularly unfettered by convention, the book of the physical world lay open before him as it had lain before no previous poet or painter [...] Mr. Ruskin's enthusiasm having fired more minds to the instinctive quest of beauty than that of any other man who lived, we are guilty of no exaggeration if we hail him as one of the first of benefactors.'¹³

Most early commentators avoided repeating the phrase, 'the New Sculpture', in favour of another formulation like 'the modern movement', 'modern British

¹² Gosse, 1897, 356.

¹³ Gosse, 1897, 357.

school', or similar. For Spielmann, writing of sculpture and sculptors 'of to-day', novelty was not in itself something praiseworthy. 'There is,' he admitted, '[...] no doubt that the modern movement, like all other movements, has given rise to a good deal of affectation, which, flashy in effect, and attractive to the lovers of New for New's sake, makes but a poor show against the lofty dignity and true learning of more classic work.'¹⁴ One of the New Sculptors, Alfred Gilbert, put this more strongly: among the material he provided for his first biographer – who already had a difficult task – was a 'Note upon Futility of attempts to promote new movements and fads in Art'.¹⁵

Still, it may be felt that the Ruskinian and Gossean formulations, 'Modern Painters' and 'New Sculptors', like two complementary, if unequal, claps of thunder, have reverberated in similar fashion through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, regardless of whether the source of the derivative soundings has always been acknowledged. There is little need here to stress the importance of the former, which Elizabeth Prettejohn has with some justice described (in her own *Modern Painters, Old Masters*) as 'one of the earliest and most powerful statements of a genuinely modernist agenda for art.'¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, 'The New Sculpture' would be appropriated and reinvented by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in the name of Futurism, by Ezra Pound in that of Vorticism, and by Clement Greenberg, albeit in each case with apparent ignorance of (rather than scorn for) Gosse's pioneering

¹⁴ Spielmann, 1901, 11.

¹⁵ Provided for Isabel McAllister, dated 27 June 1923: Dorment, 1985, 344.

¹⁶ Prettejohn, 2017, 20.

usage of the phrase, and perhaps little more understanding of the art maligned for the sake of novelties requiring promotion.¹⁷ Even so, it may be the case that precisely this accretion of subsequent modernist connotations gave Gosse's term its magnetism for critics during the later twentieth century, and that some of these later inventions of the 'new' have actually played their part in solidifying the association between the word and late nineteenth-century sculpture.

0.1. Cast List

Before we proceed to the movement itself, it may prove helpful to range some of the principal actors before our eyes, for the simple reason that definitions of what the New Sculpture was have always been rather tied up in the individual personalities involved.

Gilbert, from whom we have heard above, was a 'robust' man with a 'massive head' and, according to Ellen Terry, a 'splendid mane of lion-like tawny hair',¹⁸ possessing a broad jaw, blue eyes, and a youthful appearance; often noted by others was his physical resemblance to Beethoven, partly innate but not, it would seem, entirely uncultivated. He wore a broad brimmed hat – 'I have always worn a hat different to other men's', he told his biographer¹⁹ – and would fidget restlessly with whatever might fall into his hands, folding, twisting, scratching, and shaping

¹⁷ See Fuller, 1988, 189, 206; for Greenberg's 'New Sculpture' see O'Brian II, 313-19.

¹⁸ McAllister, 1929, 183; McAllister also refers to a Gilbert's 'shock of fair hair'; Terry, 1908, 371.

¹⁹ McAllister, 1929, 95.

cigarette papers and litter as well as metal into decorative compositions. Having begun his study of sculpture alongside Thornycroft at the Royal Academy Schools, he later entered the *École des Beaux-Arts* and proceeded, from there, to Italy, returning to London only at the end of 1884 or beginning of 1885. During the 1880s, Gilbert worked closely alongside Edward Onslow Ford, who occupied a studio next door,²⁰ and Thomas Stirling Lee, who had also learned trained in Paris and Rome. In Lee's studio at Manresa Road these three experimented with bronze casting, though Lee himself retained an overriding preference for marble.

Ford is generally presented (and presented himself), in contrast to Gilbert and many of his other peers, as an autodidact; he had trained – initially as a painter – in Germany, where he had not received anything comparable to a *Beaux-Arts* education. Where Gilbert's letters and recorded speeches are fanciful and romantic, Ford's are comparatively matter-of-fact, and it was generally agreed that he excelled in portraiture. He was sociable and popular, a collector of butterflies and paintings, and according to his friend, the American painter John McLure Hamilton, 'intensely religious', worshipping also 'the emotions of beauty, love, charity, fidelity, loyalty.'²¹ His outlook in art and life seems to have been thoroughly cosmopolitan. After his premature death in 1901, a 'near-neighbour' noted that '[i]t was sometimes difficult to realise that Mr. Onslow Ford was an Englishman; he had at times well-nigh the appearance of a Spanish grandee.'²² *Punch's* Harry Furniss also

²⁰ The Avenue, 76 Fulham Road.

²¹ McLure Hamilton, 1921, 129.

²² *The Tatler*, 21 Jan 1902, 5.

remembered him as a picturesque figure: ‘I did hope that the sculptor of the Ford statue would let us see, in marble, Onslow Ford, as he was. His personality was everything. His curious French tall hat—a perfect “chimney-pot”—his wide, flowing, French tie, and baggy, French-cut trousers, were familiar to all Londoners’.²³ Hair cut short in the French fashion and extravagantly bearded in the ‘doorknocker’ style, Ford had, like Gilbert, a youthful air.

William ‘Hamo’ Thornycroft stands out as Gilbert’s greatest rival.²⁴ An athletic man, flame-haired and moustached, Thornycroft was born to a family of artists: both parents, Thomas and Mary Thornycroft, were sculptors, and all his sisters practised painting. Though he gained early an awareness of French sculpture, and visited Italy too, his own initiation and training in the art took place entirely in England. Thornycroft spent part of his youth on a Cheshire farm, and retained a sympathy for the agricultural life he had tasted throughout his career as a sculptor; in the studio he wore an English smock of the type that was rapidly disappearing in the countryside. ‘I was bred almost in the open,’ he told a journalist in 1893, ‘and from this I believe my intense love for natural history sprang. The fields and meadows were my playground, and in the woods and along the hedgerows I think I found all my small heart needed to satisfy it. I rode, fished, and shot.’²⁵ An avowed naturalist, Thornycroft was also perceived as the most classical of the New Sculptors and in

²³ Furniss, 1904, 46.

²⁴ The name ‘Hamo’ had been chosen by the young man himself in imitation of a thirteenth-century ancestor. At the same time, Thornycroft’s sisters, Alice and Ellen, had become Alyce and Helen.

²⁵ How, 1893, 275.

many respects was the one most strongly influenced by the ‘painter-sculptor’ George Frederic Watts.

Also pigeonholed as a classicist was Thomas Brock, from Worcester, who was characterised as a ‘bluff, businesslike Englishman’ with ‘no love of Society’ and ‘an inartistic faculty for finance’, though his son felt this reputation undeserved, and he seems to have been sociable enough.²⁶ Thornycroft even thought him the ‘moving spirit’ at one meeting of sculptor Associates of the Royal Academy.²⁷ Compared to certain of his peers, Brock certainly seemed straightforward, known neither for eccentricity of dress nor the mincing of words. Accordingly, he has been largely ignored, save for John Sankey’s valuable work on him. Brock trained under, and received posthumous commissions originally given to the Irish sculptor John Henry Foley, was afterwards long associated with Frederic Leighton, and was important as a teacher: his assistants included Henry Charles Fehr and Frederick William Pomeroy, the latter an important but similarly understudied representative of the new movement who looked to his master as the ‘Chief’, ‘a great leader and a splendid artist’.²⁸ Brock worked hard and did not take holidays or see the necessity of travel – even bank holidays, it has been said, ‘were to him an abomination’ and ‘a disgrace to the country’.²⁹

²⁶ Brock, 2012, 52.

²⁷ Manning, 1982, 107.

²⁸ Brock, 2012, 72.

²⁹ Brock, 2012, 7, 17.

Harry Bates and George Frampton both worked largely in relief, having begun as architectural carvers. Bates, who died prematurely in 1899, spent time in Paris in the early 1880s. Like Thornycroft and Brock, he has been seen as classical, though his works are varied. Frampton was an ardent follower of Gilbert – experimental, much inclined to mysticism, medievalism, and polychromy, but austere in his work, for all its colour, as inclined to a flattened and more conventional handling of form even in the round. He spent some time in the studio of the great French sculptor Antonin Mercié. Frampton filled his home with Gilbert’s bronzes. Other figures associated with the New Sculpture are: Frederick William Pomeroy, mentioned above in connection with Brock, who also entered Mercié’s studio during the 1880s, but who was perhaps most strongly influenced by his contact with Brock and Leighton; Alfred Drury, a fine modeller, close to Dalou; William Goscombe John, and a constellation of other sculptors generally seen as fringing or following the more compactly grouped leaders in the field.

0.2. The Movement

What were the defining features of the movement? Gosse, thinking quietly of Ruskin, saw ‘the central principle of the New Sculpture’ as ‘a close and obedient following of nature’,³⁰ inspired in large part by recent developments in French sculpture. The principal hero of the movement was Gosse’s friend, Thornycroft. For the most part, Spielmann agreed with Gosse, writing of a ‘return to romantic realism’

³⁰ Gosse, 1894, 139.

with dual origins in the Italian Renaissance and modern France,³¹ but characterising two of the most prominent sculptors previously associated with the movement in Britain with an oxymoronic phrase that placed them, in some sense, to the side – Thornycroft and Brock were, in his view, ‘classic romantics, if such a term be permissible’. As ‘classic romantics’, these men had ‘not entirely withstood the wave’ of romantic realism tending from France. For Spielmann, the main representative of the movement was Gilbert.

‘Not hard,’ wrote one critic sympathetic to the movement, ‘[...] is it for us to understand how classicism came to be dominant in a reign of Encyclopaedists, or that romanticism must necessarily be the natural child of a century in which sentiment is the ruling characteristic.’³² The New Sculpture has been perceived both as classical and anti-classical, its leading note sometimes indicating a preference for the antique, sometimes for the romantic (and with it the medieval, or Gothic), though separating the two sides of the coin could, as Spielmann saw, produce an unsatisfactory reading of the situation. On the one hand, the New Sculpture represented a rejection of almost all that had been associated with the neoclassicism of the earlier part of the century, a neoclassicism which was thought to have lingered on in sculpture alone while the other arts had continued to change and develop. Nineteenth-century writing on art is full of talk of ‘the paralysing restraint of classic tradition’.³³ J. Comyns Carr, one of the co-directors of the Grosvenor Gallery,

³¹ Spielmann, 1901, 1.

³² Dixon, 1900, 257.

³³ Carr, 1879, 248.

attempted to explain what this classicism was felt to be from the vantage point of 1879, just at the threshold of the new movement: '[t]he modern conception of classicism required the reconciliation of all the essential realities of human passion and character. It curtly refused to bear the burdens of the modern spirit, or to associate itself with forms of expression that could be identified with the life of our time, and it was therefore no wonder that the works produced under its influence gradually lost the impress of nature, and became at last as cold and spiritless as the marble out of which they had been carved.'³⁴

Gosse wrote of the 'the 'Cupids', and 'May Queens,' the 'Sleeping Babies' and the 'Bathing Venuses,' the 'simpering allegories and the waxen mythologies'³⁵ that could be seen at the Royal Academy during the 1870s. Spielmann, in similar vein, remembered 'the bald pseudo-classic generalities of the MacDowells, the Joneses, the Durhams, and the Nobles of the past generation, when we were given Venuses, Graces, Dianas, Muses, Nymphs, and Goddesses, all dummy sisters from the same mould—at least as much alike in attempted (but rarely achieved) perfection of form as the artists could make them, beautiful in proportion, in suavity of line, in grace of form and pose—sickly-sweet in their empty charm, and carried little further, as works of art, than carefully smoothed out *ébauches*.'³⁶

The growing dissatisfaction with neoclassical sculpture in Britain was not unrelated to developments on the continent, where it had become the fashion to

³⁴ Carr, 1879, 250.

³⁵ Gosse, 1894, 140.

³⁶ Spielmann, 1901, 3.

criticise not only modern sculpture inspired by antiquity, but ancient sculpture too. The American critic, William Crary Brownell, proclaimed in 1886 that ‘Greek Sculpture has perished so completely that it sometimes seems to live only in its legend. [...] You may hear very intelligent critics in Paris—who in Paris is not an intelligent critic?—speak disparagingly of the Greek want of expression; of the lack of passion, of vivid interest, of significance in a word, in Greek sculpture of the Periclean epoch. The conception of absolute beauty having been discovered to be an abstraction, the tradition of the purely ideal has gone with it. The caryatids of the Erechtheum, the horsemen of the Parthenon frieze, the reliefs of the Nike Apteros balustrade are admired certainly; but they are hardly sympathetically admired’.³⁷

The conventional view is that among the New Sculptors bronze was now largely preferred to marble, and polychromy to monochromy; minute details took the attention away from broadly handled masses; rough or agitated surfaces took the place of smooth ones; soft curves gave way to sharpened angularity. The productions of these years were largely, though by no means solely, small in scale, and intended for domestic interiors where their finesse could be appreciated. In representing the face and body, sculptors sought expression above all, and a comparative freedom from convention. On the other hand, classical subjects were not shunned, and the sculptors were neither ignorant of nor uninspired by examples of actual ancient sculpture. To the example of actual antiquities was added admiration for certain neoclassicists like Flaxman. In 1893, Thornycroft reminisced to the journalist Harry How about a discovery made as an adolescent at a second-hand bookshop on the

³⁷ Brownell, 1886, 194.

Caledonian Road: ‘the first volume he picked up was a Homer, with illustrations by Flaxman. He bought it—three shillings and sixpence was the price. This book undoubtedly worked wonders with the lad. He almost picked the pictures to pieces, and one might say it was the purchase of this old volume that gave birth to the love of art which was in after years to materially assist in making the man famous.’³⁸ It might be thought that few figures could be more associated with neoclassicism in Britain than Flaxman; Ruskin had disparaged his illustrations to Dante and pictured him as a ‘lost mind’: ‘he stumbles over the blocks of the antique statues—wanders in the dark valley of their ruins to the end of his days. He has left you a few outlines of muscular men straddling and frowning behind round shields. Much good may they do you!’³⁹ Nevertheless, Gosse would exploit Ruskinian terms when he recognised in Flaxman’s work ‘its love of the minuter forms of nature, its humble poetic grace, its touch of pre-Raphaelitism’,⁴⁰ all qualities which would resurface in the New Sculpture.

0.3. A Changed Idea of the Classical?

In truth, attitudes towards the classical were more complex than Brownell might have recognised, though elsewhere he admitted that severity ‘is only an associated

³⁸ How, 1893, 276.

³⁹ Ruskin, 1854, 219-20.

⁴⁰ Gosse, 1894, 138.

not an essential trait' of 'classicality'.⁴¹ Even the notion that Greek beauty was an abstraction, so often taken for granted, was called into question from time to time. So we find a self-declared 'disciple of classic art', Harriet Hosmer, as late as 1894 objecting to the opposition of the word 'realistic' to 'classic'. 'Never was a grosser misapplication of terms', she wrote, '[...] Who, save Nature herself, reality itself, could conceive the form of The Fighting Gladiator, or of the Dying Gladiator, or of the Venus of Milo—or of the Neapolitan Psyche—or of the Praxiteles Faun, or greater than all, of the sublime forms expressed in the Elgin Marbles? These statues, one and all, are portrait statues [...] But one and all reflect Nature in her noblest, happiest mood, which should be the end and aim of all art, not Nature travestied as the result of human accident, or ignorance.'⁴²

In 1870, Ruskin identified as 'an essential Greek character' and staple of 'all Greek art-description' the delight in *ποικιλία*, or variegation, complicating the Winckelmannian conception of simplicity and serenity as the key qualities to be observed in ancient sculpture: '[t]he Greeks have been thus the origin, not only of all broad, mighty, and calm conception, but of all that is divided, delicate, and tremulous; "variable as the shade, by the light quivering aspen made."⁴³ Justifying the claim, Ruskin turned not only to literary sources, as noted above, but also to the humbler arts: 'if, instead of studying that art among marbles,' he suggested, 'you

⁴¹ Brownell, 1892, 41.

⁴² Hosmer, 1912, 333.

⁴³ Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici* §§ 204-5. The quotation is from Walter Scott's *Marmion*, VI, XXX, where the surrounding lines are of interest: 'O, woman! in our hours of ease, / Uncertain, coy, and hard to please, / And variable as the shade / By the light quivering aspen made; When pain and anguish wring the brow, / A ministering angel thou!—' *ποικιλία*, is perhaps implied to be a feminine quality.

were to look at it only on vases of a fine time, [...] your impression of it would be, instead of breadth and simplicity, one of universal spottiness and checkeredness, [...] and of the artist's delighting in nothing so much as in crossed or starred or spotted things'. So much might almost have been the impression received by those who had studied the engravings offered by Thomas Hope in illustration of Greek costume much earlier in the century, many of which had been based on vases and recorded with some attentiveness the observed patternings – at a time, we may note, when printed cotton dresses influenced by the antique were not unpopular in England.

Yet Ruskin's suggestion was an atypical one in 1870, and his understanding of *ποικιλία* a sensitive one, encompassing as it did an appreciation of quivering movement as much as of static mottling or marking;⁴⁴ within a few years his observation would seem to be confirmed spectacularly by new knowledge of a hitherto unknown art in which naturalism, variegation of hue and tone, and trembling motion mingled. Quite aside from the century's many more-or-less sensational discoveries of marble statuary, an enormous impact was made by the discovery, from the 1870s onwards, of small-scale mould-cast terracotta 'Tanagra' figurines, so named after the site, in Boeotia, first strongly associated with this class of object. An exhibition of these was held at the Anthropological Institute in Oxford (later the Pitt-

⁴⁴ Pater would pick up on the word a decade later in his 1880 essay in the *Fortnightly Review* 'The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture. I. The Heroic Age of Greek Art', republished posthumously under the direction of Charles L. Shadwell in *Greek Studies* (1895). Pater's definition – 'that spirit of minute and curious loveliness [...] this daintiness of execution' – is neither as precise nor as broad as Ruskin's. Pater would, moreover, see the delight in *ποικιλία* as an Ionian rather than a Doric characteristic where it had been for Ruskin simply Greek – 'an Asiatic curiousness, or *ποικιλία*', he says, '[...] always in appreciable distinction from the more clearly defined and self-asserted Hellenic influence': Pater, 1895, 225-6, 232.

Rivers Museum) in 1876.⁴⁵ If monumental sculpture commanded less affection than in previous eras, these relatively humble clay models of dancers, fashionable ladies, and children – sometimes in the guise of deities but more typically not – with their often well-preserved traces of soft-pastel colours, prettily arranged, and their ‘genre’ sensibility, inspired a genuine popularity in the closing decades of the century and afterwards. Here were scenes of real life – spontaneous, direct, unaffected, relatable, and apparently showing signs that their artisanal manufacturers, known as *coroplasts*, took simple pleasure in daily experience, frivolous pastimes, children’s play, and family life. Importantly, they exhibited a lightness, delicacy, and flexibility that struck late nineteenth-century observers as sympathetically feminine, and altogether different from the heaviness associated with massy carved stone gods and goddesses. Combined with a timely *Japoniste* influence, a new kind of classicism emerged in painting during the 1880s and 1890s – observe the figures that populate Waterhouse’s early pictures, and Albert Moore’s, with their impeccable colour-coordination and accoutrements – fans, parasols, and fluttering draperies – but also in sculpture, where the fluid modelling of moving fabric and twisting bodies taught practitioners of the art form to seek greater flexibility as well as to think of colour and to look to modern life. The word ‘Tanagra’ had begun, by the 1890s, to crop up as a cultural reference point in places where it might be thought to have no direct application. Here is the art critic, Frederick Wedmore, discussing a lithograph by Robert Anning Bell: ‘I am thankful for the grace—the Tanagra-like grace, dare I call it?—of his ‘Dancing girl.’ “And why ‘Tanagra’” am I asked. Because it is classical

⁴⁵ See Lane-Fox, 1877, 309-15; Curtis, 1879; for more up to date work on Greek terracotta figurines resulting from a collaborative partnership between the Louvre and the Fundación Bancaja in Valencia, see Jeammet, 2010.

without austerity: in a way, provokingly “modern,” yet endowed, and to the very full, with the fascination of Style.’⁴⁶ Anning Bell shared a studio with George Frampton during the 1880s, in which the two collaborated on coloured work in relief, combining this genuinely antique influence with one from fifteenth-century Italy. By the end of the decade it was a commonplace that the Tanagra figurines had ‘remained to reveal the other side of Greek sentiment, which does not appear in the monuments of classic art.’⁴⁷

Yet it was largely to the Renaissance that these sculptors, in seeking to refashion antiquity, would look, and when wandering themselves in the dark valleys of antiquity, they knew themselves to be in good company. Richard Jenkyns writes that there is ‘something intriguingly equivocal about the use of the past to throw off the past’.⁴⁸ The irony was by no means lost on the so-called New Sculptors, who sought to recover as much as to throw off the past. No sustained study of the place of the classical in the New Sculpture has been forthcoming, but Benedict Read provided perhaps the most cogent discussion so far in his 1982 *Victorian Sculpture*. ‘From its very moment of birth,’ he wrote, ‘the New Sculpture had had very close ties with classicism, in purer neo-classical form and neo-Renaissance transposition, a dual background prefigured in the loyalties of Lord Leighton, the Movement’s midwife, so to speak. Thornycroft’s classical works of the 1880s – *Artemis*, *Teucer* and *Medea* [...] – represent one classical tradition, while an even closer adherence at

⁴⁶ Wedmore, 1896, 44.

⁴⁷ Salazar, 1899, 108.

⁴⁸ Jenkyns, 1991, 297.

this time was that of Harry Bates.’⁴⁹ Selecting two further examples, Read noted that ‘[t]he two poles of the New Sculpture’s classicism are perhaps best represented on the one hand by Pomeroy’s *Perseus* of 1898 [...] harking back to Gilbert’s statue of sixteen years earlier in its taut pose, flesh and musculature rippingly rendered in bronze; on the other hand there is Bates’s life-size group *Hounds in Leash*, classical by virtue of the snood that ties back the hair of the nude, restraining huntsman’.⁵⁰

0.4. Modern Views on the New Sculpture and Our Place in the Field

It has been said that scholarship on the New Sculpture ‘belatedly came of age’ during the early 1980s, with the publication of Benedict Read’s *Victorian Sculpture* (1982), Susan Beattie’s *The New Sculpture* (1983), and Richard Dorment’s biography of Alfred Gilbert (1985).⁵¹ These outstanding and indispensable contributions were accompanied by Elfrida Manning’s 1982 biography of her father, William Hamo Thornycroft, and followed by a major 1986 Royal Academy exhibition on Alfred Gilbert and accompanying catalogue, also edited by Dorment. ‘Where the lions have feasted, the jackals may take their fill’ says Richard Jenkyns, in a similar context.⁵² This thesis is, like everything published or written on late nineteenth-century sculpture during the last forty or so years, deeply indebted to the

⁴⁹ Read, 1982, 317.

⁵⁰ Read, 1982, 319.

⁵¹ Stocker, 2005, 312.

⁵² Jenkyns, 1991, x.

works named above and their authors. Time has done little to diminish the importance or relevance of these pioneering studies, none of which can be said to have been entirely superseded by even the best of the more recent work that has carried out within the field. As such, even when we find we must diverge from one or other of these scholars on matters of interpretation, or differ on a point of fact, we must still keep a close and respectful eye on their work, whose range and depth of study sets it in a category apart from subsequent contributions. If Beattie's *New Sculpture* in particular seems to come in, over the course of the following chapters, for a larger share of criticism than seems fair considering the span of time that has now passed since that monograph appeared, it should be taken also as an indication of the esteem in which she is still held and of the continuing influence of her work.

It should be noted that a corresponding development took place across the Channel with respect to nineteenth-century French sculpture at about the same time that British sculpture was receiving this renewed attention. Less than a month after the opening of the Gilbert exhibition at the Royal Academy, *La Sculpture française aux XIX^e siècle* appeared at the Grand Palais in Paris. With it came the most systematic study to date of the subject, overseen by Anne Pingeot, then curator of the Musée d'Orsay. No single work on British sculpture has matched the breadth or depth of the accompanying catalogue, which consists of many thematically arranged essays covering a larger period than, say, the Victorian age.

If the study of the New Sculpture reached a kind of maturity in the 1980s, the following decade may seem at first glance to have brought fewer important contributions to the field: Read wrote in 2006 of a post-80s 'lull' that proceeded up

to the millennium.⁵³ This was partly an illusion, since the hundredth anniversary of Frederic Leighton's death in particular prompted a spate of publications that, among other aims less obviously connected with the plastic art, also re-examined the role of the President of the Royal Academy in transforming British sculpture during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Such men as Gilbert and Thornycroft were perhaps afforded a comparatively peripheral status in this context, but the matter of Leighton and the New Sculpture was recognised as one demanding serious and sustained consideration. The catalogue of the 1996 Royal Academy exhibition on Leighton was joined by *Leighton and his Sculptural Legacy: British Sculpture 1875-1930*, produced alongside an exhibition given by Joanna Barnes Fine Arts at the Matthiesen Gallery in London; Barnes had already collaborated with Read on an important exhibition and catalogue surveying *Pre-Raphaelite Sculpture: Nature and Imagination in British Sculpture 1848-1914*, also shown at the Matthiesen Gallery in 1991, before moving to Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery for the start of 1992. Overlap was relatively minimal, but of those typically associated with the New Sculpture, Gilbert, Frampton, and William Reynolds Stephens were all included. In 1997 appeared the first issue of the *Sculpture Journal*, including contributions from Read and articles on New Sculpture figures like Thomas Brock (by Mark Stocker) and Thomas Stirling Lee (Edward Morris). The Journal has continued to serve as a potent vehicle for the publication of fresh and exciting research on late nineteenth-century sculpture. At the end of the decade came *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity*, a collection of essays edited by Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn, and including important contributions from Rosemary Barrow

⁵³ Read, 2006, 119.

and Robyn Asleson that focused especially on that painter-sculptor's engagement with ancient models, sculptural and otherwise. Also published in 1999 was Caroline Dakers' monograph, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society*, which took a different approach to many of the figures with whom we are concerned, re-establishing the closeness of Leighton, Watts – whose own anniversary celebrations would follow in 2004 – Thornycroft and others in real spatial terms rather than the less tangible binding agent of influence that had characterised most earlier explorations of the subject. As part of the Prettejohn-edited volume, *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, which also appeared in 1999, Michael Hatt approached the New Sculpture from the perspective of 'physical culture' and the male nude.

In the early 2000s this activity continued quite unabated. As mentioned above, several publications relating to George Frederic Watts appeared in 2004, which motioned towards, without delving deeply into, his connections with the so-called New Sculptors, though his own works in the round were given much greater attention than before. The most sustained study of the subject up to this point had surely been R. E. Gutch's brief but significant article on 'G. F. Watts's Sculpture', published in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1968. A more detailed survey was overdue, and Stephanie Brown especially helped plug this gap;⁵⁴ her focused study on *Physical Energy* and its changing meaning in relation to its various intended sites followed in 2007. There has been further activity in this direction recently, with an exhibition at the Watts Gallery – *A Fragmented Legacy: G F Watts and Sculpture*

⁵⁴ See Brown, 2004, 83-106.

(2022), curated by Stacey Clapperton – aiming to bring this major part of Watts’ artistic output and (especially) process into greater focus.

For scholarship on Gilbert, Thornycroft, and Ford, however, the most significant new voice in the early 2000s was certainly that of David J. Gesty, who in his monograph, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877-1905*, sought to incorporate the New Sculpture, long derided and dismissed (despite the valiant efforts of Beattie, Read, and others), into a teleological narrative leading up to the apotheosis of Modernism: in this narrative, sculpture that seems in retrospect to look forwards is praised – rescued, even, for modern appreciation – and that which fails the test comes in for criticism, with the author even disputing the importance of Thornycroft’s *Mower*, a statue that had previously been seen as a major achievement for the sculptor and the New Sculpture as a movement. Gesty’s thesis was developed further in the edited anthology, *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain c. 1880-1930*, also published in 2004. In a sense, the germ for this approach had already been present in Beattie’s account of the development of the New Sculpture, which had in numerous passages sought to trace a line of best fit towards Modernism and abstraction, and away from naturalism, by advancing a view of British sculpture during this period as amounting to a major branch of and expression of sympathy with the aims of International Symbolism. Much of this had to do with subject and mood, but form had inevitably played an essential part in Beattie’s argument. For Gesty, the formal and physical really made for the more compelling aspect of late nineteenth-century sculpture, and each sculptural work in his selection accordingly became above all else a formal exploration of theoretical principles about sculpture itself, and what it could and should be. Each statue – and

Getsy focused relatively tightly on the free-standing male nude as the particular *locus* through which this was expressed – could now be understood as a more or less combative contributions to a kind of ongoing sculptural dialogue between numerous sculptor-actors. As he put it, statues ‘made [...] a self-reflexive statement about the medium of sculpture [...] and] functioned as manifestos for an artist’s attitudes towards sculptural representation’.⁵⁵ It is a great merit that this interpretation seeks to account for, without diminishing, some of the clear differences between the styles of individual artists, which always cause trouble for too-simplified or too-narrow descriptions of the New Sculpture, though we may well have reason to think some parts of the narrative a little overdramatic at times, and the selection a little too streamlined. Getsy’s slightly anachronistic sense of art-historical progress is not without its problems, and to err too much on the formal and ‘art theoretical discursive’ side of the movement can lead to flattened readings of certain works, just as would be the case if we were to neglect the physical presence of the sculptural work altogether.

On the whole, Getsy’s contribution was welcomed with enthusiasm, most significantly by Benedict Read, who in his very positive review of the monograph for the *Sculpture Journal* proclaimed Getsy ‘leader’ of the younger scholars working on the New Sculpture and professed that ‘everyone who is interested in sculpture of any period should read it.’⁵⁶ In many respects it was a key milestone in what is sometimes termed the ‘phenomenological turn’ towards examining sculptures in

⁵⁵ Getsy, 2004, 5.

⁵⁶ Read, 2006, 119.

space and in relation to the viewer, especially with a focus on the interaction between real and represented bodies. Angela Dunstan would note in 2016 that ‘[t]he impact of David Getsy’s scholarship may be traced throughout [...] most scholarship on Victorian sculpture from the last decade’.⁵⁷ On the other hand Mark Stocker, who had been responsible for an important 1985 article on Edmund Gosse and sculpture, an aforementioned essay on Brock for the *Sculpture Journal* (1997) and a study of Gilbert’s master, Joseph Edgar Boehm (1988), was still able to claim in 2005, after the appearance of *Body Doubles*, that ‘the movement [the New Sculpture] still has far to go in terms of its popular and even academic recognition.’ In his joint review of Getsy’s *Body Doubles* and the edited anthology, *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain*, Stocker expressed reservations about whether Getsy’s approach, focusing on ‘the art theoretical discursive context’ as opposed to the ‘economic, social or political contexts in which these statues attempted to make their claims’, really had given the New Sculpture – ‘and the author’, he added – ‘the “street credibility” that otherwise might have been lacking.’ In Stocker’s view, with which we have some sympathy, ‘Getsy sometimes strains too hard [...] in attempting to provide a theoretical framework [...] and creates interpretations that reveal more about current art historical agendas than about what was said or thought in the late nineteenth century.’⁵⁸ George Landow suggested that it was ‘not always clear if [Getsy] realizes the value judgements implicit in his approach’ and proposed that

⁵⁷ Dunstan, 2016, unpag.

⁵⁸ Stocker, 2005, 312.

Body Doubles might more fittingly have been called ‘Anticipations of Modernist Sculpture.’⁵⁹

If Getsy’s scholarship can be faulted for resorting to overly contemporary interpretations, as Stocker has charged, the same can certainly be said – to some extent has been said – of a number of Jason Edwards’ contributions to the field. An earlier version of one of the chapters from Edwards’ 2006 monograph, *Alfred Gilbert’s Aestheticism: Gilbert Amongst Whistler, Wilde, Leighton, Pater and Burne-Jones*, had already appeared in Getsy’s *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain*, and Edwards stressed in the introduction to the more developed exposition of his thesis that his work was intended to ‘complement Getsy’s methodology of comparative close reading’, and also Prettejohn’s ‘analyses of the intertextual relationship between Aesthetic painting and literature’ (explored especially in her influential 1999 essay, ‘Walter Pater and Aesthetic Painting’, from *After the Pre-Raphaelites*). Edwards emphasised that his readings would ‘self-consciously remove Gilbert’s works from their more traditional context within the New Sculpture’, and instead ‘return’ the sculptor ‘to a complex social, literary and art historical community that challenges received expectations of the apparent retrospective polarities of supposedly discrete institutions and movements’, that is to say ‘the context of literary and painterly Aestheticism’.⁶⁰ Edwards referred also to the ‘original Aesthetic contexts’ for some of Gilbert’s sculptures and characterised his own work as an attempt ‘to recover the potential sculptural encounters’ of ‘a

⁵⁹ Landow, 2008, unpag.

⁶⁰ Edwards, 2006, 3.

range of what we might call *queer* [Edwards' emphasis] "viewers and institutions" with Gilbert's productions. Edwards accepted that some of his readings might strike readers as 'perverse', but boldly countered that 'if [the] volume provides a deliberately "perverse" reading of certain aspects of Gilbert's oeuvre, it's clearly a project that Gilbert himself would have relished. After all, [...] it's hard to imagine a more bourgeois-baiting sculptor.'⁶¹ This claim, alongside Edwards' characterisation of Gilbert – who was notoriously lacking in business nous – as a savvy and almost cynical careerist who 'actively sought to affiliate himself with other artists within the Aesthetic Movement' and who learned from Whistler and Wilde 'an adept sense of how best to captivate an audience and manage a press campaign',⁶² is more than a touch outlandish. In and of itself a degree of wilful perversity need not be a problem, but the chief issue with *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism* is that the repeated acknowledgements that its highly personal and even 'deliberately perverse' readings are of 'potential' rather than positive significance sit very uneasily alongside the just as ubiquitous rhetoric of 'return', recovery, and 'original' contexts – that is, Edwards' frequent claims that his own (often fanciful) readings are correct and were even intended by the artist. Too often the evidence provided is simply unconvincing.

One forthright critic was Stocker, who judged Edwards' 2004 article on Gilbert's *Perseus Arming* – the basis for the second chapter of *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism* – 'at best tortuous' as a result of its employment of an 'imaginary "viewer of [John Addington] Symonds's homoerotic persuasion"', as opposed to a

⁶¹ Edwards, 2006, 14-15.

⁶² Edwards, 2006, 3-4.

real spectator of the period.⁶³ Ironically, in his attempt to do away with ‘the Francophile bias of much art history’ – already attacked by Beattie – and to solidify Gilbert’s place within a firmly British and Aesthetic context, Edwards had actually depended much on evidence unearthed in Stocker’s study on Boehm regarding the younger sculptor’s occasional trips home from the continent between 1876 and 1885.⁶⁴ Another critic was Matthew Sturgis, biographer of Beardsley (1998), Sickert (2005), and, later, Wilde (2018), who likewise drew attention in the *Times Literary Supplement* to what he called Edwards’ ‘curious habit of often favouring speculation above actual evidence’, even in cases where the ‘evidence is available’. Sturgis concluded that ‘[s]uch extended flights of fancy tend, after a few graceful and diverting arabesques, to come down, like Icarus, to earth with a bump.’⁶⁵

Similar problems are discernible in other of Edwards’ contributions dealing with figures associated with the New Sculpture, such as his 2015 article on Edmund Gosse – an important essay in so far as it drew attention, rightly, to a neglected source: here, Edwards scoured Gosse’s *Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S.* (1890) for innuendo and attempted to draw a link between the ‘gem-like’ molluscs examined by the critic’s naturalist father on Babbiscombe Beach and the famous ‘Conclusion’ of Pater’s 1873 *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, with its reference to a ‘hard, gem-like flame.’⁶⁶ The phrase may, perhaps, seem sufficiently quaint to us now as to

⁶³ Stocker, 2005, 314. This ‘viewer of Symonds’s homoerotic Aesthetic persuasion’ remains present in Edwards, 2006, 48.

⁶⁴ Edwards, 2006, 36-41.

⁶⁵ Sturgis, 2006, 31.

⁶⁶ Edwards, 2015, 36-7. Edwards’ approach has been taken up to some extent by Patricia Pulham, who has looked rather to Gosse’s correspondence and poetry – both comparatively understudied – for

seem like a deliberate and meaningful allusion to Pater's *Renaissance*, but such a reading makes little sense in context, despite the (unmentioned and not irrelevant) fact that Gosse and Pater were actually well acquainted with one another.⁶⁷ It is also worth noting in this connection that even Lene Østermark-Johansen, in her otherwise highly positive 2007 review of Edwards' earlier *Alfred Gilbert's Aestheticism*, had protested that in that monograph 'Pater is so often quoted out of context – that is, the context of his own texts – and is instead represented by a string of “Paterian” words and concepts which are too frequently employed in an exclusively homoerotic discourse. Allusions to Pater's Greek essays and the essays in *The Renaissance* (1873) tend to take for granted that Pater's main message is queer. Such a reading neglects much of the density and complexity of Pater's ideas and of his writings'.⁶⁸

Edwards' tendency, in his readings of late nineteenth-century sculpture, to rely on fictive responses from 'potential' spectators serves to redress perceived imbalances in the historical and evidential record, emphasising or even

signs of encoded or 'encrypted' erotic desires: see especially Pulham, 2020, 147-53. In Pulham's view, Gosse's affections for Thornycroft were transferred to his sculpture, which could, in place of the man himself, be caressed, possession of the one standing for possession of the other.

⁶⁷ After Pater's death, Gosse's 'Walter Pater: A Portrait' appeared in the *Contemporary Review* 66 (1894), 795-810. The text is largely made up of the author's personal recollections. Gosse later told Logan Pearsall Smith that he had invited himself to lunch with Pater on the day of the unveiling of Ford's *Shelley Memorial* at University College (1892), expecting to attend the celebration together; having dined together, Pater excused himself on the grounds that 'he was not among those who had received an invitation to attend': Smith, 1938, 173-4. Gosse does not seem to have considered that Pater might be a controversial figure; we may learn more from examining what is documented of their actual relationship.

⁶⁸ Østermark-Johansen, 2007, 389. Østermark-Johansen has since published various works on Pater, including the monographs *Walter Pater and the language of Sculpture* (2011) and *Walter Pater's European Imagination* (2022). She has also edited his *Imaginary Portraits* for Oxford University Press under the umbrella of *The Collected Works of Walter Pater* (Volume III, 2019). Her celebrated earlier monograph, *Sweetness and Strength: The Reception of Michelangelo in Victorian England* (1998), had taken its title from Pater.

manufacturing new perspectives and indulging, to some extent, in precisely the kind of ‘bourgeois-baiting’ exercises that he has projected onto Gilbert. In ‘War and Peace, Harry Bates’s Lord Roberts Memorial in London, Calcutta and Glasgow’ (2012), Edwards has taken this to an extreme, not only positing, grotesquely, that the sculptor’s employment of atmospheric low relief for Sikh figures in the background of one of the relief panels suggests ‘the presumed proximity of the Sikh population to unformed matter’,⁶⁹ but also imagining that the memorial’s ‘*trans*-identified spectators, if they are anything like me, [...] might experience a queer sense of the possibly pleasing sensation of the gentle flick of the tail against the behind and the possibility of the fecal’.⁷⁰ It is the horse to which Edwards refers here, not the rider, in the name of redressing ‘the normative sexual politics underpinning much scholarship in the field’ and challenging the anthropocentrism and ‘ongoing postcolonial species-ism’ of its human authors.⁷¹ The accusatory tone seems a little misjudged, especially since Edwards has acknowledged and dismissed only a few pages earlier Beattie’s suggestion that the animal element had been key to the monument’s success.⁷² We have sympathy with Edwards’ eagerness to incorporate Anglo-Indian monuments more fully into historiographical treatments of British art,

⁶⁹ Edwards, 2012, 207. Edwards speculates that ‘Bates presumably characterizes the Sikh infantry in such a disparaging way to help justify their position in the front line to mop up enemy fire and keep the Highland infantry and white colonial cavalry behind the lines.’ *Sunt lacrimae rerum*, rather, had an earlier work of Bates’ proclaimed. We cannot agree with this baseless reading, which, we must note, switches seamlessly from the spectator’s response to the sculptor’s *intention* without remotely adequate justification.

⁷⁰ Edwards, 2012, 217.

⁷¹ Edwards, 2012, 216.

⁷² Edwards, 2012, 202. See Beattie, 1983, 220, where the horse is described as ‘the climax of Bates’s achievement as a sculptor of animals.’

as well as with his enthusiasm for maligned pre-Modernist sculpture, but whether the status of late nineteenth-century sculpture can be lifted by such means remains to be seen.

As matters stand, Stocker's sense in 2005 that the New Sculpture had further to go in terms of popular and academic recognition may easily be shared by students of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British sculpture in the present. There might have been hopes that the most recent major exhibition on Victorian sculpture, *Sculpture Victorious: Art in an Age of Invention, 1837-1901*, curated by Martina Droth, Edwards and Hatt, and held at the Yale Center for British Art (2014) and Tate Britain (2015), would transform this state of affairs beyond recognition, including as it did some of the acknowledged 'greatest hits' of the movement alongside works of an entirely different character, but the stark or even zany visual contrasts and ambitious scope seem, for at least some attendees, to have sapped any sense of cohesion away from the movement, while, perhaps a little counterintuitively, also diminishing the impression that there was anything new about the New Sculpture. The exhibition was generally ill received by specialists and those with an already existing prejudice against 'Victorian' art alike. Richard Dormont wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that 'its incoherence is frightening', citing what he called 'junk scholarship' and 'low-grade, pseudo-historical twaddle'.⁷³ These attention-grabbing phrases were accompanied by citation of a few factual inaccuracies. Despite all the variety on show, another well known art critic – more positive about the exhibition, if not the sculpture exhibited – left the Tate claiming

⁷³ Dormont, 2015, unpag.

that no stylistic changes whatsoever occurred between 1837 and 1901, and bemoaning the supposed monotony of depth and mood across this period.⁷⁴ Oh dear!

As we have observed, the blame cannot be pinned entirely on either the curators of the exhibition or the many contributors to the accompanying catalogue, which remains a resource of great utility and breadth, complementing Benedict Read's *Victorian Sculpture* in particular with a plethora of different perspectives and a very diverse range of objects, both hand-crafted and industrially manufactured, that had not necessarily been given due attention in earlier studies within the field. The aim was partly to expand the definition of 'sculpture' so as to include a much wider – and in the curators' view more representative and telling – assortment of artefacts, demonstrating the ubiquity and vitality of the art (considered in this expanded sense) during a period of rapid technological change. Dunstan has identified the exhibition's 'material-cultural emphasis' as one of the most controversial aspects of its collective contribution.⁷⁵ Dorment's approach to sculpture during the final decades of the nineteenth century, we must remember, had not neglected technological experimentation – this had been a key factor in his work on Gilbert – but he had stressed the individual's driving quest for artistic expression as the dominant factor rather than setting sculptors within the stream of societal change: 'sculptor and goldsmith' gave way in the new exhibition to the 'age of invention', though there was still a significant place here for the craft object even with the greater focus on the mass-produced commodity. For Calè and Evangelista, the

⁷⁴ Januszczak, 2015, unpag.

⁷⁵ Dunstan, 2016, unpag.

attention given to ‘materials and ways of making pointed to the centrality of the Arts and Crafts movement’, and yet the exhibition also traced ‘the development of a sculptural modernity’ characterised by ‘the medium’s connections with industrial design, raw materials, and mechanical processes of reproduction’.⁷⁶ What this vision of ‘sculptural modernity’ means for those with Arts and Crafts allegiances or sympathies was not altogether clear. The New Sculptors were decidedly ambivalent about some of the developments taking place during the late nineteenth century, accepting some and forthrightly rejecting others: Gilbert might have been a pioneer when it came to the revival of lost-wax casting, an ancient and prestigious process that allowed subtler artistic expression, but he also told his Liverpool audience in 1888 that:

There is a modern industry—I cannot call it a craft, although it has usurped the position of one in modern applied art, [...] It is the electro process of depositing metals that I allude to. It has many advantages, but they are rather on the side of commercial reproduction than on that of artistic creation.⁷⁷

Getsy claimed that the exhibition was successful in part ‘because of its circumscribed focus on certain issues and kinds of objects’, which could not help but invite responses of varying kinds, preventing the development and stagnation of any ‘singular view or methodology for the subfield’.⁷⁸ The catalogue that accompanied

⁷⁶ Calè – Evangelista, 2018, 4.

⁷⁷ There is a modern industry—I cannot call it a craft, although it has usurped the position of one in modern applied art, [...] It is the electro process of depositing metals that I allude to. It has many advantages, but they are rather on the side of commercial reproduction than on that of artistic creation’: Gilbert, 1888, 105.

⁷⁸ Getsy, 2016, unpag.

the exhibition may be compared fruitfully with that for the 1986 exhibition *La Sculpture française au XIX^e siècle*, which had adopted a similar thematic arrangement, covering many of the same topics (*Sculpture memoire* and ‘Sculpture and Commemoration’, for instance, or *Techniques et matériaux* and ‘Craft and Manufacture’ and ‘Craft and Art’), though, as might be expected, it gave a rather different weighting to some of these areas of enquiry. Much greater attention had been given in the French exhibition to the training of the sculptor, for example, and to work commissioned for religious contexts,⁷⁹ even to the *mécanisme de choix et financement*, and, of course, to the different styles adopted by sculptors, including a section on *La tradition classique*. By contrast, the Yale and Tate exhibition, with its diversified scope in terms of materials and technical processes, also devoted much greater attention to imperial portraiture of Victoria (and imperialism more broadly) and to the international exhibition culture of the epoch.⁸⁰ It did include, however, a section on ‘Antiquity and the Ideal’ that featured Thornycroft and Leighton. Otherwise, sculptural works created by figures associated with the New Sculpture were split into numerous categories, such as ‘Victorian Sculpture’, the aforementioned ‘Antiquity and the Ideal’, and ‘Craft and Art’, disrupting, intentionally or otherwise, any idea of a single unified movement with more or less shared aims.

⁷⁹ Caroline Vout (2023, 122) has noted the ‘apparent indifference to religion’ shown by both the curators and reviewers of the *Sculpture Victorious* exhibition.

⁸⁰ In these respects the exhibition developed the central concerns of the 2010 Edwards and Hatt-edited special edition of *Visual Culture in Britain*, which had focused on ‘Victorian Sculpture in its Global Contexts’.

0.5. Mission Statement

The task of marshalling such a vast quantity of material into thematic categories inevitably necessitates the imposition of as many arbitrary divisions as it does the construction of new connections and narratives. It is clear that the sculptors grouped together by Gosse in 1894 as representatives of the ‘New Sculpture’ differed from one another as individual artists always do – even prompting contemporary critics, as we shall see, to attempt, like Kenneth Grahame’s ‘practical Roman, stern constructor of roads and codes’, to parcel them into plots ‘saying unto this man, Bide here, and to that, Sit you down there’.⁸¹ This thesis contends that the New Sculpture as a whole should be considered as a fundamentally backward looking but by no means regressive movement, one that explicitly defined itself in relation to the past. This past was no single privileged entity inherited without hiccup from a previous generation, but a complicated and changing pool of resources to which the modern sculptor could turn for inspiration and advice, though an element of reinterpretation was always necessary. The purpose of this thesis is to work through some of the complicated engagements with art history and especially with antiquity, that characterised the movement and were central to its identity. Antiquity here was encountered directly in numerous guises, but also through many mediating layers of, renaissance, rediscovery, reflection, or even ‘transhistorical affinity’, if we may borrow one of Prettejohn’s favoured formulations for the ‘chance encounter’ that seems to occur without anything like a traceable Jaussian ‘chain of receptions’

⁸¹ Grahame, 1894, 51.

reaching back into the ancient world.⁸² Gilbert's idea that Japanese art had something in common with Italian art in particular (discussed in Chapter Two) presents one example of this kind of encounter, especially since he emphasised that the apparent connection crossed temporal gulfs as well as a geographical distance.

Prettejohn's model of reception, looking as it does to incorporate, with flexibility and subtlety, a range of possible ways in which such encounters may occur, and even emphasising those that appear to be independent of ideas of 'influence' as it is generally understood, has been influential on the present thesis. Common to most approaches to the New Sculpture is a close focus on the idea of progress, in Getsy's account towards an enlightened Modernism and in Beattie's towards a less corporeal and even abstract but still expressive handling of form. In neither does antiquity play much of a role. Progress was, of course, important both for the sculptors with whom we are concerned and for those early observers, commentators, and shapers of the movement, among them Gosse and Spielmann, who shared in common with their practitioner friends a certain dissatisfaction or disdain for the less naturalistic 'neo-classical' productions of mid-Victorian and earlier sculptors, but Gilbert, we must remember, was at pains to emphasise in 1888 that, in art, the progressive must necessarily be twinned with the retrospective. More importantly, this sort of rhetoric was borne out in his actual work as much as it was in that of his ostensibly more classical peers, and the thesis looks to tease out and show the pervading presence of the classical within the movement, emphasising,

⁸² See, for instance, Prettejohn, 2012, 67; for more on the 'chance encounter' see 36-7. For more on the 'transhistorical' see Martindale, 2013a, 169-83.

however, that this was a period in which there were many different versions of the classical. Some were even supposed to be *alternatives* to the classical.

This thesis moves away from the teleology presented by Getsy, and also from Edwards' revisionist account of Gilbert that prioritises a context within an evolving Aesthetic movement above all other competing factors and frames of reference. We build, however, on Getsy's close analysis of sculptures both on their own and in their specific display contexts, whether indoors in the temporary or more long-term exhibition space or within more or less monumental, architectural, or open-air settings. Scholarship on nineteenth-century sculpture has often focused on the former, at times a little too exclusively, and the New Sculpture in particular has been seen as effecting an artistic revolution only within the gallery and the domestic interior. One of Beattie's main achievements, however, was to show that the movement made serious inroads into other branches of daily life, its sculptors 'reaching out', as she put it, 'into the community as decorators in the service of architecture and industry'.⁸³ Beattie had criticised Gosse heavily, and not altogether fairly, for focusing too exclusively on free-standing "'exhibition" pieces' in his 1894 account of the movement's development (see the beginning of Chapter Two).⁸⁴ The spotlight has returned forcefully to those same exhibition pieces as a result of Getsy's *Body Doubles*, and to a lesser extent *Sculpture Victorious*, though individual monuments have garnered some attention along the way. This thesis does not wish to lose sight of Beattie's important work in this area, and will accordingly pay attention

⁸³ Beattie, 1983, 8.

⁸⁴ Beattie, 1983, 3.

to architectural sculpture carried out by sculptors associated with the movement, whether in bronze and intended for the interior, or stone for the exterior, as well as to those sometimes more familiar works appearing at the Royal Academy or in other exhibition spaces. Although the relation of painting and sculpture was a key issue for the movement, it was regarded as a truism in the nineteenth century that sculpture was in some sense intrinsically linked with architecture, the free-standing figure being only one more or less prodigal son of an art that began with the ornamentation of a surface that would hold fast any embellishment. The thesis returns frequently to the field of relief sculpture, where the art can be seen at its most painterly and its most architectural, though the matter of relief need not necessarily be one confined to the flat panel or plaque. We shall see that this was central to the discussions about sculpture more broadly.

In another respect the thesis follows Getsy's prompt. He has observed that '[t]he parsimony in the [*Sculpture Victorious*] catalogue's registration of existing literature [...] offers an opportunity to spur further debate and to address its omissions and omissions.' While questioning the overly retrospective approach to the New Sculpture that finds a place for some of its works on the road towards Modernism, the present thesis embraces Getsy's exhortation for the field to 'refuse a narrow focus on the Victorian and to engage with broader debates in art history and cultural studies.'⁸⁵ Over the course of the following chapters the thesis will take stylistic and formal choices seriously, stressing throughout, however, that these choices were and should be understood as fundamentally and inextricably bound up

⁸⁵ Getsy, 2016, unpag.

with shifting visions of antiquity and its various rebirths in Italy and, most recently, in France. In a sense the objective is precisely to draw attention to some of the many ways in which the New Sculpture made contact with a larger art history in which the Victorian represents only a small, but profoundly self-aware part. The movement's allusions to the past are not to be dismissed as quaint expressions of 'mere' historicism, superficially tacked on to modern works, or even in most instances as unconsciously adopted modes, though it must be acknowledged that there could be multiple reasons for the employment of a more 'Greek' voice here, or a more 'Florentine' or 'Gothic' one there, including in many cases the seemingly strict conditions imposed by intended site and the connected demand for harmony between sculpture and surroundings. This is all the more pertinent when the context is explicitly one of memorialisation, but the idea of commemoration was in reality seldom far from a sculptor's thoughts during this period, and even present in the exhibition space and the small-scale statuette. As we shall see, the so-called New Sculptors thought deeply about the past and deeply *through* the past, constantly looking to renegotiate their own position in relation not to one clear-cut idea of a classical tradition only, but to many aspects of a complicated and multifaceted sense of the historical.

On the whole, encounters with the past were deliberate and carefully considered, even if we allow for an accidental or serendipitous element beyond the learning, or at least the notice, of the sculptor. Many of the different stylistic and formal choices available to the modern sculptor (often conveniently associated with a specific name as well as an age, be it Phidias, Praxiteles, Donatello, or Michelangelo, as much modern inventions as actual sculptors) represented

alternative but not necessarily opposed ways of interpreting aspects of nature in its own diversity and richly variegated complexity. At the same time, approaching the New Sculpture with a heightened awareness of the half-mythologised historical personalities and *exempla* through which modern practitioners in the art both experienced and interpreted nature allows us to explore more effectively many defining aspects of the movement, including some which have rather fallen by the wayside in recent years. In contrast, for example, to Edwards' attempt to isolate Gilbert from his practitioner peers and instead insert him into an overwhelmingly, if not entirely, literary milieu, this thesis sets out to reassert and rediscover connections between sculptor and sculptor; only by examining these relationships can a fair understanding be reached of each individual's work in the field of sculpture *as sculpture*. The New Sculpture involved a degree of banding together as much as it did the kind of self-conscious differentiation from each other that is so prominent in Getsy's account. It will thus become clear that apparent artistic allegiances and attachments were frequently explored and expressed through shared allusions to sculptors and painters of the past, whose very names were, accurately or not, considered to be evocative of one variety of excellence or another.

Introducing a greater art-historical perspective into the study of later nineteenth-century sculpture also allows a more sensitive consideration of many of the debates that were current during the period, including that which centred on the relationship between naturalism and idealism. We even find Gilbert opting to explore this topic by transposing an ancient story about the painter Zeuxis onto an earlier nineteenth-century sculptor. Likewise, antiquity and its later reimaginings was thoroughly implicated when it came to the related and equally fraught question of

how far sculpture should aim to mimic the qualities inherently associated with painting, or adopt the more architectonic handling of form observed in ancient architectural sculpture. We are closer to Getsy's territory here, focusing on formal qualities, though not exclusively. Should the sculptor interpret nature in a painterly or aggressively 'sculpturesque' fashion? This was a theoretical and practical problem that was always approached through examples of perceived success and failure from the past, and not from a twentieth-century vantage point, though we do not dispute the idea that later attempts to tackle similar problems might have been anticipated in the late nineteenth century. The pursuit of *couleur* in sculpture, for example, which constituted in many respects one of the more substantial changes spearheaded by the New Sculptors – more significant even than the related but distinct chasing after actual polychromatic effects through material or surface experimentation – was understood as a rediscovered concept rather than an entirely novel invention. Accordingly, this modern idea was projected onto fifth-century Athenian and fifteenth-century Florentine prototypes.

British sculpture in this area was closely connected with developments in Paris, and across the Atlantic too, where theory and practice were likewise tied to observation and attitudes about the surviving sculpture of antiquity and its various claimed rebirths in Italy and France. Beattie sought to detach the New Sculpture from the international context rightly emphasised in early accounts, instead tracing the movement's development as a more or less native product of British art training. Getsy and Edwards have in different ways maintained a fairly strict British focus: remarkably, Edwards has even sought to present aspects of Beattie's account of the New Sculpture as 'characteristic of the Francophile tendencies of nineteenth-century

art historiography’, contrasting her approach in one place with his own ‘more “parochial”’ focus.⁸⁶ Here the wider European context is given more weight, not only in relation to the formative years of many of our sculptors, all of whom were close watchers of French exhibitions and not a few of whom received first-hand instruction and experience on the continent, but also in relation to contemporary art criticism, since the opinions of external observers on British sculpture have hitherto occupied too small a place in the scholarly literature on the subject. British sculpture was encountered outside of Britain. As in British art criticism of the period, external commentary on late nineteenth-century sculpture rarely failed to resort to examples from antiquity or the Italian Renaissance with which to chide or occasionally praise practitioners in the art, so it is also necessary to keep the masters of the past with us if we are to comprehend the critical attitudes of the day and obtain a reasonable impression of the immediate reception of many of the works we explore.

For the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, there is of course a very vast amount of documentary evidence available in the form of newspaper articles, journals, reports, and so on, to complement the information in archival collections and later biographies. Chief among the former is the archive of sculptors’ papers at the Henry Moore Institute, which holds a few objects of importance like sculptors’ tools alongside correspondence, photographs, and drawings. Many different types of evidence have been consulted and considered throughout the project, though the reader will notice that no overarching theoretical framework has been found wholly

⁸⁶ The claim is all the more noteworthy in the context of the article (on Bates’ Lord Roberts Memorial in different national and international settings), and anthology (*Transculturation in British Art*) in which it appears: Edwards, 2012, 202. We have already referred above to the passage in question, but must add that Beattie does not actually use the term *animalier* in relation to this monument, as Edwards implies so as to amplify her supposed ‘Francophile’ bias.

suitable for the purposes of the thesis, which aims, instead, to keep the sculptural object itself in the foreground as much as possible, and opts, in general, to devote more space to nineteenth-century sources than to subsequent readings so as to come closer to contexts in which New Sculptural works were created and initially received. What these works may mean in the future or for all spectators and for all time we can hardly begin to approach without leaving the confines of the project as set out here and advancing into wild and speculative territory, though there will undoubtedly be greater possibilities in this direction in years to come.

Elizabeth Prettejohn has argued that – at least as far as the study of ancient sculptural works is concerned – ‘we cannot afford to ignore even the most wayward of their modern receptions’ if we wish to ‘set the imagination free’ and ‘avoid a naïve historicism’.⁸⁷ On the whole we must agree with this in principle. Certainly the thesis aims to show that late nineteenth-century sculptors were sophisticated readers of the sculptural productions of earlier periods, whether or not they cared for or adhered to the scholarly attitudes and interpretations current in their time. Some of the ideas about ancient sculpture, for instance, that are explored in the chapters of this thesis might indeed be described as wayward. On the other hand, we are unable to extend the same licence of interpretation to the treatment of much of the nineteenth-century sculpture discussed, if this necessitates an overly selective approach to available evidence or to the movement as a group. This is one of the criticisms that has understandably been made of recent works dealing with the New Sculpture, or with a narrow group of its associates.

⁸⁷ Prettejohn, 2012, 103.

One voice that has been almost completely excluded from previous discussions of the New Sculpture is Ruskin's: even Read cited 'a critical lacuna peculiar to' the critic as a justification for the 'sometimes salutary exercise' of looking elsewhere for critical views on nineteenth-century sculpture.⁸⁸ Ruskin would sometimes, in private as well as public, play up his disinterest in modern sculpture: 'I note what you say about Mr [Joseph] Durham', he wrote to Ellen Heaton in 1855, 'I don't much care about sculpture as such however – only as a part of architecture and I have not time to study it properly.' Yet we may contrast this with a passage published the same year, in the preface to the second edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*; there Ruskin announced his realisation that, in architecture, 'the sculpture and painting were, in fact, the all in all of the thing to be done; [...] these, which I had long been in the careless habit of thinking subordinate to the architecture, were in fact the entire masters of the architecture; and [...] the architect who was not a sculptor or a painter, was nothing better than a frame-maker on a large scale.'⁸⁹ His more positive comments about modern works of sculpture and modern sculptors could be double-edged, as in his claim that Joseph Edgar Boehm had 'done the only horse I ever cared for – such a love – rearing, and hitting out straight with his right forepaw – hoof I mean.'⁹⁰ On ancient sculpture, however, Ruskin was more vocal than is often recognised, especially once he had accepted the seat of Slade Professor of Fine Art in Oxford in 1870, and by this point he had already published *The Queen of the Air* (1869), tackling ancient mythology head on

⁸⁸ Read, 1982, 4-5.

⁸⁹ Ruskin to Ellen Heaton, 1855, published in Surtees, 1972, 160.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Dearden, 1999, 119; see the entry for cats. 147-51.

and expanding the range of his study – and influence – far beyond any simple insistence on the Gothic. If he did not comment much on modern sculpture, then neither did Pater, but this has not prevented the latter from having gained a certain status in recent scholarly literature on nineteenth-century sculpture and antiquity, despite the fact that Pater read and often wrote in direct response to Ruskin’s works without necessarily stating this aim clearly.⁹¹ Ruskin’s importance can hardly be overstated. Walter Hamilton, the earliest chronicler of the Aesthetic movement, even suggested in 1882 that young aesthetes had adopted Ruskin’s superlative and metaphor-laden ‘mannerism of speech’ for daily use, fitting it ‘to the petty uses of every-day small talk.’⁹² This is the jargon satirised in George du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons and elsewhere during the period. We shall return frequently to Ruskin for views – wayward or otherwise – on many of the themes explored in this thesis, including naturalism, sculptural form, mythology, spirituality in art, ‘picturesque’ sculpture, and the relationship between modernity and more or less conflicting visions of the past.

As for the movement itself, revisionist approaches to the New Sculpture have inevitably given more space to some sculptors than others, meaning that certain figures, such as Brock and Pomeroy, have been relatively neglected; Beattie’s disparaging comments about the former will be discussed in the second chapter, but it is worth noting also Stocker’s suggestion in 2014 that ‘scholars post-dating Beattie such as David Getsy and Jason Edwards have not yet done Brock justice; the former

⁹¹ For one representative example of a case where Pater’s ‘primary though unstated purpose’ appears to be ‘the confutation of Ruskin’, see Bann, 1982, 122-36 (126).

⁹² Hamilton, 1882, 35-6.

perhaps because of the difficulty in shoehorning his work into a remotely convincing “New Sculpture as Modernism” thesis, the latter because there is a telling lack of the “homocentric”, let alone exquisite aestheticism, in either Brock’s persona or performance’.⁹³ This in spite of the sculptor’s close ties with Leighton and Gtetsy’s understanding of the artistic culture of the period, or more precisely the role of sculpture within the vehicle of the public exhibition, as essentially combative in nature and therefore necessarily diverse.

Even Gosse had referred, however, to the ‘totally distinct manners’ of Gilbert and Thornycroft.⁹⁴ Much of the earliest writing on the movement, as we have before noted, attempted to distinguish between the leading sculptors of the 1880s and 90s, setting them in opposing camps, regardless of whether there were shared characteristics or aims that united them. The complicated role of the classical, however this slippery idea or set of associated ideas was conceived, was always invoked and implicated in discussions about the ‘wings’ or ‘poles’ of the New Sculpture.

0.6. Two Movements? The New Sculpture, Ruskin, and the Classical

Even before the New Sculpture had received its baptism, suggestions had been made that the British school consisted not of one, but of two movements – these not in

⁹³ Stocker, 2014, 359. The context here is Stocker’s review in the *Sculpture Journal* of Frederick Brock’s biography of his father, written in the 1920s but only edited (by John Sankey) and published in 2012. This has made a start on the road towards the sculptor’s rehabilitation.

⁹⁴ Gosse, 1894, 141.

every respect distinct from one another, yet, nonetheless, recognisably dissimilar in aims and approach. In 1889 Cosmo Monkhouse asked in the *Magazine of Art* ‘whether we are at last to have what, in the fullest sense of the term, can be called a National School of Sculpture’.⁹⁵ The following year an answer was suggested in the same place, that the School, as such, was divided.⁹⁶ At the helm of the first group was the ‘neo-Greek’ Thornycroft, who had first won favour with a brilliant series of athletic youths whose vitality, advanced naturalism, and unconventional engagement with antiquity radically transformed British sculpture, confronting the neo-classical sculptural language of the previous generation, widely regarded as a bland shadow of its former self, with a newly imagined classicism – light, elastic, and delicately balanced, but firm and severe. Of Thornycroft’s *Artemis* (1879-80, exhibited 1880), Gosse wrote that the sculptor ‘has produced a figure that lifts him to the front rank of contemporary sculptors, a figure full of simplicity and dignity, modern in sentiment and antique in form, blending the present and the past by sympathy rather than by antiquarian study, and answering to the usual mock-antique of sculpture as a poem of André Chenier, or Keats, answers to an ode of Akenside.’⁹⁷ A short ekphrasis of this statue appears in one of Gosse’s poems, *The Island of the Blest*, in which Thornycroft is portrayed as Myron himself:

My tall companion was of aspect grave,

His features moulded in a form severe,

⁹⁵ Monkhouse, 1889, 1.

⁹⁶ See *Magazine of Art*, 1890, 361.

⁹⁷ Gosse, 1880, 183.

The locks that round his forehead loved to wave
Were like an autumn leafage, richly sere;
Stern was he, but the trembling heart of fear
Took comfort at the light in his young eyes;
Little he said, but spoke out firm and clear,
As one whose hands had taught him to be wise,
And from his robe I marked a dust of marble rise.⁹⁸

On *Artemis*:

Serene she seemed as when her godship dons
The woodland dress that wrought Actaeon shame;
One hand she held her bow in, and the same
Pressed back her foolish hound; the other passed
behind her neck to lift one shaft of flame
Out of her quiver; from her eyes she cast
A glance to outstrip in speed the quarry flying fast.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Gosse, 1885, 62: *The Island of the Blest* XXVII.

⁹⁹ Gosse, 1885, 64: *The Island of the Blest* XXXI.

It would seem from such lines that Gosse was eager to publicise his awareness, or even endorsement of, a largely Winckelmannian view of ancient sculpture as simple and serene at its best. However keen he was to depict Thornycroft as *instinctively* rather than *laboriously* ‘Greek’, he can hardly be said to have been embarrassed about his own antiquarian study. Editing a new edition of Reynolds’ *Discourses* in 1884, he opined of the first President of the Royal Academy that ‘[h]is earliest discourse might have gained much from Lessing and from Winckelmann; his latest is just as ignorant of the erudition of those writers. He knew nothing about Greek sculpture, nothing about Venetian painting. He passed close by the hiding-places of the great monuments of art, and never suspected their presence.’ Again, a few lines later, he lamented that ‘we cannot help desiring that Reynolds had read the *Laokoon*. All that was brightest and most sensible in the Englishman would have leaped up to greet the freshness of Lessing’s intuition of the principles of art.’¹⁰⁰

Helen Zimmern, who was on friendly terms with Thornycroft and Gosse, argued a few years later that ‘[a] science corresponding to the German *Aesthetik* does not exist in English, for what modern cant has dubbed aestheticism, the child’s play of “passionate Brompton” and languishing South Kensington, must on no account be confounded with a real serious study that in German universities fills a special chair.’ Winckelmann, in particular, she believed to be of no serious importance for British artists because of ‘the vastly diverse genius of the two nations. The German is nothing if not abstract; the Englishman nothing if not positive; and on this account the English take art, as well as all else, from the practical side. [...] Hegel has written

¹⁰⁰ Gosse, 1884, v-vi.

a philosophy of the fine arts scarcely less valuable to art-students and painters, and perchance even as unknown to the latter—for artists are rarely readers—as works of the same class written by Winckelmann and Lessing.’¹⁰¹ Thornycroft was a reader, but whether he cared for Winckelmann’s opinion on sculpture – or for that matter, Lessing’s – is not absolutely clear, however considerable an influence on him Gosse attempted to exert during the early 1880s.

More certain is it that Thornycroft, like Gosse, was a reader of Ruskin, though neither was a great partisan of the Gothic Revival: as Getsy has recognised, the sculptor was deep in Ruskin at the point when he was working on his *Mower*, writing to Agatha Cox – soon to be his fiancée – in February 1883 to recommend his work and describing him as ‘an ‘activity’ of our time, & an activity for good I am sure.’¹⁰² As an ‘activity’, the reading of Ruskin was one in which others associated with the new movement certainly participated, and it is doubtful whether any of its leading figures were entirely unaware of his ideas. Ford, too, would turn to Ruskin as an authority in his address at the 1889 congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry,¹⁰³ though his quotation of the critic – ‘in no circumstance whatever can man be comfortable without art,’ – is spurious and must have been found in some such immortal pamphlet as *Many Thoughts of Many Minds* or even *The Book of Ready-Made Speeches*.¹⁰⁴ Gilbert,

¹⁰¹ Zimmern, 1887, xxii.

¹⁰² Thornycroft to Cox, 22 February 1883, Henry Moore Institute and Archive, HTP Tii-C-T[H]25, quoted in Getsy, 2004, 75.

¹⁰³ Ford, 1890, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Southgate, 1862, 33: a passage attributed to Ruskin on the previous page is likewise false; Hindley, 1869, 78. An article containing the claim that ‘in no circumstances whatever can man be comfortable

who had actually come into contact with Ruskin as a young man when working in the studio of Joseph Edgar Boehm, was, for all his friendly relations with Whistler, enthusiastic in his praises of Ruskin:¹⁰⁵ to Isabel McAllister he declared that, looking back at Venice from Padua in 1883, he had suddenly realised that:

Turner was possibly the greatest artist-poet since Rembrandt, and this feeling of admiration of his genius has never changed; nor has my gratitude to John Ruskin, the greatest of his apostles.

I was able to endorse my opinion of the latter years afterwards when I saw an exhibition of his own works, which demonstrated the great pains he had been at to get behind the mind not only of Turner, but of all those that he wrote about so beautifully.

Ruskin's influence was not only of a critical nature, but could suddenly become very direct indeed. He actually approached Boehm at the beginning of 1884 with – as he reported to Charles Eliot Norton on 25th February – ‘a commission for 12 flat medallions Florentine manner, life-size—of six British men and six British women, of typical character in beauty; all to be looking straight forward in pure profile, and to have their hair treated with the Greek furrow.’¹⁰⁶ Gilbert was still in Italy at this point (though he did return to London more than once during these years), and it is a great pity that we do not know what came of this remarkable

without art’ (and associated musings) appeared under the heading ‘Art and Nature; or, the Difficulty of Doing Anything Right’ in the *Family Herald* 3.105 (10 May 1845), 9-10.

¹⁰⁵ McAllister, 1929, 77.

¹⁰⁶ Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton, 25 February 84, in Norton II, 202.

intervention, with its startling combination of Greek, Florentine, and British elements.

If Winckelmann was of indirect importance at best, it is surely true on the whole that Thornycroft's 'sympathy' with Greek sculpture was chiefly formed in the British Museum and in the Life School, including a greater element of 'antiquarian study' than it suited Gosse's purpose to admit, but also the fresh inspiration and corroboration that comes with observation of the living model.

The second group, led by Ford and Gilbert, but also including Thomas Stirling Lee, was described as more 'aggressive': here, new interpretations of classical subjects were presented in conjunction with an astonishing degree of realism that made them less obviously classical in style than Thornycroft's early works and apparently entirely incapable of conveying anything like the healthy heroism of his dynamic figures; yet however energetically opposed to the 'antiquarian' or the 'archaeological' approaches of other artists, these sculptors were no less heavily indebted to ancient models for the vocabulary of their art, drawing also, in Gilbert's case at least, on Ruskin and on ancient mythology as well as the living model. Much has been made of their preference for bronze and for polychromy over the coldness associated with white marble, but caution should be shown with respect to any sweeping generalisations, as Lee in particular was seen very much as a carver, and even an 'ascetic' as far as material experimentation was concerned.¹⁰⁷ *Lee's Asceticism* would perhaps make for a less appealing volume than *Gilbert's Aestheticism*. Critics excitedly pointed, for the most part, to Florence rather than

¹⁰⁷ Spielmann, 1901, 66.

Rome or Athens as the fountain of their inspiration, the birthplace, it seemed, of all that was frail, spiritual, or explicitly Christian in modern art, but some sought, nevertheless, to find a kind of Greek feeling in these sculptors' productions. The art critic Harry Quilter, who would later boast of having been 'the first writer in England who mentioned favourably Mr. Gilbert's work, and predicted his fame,'¹⁰⁸ thus claimed that Gilbert's *Study of a Head* (1883) was 'instinct with a feeling for the antique, which is very difficult to explain.' Facing down the difficulty as best he could, Quilter wrote as follows:

The truth is, that Mr. Gilbert's work is like the antique less from the outside than the in. He is penetrated with the Greek spirit rather than the Greek form, and he is gaining from Nature and himself what the Greek gained from like sources. The chief works of modern sculpture fail, as a rule, from being either too brutally, or perhaps, I should say, too exclusively, realistic, or from being simply echoes of the work of the Italian or Greek sculptors; and the peculiar quality of Mr. Gilbert's sculpture is, that it avoids either of these extremes, and that it succeeds in reproducing much of the Greek simplicity and unconsciousness, without imitating the mere outside form in which these qualities are displayed.¹⁰⁹

Gilbert's classicism has not always been obvious to later observers, except in the simple sense that the sculptor turned, at least initially, to Greek mythology as a means of expressing his ideas and emotions. Simplicity and unconsciousness have

¹⁰⁸ Quilter, 1892, 366.

¹⁰⁹ Quilter, 1883, 309.

rarely been seen as the principal merits to be found in Gilbert's sculpture, whose complexity, rather, and self-consciousness, have surely invited more comment in the years that have elapsed since 1883, when Quilter first sought to identify these qualities in the sculptor's exhibited works. The sculptor's nephew, Adrian Bury, would see the early works, which Quilter found to be (in contrast to Thornycroft's work) somehow antique in spirit but modern in form, as 'the key to his [Gilbert's] genius and the foundation of his career.' 'Nor is it without significance', Bury continued, 'that he used Greek legends to express his own life, and in this way gave the old myths a new, irresistible, human appeal.'¹¹⁰ Human appeal was, indeed, an absolutely key objective for Gilbert in the early days, according to the retrospective account he gave his friend, Joseph Hatton, in 1903, of how the subject of Perseus had come to interest him during the early 1880s; the account implies at once a competitive spirit and a kind of humility in the face of the masterpieces of the past, but the emphasis in Gilbert's story is on the idea of 'human sympathies':

[...] every story has two sides—the one being the accepted and literal text, and the other that which the text suggests. After seeing the wonderful and heroic statue by Cellini, amazed as I was by that great work, it still left me somewhat cold, insomuch that it failed to touch my human sympathies. As at that time my whole thoughts were of my artistic equipment for the future, I conceived the idea that Perseus before becoming a hero was a mere mortal, and that he

¹¹⁰ Bury, 1952, 42.

had to look to his equipment. That is a presage of my life and work at that time.¹¹¹

Again, with *Icarus*, Gilbert wanted to express ‘the human side’ of the story, an element that he sought to introduce by the invention of a novel episode, unprecedented in any previous version of the myth and involving, ironically, the addition of a distinctly animal presence at the feet of the young man, one that momentarily clouds his careless demeanour, it is implied, with a disturbing vision not of beneficent nature, but of nature red in tooth and claw. Aside from any Donatellesque influence, whether received directly or mediately through the works of French sculptors like Mercié, the motif strongly recalls a well known (because reproduced as an etching) if somewhat quieter watercolour study by Frederick Walker known simply as *Boy Looking at a Dead Bird* (or *Harsh Winter*), where the childlike innocence of the principal actor is similarly juxtaposed with an ominous suggestion of the hostile forces of nature and mortality.¹¹² Walker had previously made numerous studies of a boy watching a man digging a grave; John George Marks, who was present when Walker had made the watercolour in question, naturally saw a connection with these other studies making a more explicit allusion to human mortality. More strikingly still, the owner of one of these studies, reproduced in Marks’ text, was Somerset Beaumont, who commissioned Gilbert’s

¹¹¹ Hatton, 1903, 10.

¹¹² Marks, 1896, 27. Significantly, Beaumont had already been in possession of this study in January 1876, when it was shown at the posthumous exhibition of the artist’s works held on New Bond Street: Walker Memorial Fund, 1876, 22, Cat. 76.

Kiss of Victory and would remain one of the most loyal and significant of the sculptor's patrons in years to come.

Cellini is hardly a representative of an unmodified classical tradition, and yet Gilbert was clear that the famous *Perseus* by that artist had left him 'cold', rather like the works of Greco-Roman antiquity which he had witnessed in Rome. His biographer, Isabelle McAllister, wrote in 1929 that the works of art Gilbert had seen in Rome had been 'too classical in feeling, too detached and cold for what he was eagerly seeking to express; in fact, art in Rome was too reminiscent of archaeology.'¹¹³ Cellini's *Perseus*, not exactly archaeological in character, still seemed to the young artist to be in a sense too classical, too divine, and too lacking in the human frailty more usually associated with Florentine art to meet the modern spectator's demand for immediate emotional appeal, something to be found in copious quantities at every Salon exhibition. Standing before the Loggia dei Lanzi, Gilbert was probably also aware that, in his discussion of the relative value of facial and gestural expression in sculpture – in which the latter was found to outweigh the former in importance – Joshua Reynolds had referred specifically to Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine*, close by, as an example of a modern work in which '[t]he figures have the same general expression which is to be found in most of the antique sculpture; and yet it would be no wonder if future critics should find out delicacy of expression which was never intended; and go so far as to see, in the old man's

¹¹³ McAllister, 1929, 55.

countenance, the exact relation which he bore to the woman who appears to be taken from him.’¹¹⁴

Other voices with which Gilbert would have been familiar, among them Ruskin’s, had concurred that Greek sculpture was concerned chiefly with the body, and only afterwards with the face, but as Slade Professor Ruskin had also argued in 1871 that one cardinal ‘attribute of the best art’ was that it should make ‘[t]he Face principal, not the body’. This statement that might easily be taken as a bold disqualification of fifth-century Greek art from the highest category, even though the critic added the qualification that the face should be ‘free from either vice or pain’;¹¹⁵ certainly such claims ran in opposition to Reynolds’ view of sculpture as an art more akin to dance, and one in which the body should speak without the assistance of the face. The young sculptor, looking to steer a path between austere neoclassicism on the one side and the ostentatious carving of marble tears on the other, would have approached the Loggia dei Lanzi with certain preconceptions about the emotional detachment of antiquity that could also apply to Mannerist works of the sixteenth century:¹¹⁶ his solution with *Perseus Arming* was predominantly gestural, with *Icarus* a little more concentrated in the face, and yet the latter had drawn so overtly on a recognisably Praxitelean type of grace, combining

¹¹⁴ Reynolds, 1884, 181. This is in Discourse X, delivered to the students of the Royal Academy in December 1780.

¹¹⁵ Ruskin, *Works* XXIX, 85.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert used Donatello in one of his Royal Academy lectures to furnish students with an illustration of the purely gestural approach, observing of a relief of the Virgin and Child that the sculptor had ‘made the action of the arms, rather than the expression of the faces, express the sentiment’: See Whitley, 1903, 548.

its undercurrent of troubled fatalism with a sleek and unruffled composure that may be seen as Winckelmannian as well as Donatellesque..

On the other hand, Thornycroft and Gilbert were lumped together early on as sculptors concerned with remote classical myths, which, if not altogether devoid of the potential for ‘human appeal’ in themselves, could nevertheless be seen as the object of artistic appreciation of only a superficial kind. In 1883 an antagonistic critic in the *Magazine of Art* complained that:

The classic recreations in which modern English sculptors have so often indulged do not interest the popular mind except in so far as they may touch the inner springs of feeling, the deep eternal sources of human emotion. This they very seldom do [...] but to the world in general statues of Artemis and Teucer and Perseus convey no meaning whatever. The stories of classic history and mythology are not popular.¹¹⁷

The critic continued, however, by arguing that the classical subjects were not at fault so much as the ostentatious ‘technique’ employed in the treatment of them:

The mistake our sculptors make is that they do not go to work with the high purpose of expressing with their utmost power the essential ideas and meanings of the subjects which they choose, but merely the intention of

¹¹⁷ *The Magazine of Art*, 1883, 451. The reference to Perseus is not solely to Gilbert, but also George Blackall Simonds, whose *Perseus* was exhibited in 1883, and is discussed in the article cited. Simonds has not generally been associated strongly with the New Sculpture, though he is often assumed to have been influenced by his more innovative contemporaries in terms of subject, style, and technique, adopting and promoting lost-wax casting, for instance, and, to a limited degree, the movement’s naturalism, but not fully committing to the movement. Gosse (1894, 142) associates him firmly, perhaps too firmly, with the ‘old school’.

showing what very clever fellows they can be on occasions. This is all very able, and interesting, and amusing; but it is not exactly art, and on the whole, it is wise not to encourage it more than need be. When our sculptors show in their work as earnest and lofty a concern for sentiment and expression as they display in the rather less important particular of technique, then will be the time to inquire into the question of patronage and understanding.¹¹⁸

0.7. Classical Reception

Critics have not changed much, it may be thought, but the status of both the ‘stories of classic history and mythology’ and the extant remains of the ancient world has been much altered since 1883, when, we are perhaps accustomed to suppose, these were indeed popular. Recent work in the field of classical reception, alluded to above, has simultaneously acknowledged the decline in classical learning, if not scholarship, that has indisputably taken place in the interim, and sought to draw attention to and celebrate the signs of a continued or even renewed popularity for the classical, however it is defined, beyond disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Salvatore Settis has argued that Classics must in the future bring both the ‘complexity and singularity’ of the classical to the fore, overwriting any one-dimensional idea of its ‘perpetual and unchanging’ character, which might render it vulnerable to misuse for political ends.¹¹⁹ According to the self-declared

¹¹⁸ *The Magazine of Art*, 1883, 451-2.

¹¹⁹ Settis, 2006, see 83, 7.

‘Postclassicisms Collective’, a group of nine prominent classical scholars, many of whom can lay claim to ‘hybridized professional identities and affiliations’ stretching beyond the discipline as formerly conceived, Classics has now ‘become global and democratized. It is being consumed outside the classroom and beyond the walls of the museum’, and ‘the discipline has been responding to these changes by transforming itself in turn: it has been enriched, not impoverished, in the process.’¹²⁰ With the Collective’s recognition that ‘the classical past is in essence an unfinished project’ and emphasis, if not always on smooth continuity over rupture, then at least on the persistence of the classical in contemporary culture, we may compare Elizabeth Prettejohn’s efforts to demonstrate the ‘modernity of ancient sculpture’, exemplified, for instance, by the suggestion that meaningful engagement with antique models is more discernible in some of Picasso’s work than in the exaggerated ‘comic-book’ proportions selected by a sculptor like Arno Breker.¹²¹ Brooke Holmes, one of the Collective (most of whom have a literary focus), has, alongside Dakis Joannou and Karen Marta, sought to show in *Liquid Antiquity* some of the ways in which contemporary artists are engaging with the ancient world, demonstrating in part that they need no longer be seen as participating in a conscious rebellion against a simplistic and ‘petrifying’ idea of the classical. The emphasis on revising what classicism might be has also involved attempts to show that classicism was not necessarily a single ‘petrifying’ thing in the past. Simon Goldhill, another member of the Collective, has sought to complicate received notions of what

¹²⁰ The ‘Collective’ is made up of Alastair Blanshard, Simon Goldhill, Constanze Güthenke, Brooke Holmes, Miriam Leonard, Glenn Most, James Porter, Phiroze Vasunia, and Tim Whitmarsh: 2020, viii, 8-9.

¹²¹ See Prettejohn, 2012, 219-21.

classical antiquity meant – or could mean – for creators and consumers during the nineteenth century in his pioneering *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (2011), which spans a broader period than its title suggests. The language has shifted perceptibly from ideas of ‘revolt’ to reclamation, with a mission to ‘reclaim ancient texts as rich and unexpectedly generative resources for thinking about not only our own relationships to them but also about time, matter, agency, and other terms that are central to contemporary debates beyond the borders of disciplinary classics.’¹²² This much would seem to proceed from Charles Martindale’s seminal *Redeeming the Text* of 1993, which has been tremendously influential in broadening the horizons of Classics as a discipline. So, too, does the collective’s plea for greater critical self awareness and a more serious focus on ‘value’ and processes of discrimination,¹²³ since Martindale’s own work has moved very much in this direction in the intervening years, with a particular focus on beauty and aesthetics.¹²⁴ On the other hand, there has been a greater emphasis on collaboration, on social and cultural factors, and on consumers rather than creation.

In a sense this push to reclaim, recover, or redeem some aspect of antiquity either for contemporary audiences or for posterity mirrors the eagerness of some scholars of late nineteenth-century sculpture to raise the profile of the art of the period and bring it more fully within the ken of academic and non-academic

¹²² Blanshard, Goldhill, Güthenke *et al.*, 2020, 7.

¹²³ For a discussion of ‘value’ and an argument that it must be examined rather than presumed, see Blanshard, Goldhill, Güthenke *et al.*, 2020, 8ff.

¹²⁴ See, for instance, Martindale, 2001, 63-89; 2005, *passim*.

spectators alike. Sometimes these aims converge, as in the work Goldhill, who has explicitly connected classicism with the ‘Proclamation of Modernity’ but also suggested that such figures as John William Waterhouse and Lawrence Alma-Tadema ‘have serious contributions to make in the heady arena of sexuality, narrative, and viewing’,¹²⁵ though this is not quite the same as claiming any aesthetic value for them, as a specialist on late nineteenth-century painting might. Getsy and others have turned to Modernism, a particular vision of that modernity, as a suitable staging ground from which to launch a rescue operation.

The New Sculpture still occupies an awkward position for art historians and interested classicists – and this thesis straddles and is intended for both camps – because the movement has been framed at various points as one defined by its rebellion against a particular vision of classicism and as one (in its later years especially) too classical and insufficiently progressive. Classicists working in reception studies with a focus on the visual art of the nineteenth century have tended, understandably, to focus on painting, as the more popular and more colourful art, though sculpture at the end of the century could be emphatically picturesque, and just as worthy of study. In the light of recent developments within sculpture studies and the ever expanding field of classical reception, we are now in a much better position to see the New Sculpture as more than a straightforward rejection or exemplar of any one classical culture. Instead, we may examine the many different types of classicism through which its various actors expressed themselves and communicated with one another with a subtler appreciation for the diverse ways in

¹²⁵ Goldhill, 2011, 16.

which these classicisms competed or overlapped. If the following chapters focus more on individuals and ‘the unilinear response of the artist to a previous artwork’,¹²⁶ than on broad and intangible cultural processes tidily illustrated, this is not only because the thesis is concerned with sculpture as a creative art, but also because the sculptors thought and expressed themselves very much in these terms. Yet this does not prevent the thesis from taking account of audience responses, criticism, and the ‘mechanism’ by which reputations were made, movements constructed, and relationships formed outside the sphere of private study and experimentation.

As we have indicated, there is no single theoretical framework through which these complicated relationships can best be explored or understood. This thesis avoids projecting any too prescriptive or anachronistic ways of thinking onto the sculptors, commentators, and objects covered simply because the primary sources have already touched on many issues that could have been approached through modern theory. In as much as the movement can be said, however, to have had a unifying theoretical principle – or rather a metaphor with theoretical implications – this was best expressed in words by Gilbert in Liverpool in 1888, when he described every advance in art as ‘a reflection sent back from the mirror of the past.’

The image might seem to be Tennysonian, an allusion first and foremost to the magic mirror in ‘The Lady of Shalott’ (first published in 1832), to Holman Hunt’s celebrated illustration of it (for the famous Moxon Tennyson of 1857), and through

¹²⁶ Goldhill, 2011, 16. This is a criticism especially of Martindale’s model of reception, partly derived from T. S. Eliot, which is populated with more or less heroic authors communing across time. Goldhill prefers a version of reception that gives more space to ‘historical contextualisation, audience engagement, and cultural power.’

the latter, to Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*, which has been seen as the source for the mirror motif that entered into pictorial contexts not long after its entrance into the National Gallery in 1842.¹²⁷ Belatedly, in 1899, the aspiring painter Wolfram Onslow Ford would send to the Royal Academy a portrait of his father Edward in his studio holding a reproduction of the *Arnolfini Portrait*, with the obligatory convex mirror in the background drawing an explicit link between past and present. Here is a prime example of the *mise en abyme* phenomenon, exactly as defined by André Gide in 1893.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ See Prettejohn, 2017, 58-62; Smith, 2017, 30-75. Hunt had already used the circular mirror in a drawing illustrating 'The Lady of Shalott' as early as 1850.

¹²⁸ Gide, 1893, in O'Brien (tr.), 2000, 29-30.



Fig. 2. Wolfram Onslow Ford, *My Father*, 1899, Oil on canvas (?), 53.3×40.6cm,
Untraced, reproduction from *Royal Academy Pictures 1899*, 117.

Getsy notes that Wolfram ‘fashioned his father in allegiance to the Pre-Raphaelites’.¹²⁹ For Alison Smith, the reproduction even ‘acts as a manifesto for the principle of mimesis and craftsmanship that linked the two artists [Van Eyck and Ford] across time’.¹³⁰ A third artist might be added. Percy Bate, author of *The English Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, observed in 1901 that the painter – not just the sitter – ‘seems to have gone back to the primitives themselves for his inspiration.’¹³¹ As in Thornycroft’s *Mirror* (exhibited in 1890) there is a parental aspect to the relationship between past and present, and a statement not so much of inheritance as of self-recognition: the intrinsic value of the past in both cases is partly the fact that it is still current, Van Eyck being claimed as a spiritual father to both Fords, sculptor and son, and a living presence in their work.

In addition to these resonances, Gilbert must surely have had in mind one of the versions of George Frederic Watts’ *Britomart and her Nurse before the Magic Mirror*, an illustration or rather pictorial extrapolation of an incident from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590), in which much of the composition is taken up by an immense circular mirror that shows the heroine – as Tennyson’s does to the Lady of Shalott – a vision of a knight on horseback (the earliest version dates to about 1850 and is therefore roughly contemporary with Hunt’s drawing, but the principal version, now in Birmingham, appeared at the Royal Academy in 1878). In the poem, Britomart instantly falls in love with the reflection, comparing herself with Narcissus, ‘Who

¹²⁹ Getsy, 2004, 124.

¹³⁰ Smith, 2017, 70.

¹³¹ Bate, 1901, 114.

hauling vewed in a fontaine shere / His face, was with the loue thereof beguild' (III, ii, 44). In Watts' hands, the principal rider (Artegall, who in Spenser has clad in the armour of Achilles: III, ii, 25) is loudly Phidian and almost directly lifted from the Parthenon. The painter complicates the poem in another respect: Britomart does not see the mirror herself, but her nurse, Glauce, describes the vision to her, interposing herself as a mediator and interpreter.

In this case the elder artist, still living, acted at once as an interpreter and a sort of window to the past, and it should be no surprise that by 1888, when speaking of magic mirrors and the like in Liverpool, Gilbert had already produced his own reflection of Watts' picture. Only the previous year he had sent to the Royal Academy a roundel in plaster, possibly modelled as early as 1883, when the sculptor was still in Italy,¹³² that had been explicitly designed to evoke the enchanted looking glasses of poetic and pictorial fancy. This work, *Post Equitem Sedet Atra Cura*, presents a mirror vision of a mounted knight, strikingly similar in effect to that set down by Watts, which synthesises many historical influences to create a richly complex picture of forward movement and restraining force, but it is the idealised pseudo-Renaissance elements that struggle to progress towards their illusive goals, and the constraints of modern life that seem at once to spur on and slow the advance, past and present battling and not fully reconciled with one another. The critic Claude Phillips identified the 'mounted warrior' as a champion 'conceived in the style of the Florentine Renaissance' and as 'a very Colleoni galvanised into action, recalling far

¹³² See Dormant, 1985, 52-3; 1986, 176-7, Cat. 88. All known casts in bronze are later.

too closely Verrocchio's great warrior before S. Giovanni e Paolo.'¹³³ Behind the warrior stand a long line of armed and mounted soldiers extending back to the Marcus Aurelius on the Campidoglio, Watts' Hellenism having been reinterpreted in a more Italian light. The work itself is prompted by its title, taken from Horace (*Odes* 3.1), one of Gilbert's favourite Roman poets.

¹³³ Phillips, 1887, 385.

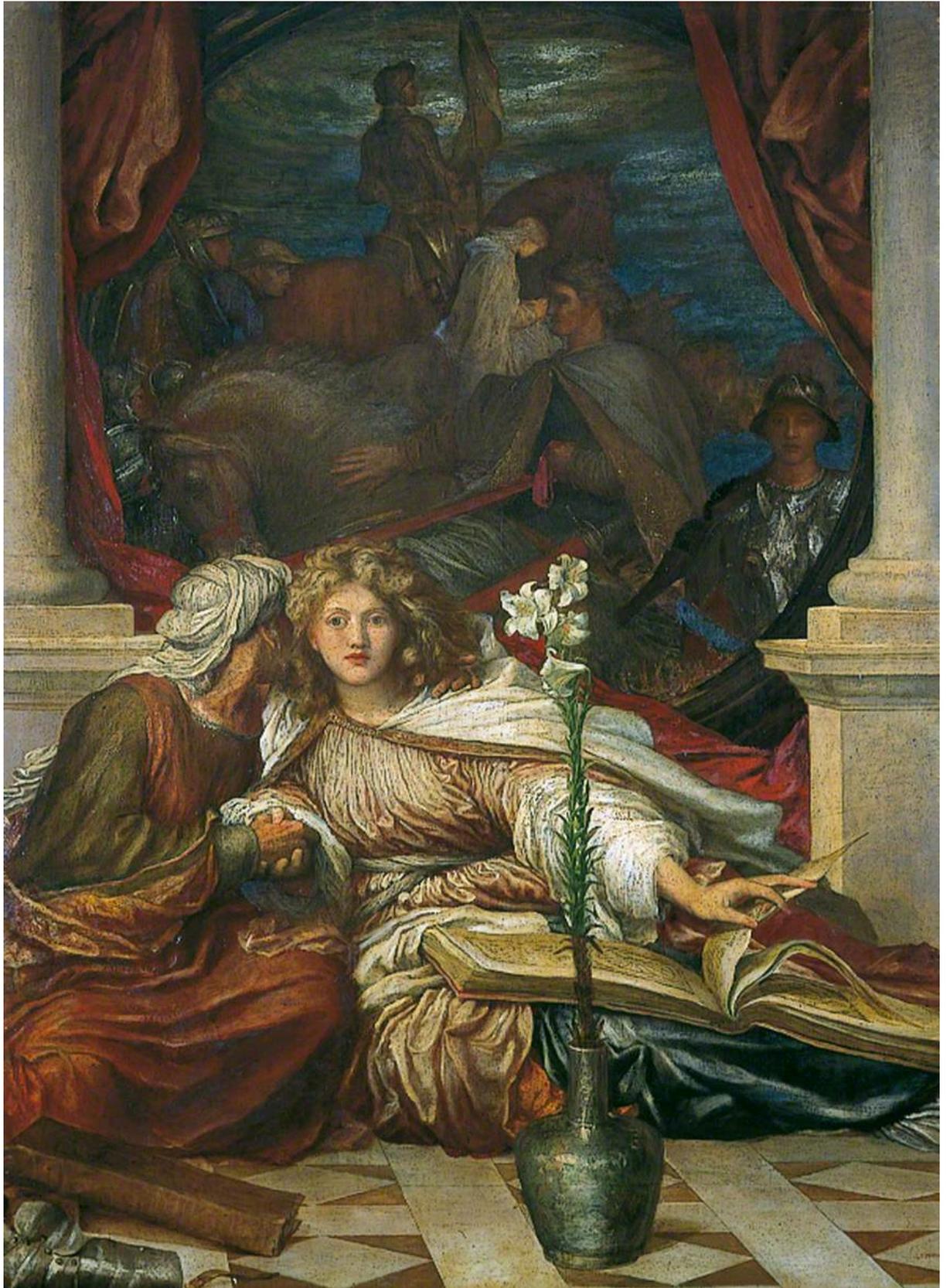


Fig 3: George Frederic Watts, *Britomart and her Nurse before the Magic Mirror*, 1877-8, Oil on canvas, 160.9×122cm, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 4. Alfred Gilbert, *Post Equitem Sedet Atra Cura*, c.1883-7 (this cast 1899), Bronze, 41.5cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

This plaque presents a drastically different kind of mirror vision from that in Thornycroft's *Mirror*: one intimate, domestic, deceptively simple, and overtly Greek in most particulars; the other grand, complex, florid, and Italianate. Both show

sculpture breaching the boundaries that hold it from overt pictorialism and expressing personal and deeply human preoccupations through their complicated references to and reflections of antiquity, modified and transformed by the art of later periods. Both sculptors can with justice be described as being thoroughly steeped in the classical past.

0.8. Summary of the Chapters

It has not been possible to separate different periods or movements – Florentine, say, Hellenistic, or Roman – into discrete chapters or sections, not only because as soon as one attempts to grasp these firmly they can begin to disintegrate further into smaller subdivisions (Archaic, Phidian or neo-Attic, Praxitelean, and so on), but also because these seemingly disparate historical influences frequently come all together. Still, the exercise of picking through the evidence remains a valuable one that can tell us more about attitudes to each and the modern works which we discuss.

The first chapter will focus on some of the ways in which the New Sculpture in Britain was shaped by contact with France and Italy, returning the movement to an international context that has been overlooked or given only lip service in much of the scholarship to date. Early attempts to describe the new movement often drew attention to its debt to Renaissance and especially Florentine sources, setting these against a now old-fashioned classicism derived from Greek and Roman models. We show in this chapter that the Florentine revival in British sculpture during the late nineteenth-century – something that not only invited much comment at the time, but also retained a cachet of prestige in the twentieth century as an alternative of sorts to

unfashionable academicism and its classical connotations – was in reality one of the most significant evidences of French influence on the movement. If a revolution occurred in Britain that saw (especially early) Renaissance art take the place of Greek and Roman antiquity, it was part of the wider turning from one classicism to another that had already been underway among French artists since about the middle of the century, for sculpture a transformation more or less complete by 1880, and one had already changed the nature of academicism. Neo-Florentinism, or Quattrocentism as it was sometimes with greater specificity termed, may have seen the production of some superficial costume pieces, but the landmark works in this genre were distinguished rather by a diligent and tender naturalism informed by fifteenth-century sculpture. It was chiefly this that British sculptors sought to emulate or to discover at first hand from Italian sources. The chapter closes with a demonstration that Kenyon Cox's 1884 article on Quattrocento sculpture, which attempted to identify the key innovation of fifteenth-century Italian sculpture in terms of low relief, was known in Britain and its findings adopted.

The second chapter, while touching on many figures, including Brock, Thornycroft, and Pomeroy, focuses for the greater part on Gilbert, presented by Beattie as representative in chief of the new movement in Britain, but in no way a figure of parochial interests or aims. The chapter reasserts Gosse's interpretation (and partial construction) of the New Sculpture as predominantly concerned with naturalism, arguing, however, that the term had a deeper and wider significance than perhaps even Gosse recognised, even potentially including the visionary aspect of some of the sculpture produced during the period. Along the way, we relate nineteenth-century ideas about naturalism to antiquity (directly and mediately

encountered), to the Gothic, and to the notion of ‘tradition’, resetting Gilbert’s figural and ornamental works in a long historical perspective that differs from the overly retrospective approaches that have been taken to his sculpture by Beattie and Getsy. After a section that questions Beattie’s generalisations about French ‘academic’ sculpture of the period and seeks to emphasise its eclecticism and diversity, we demonstrate some of the ways in which Gilbert’s sculpture was at various points in dialogue with modern French sculpture and with antiquity, especially through visual sources, but also through ancient mythology, which so frequently appears in an allusive rather than straightforwardly illustrative context. In order to complicate our understanding of what ‘Nature’ and to some extent ‘Realism’ could mean for sculptors in the late nineteenth century, a section on Ruskin and what Beattie dismissively called ‘Ruskinian realism’ follows. This also makes the case that Ruskin’s writings – especially those, like *The Queen of the Air* (1869), that deal with classical subjects – help us to interpret the symbolic side of their work. This leads into further discussion about the place of nature and Gilbert’s use of (especially animal) symbols in both well known (*Icarus*) and less appreciated works (the Graham Memorial; *Mother Teaching Child*, *The Broken Shrine*), and a final reflection on how ‘naturalism’ and ‘Symbolism’ relate to ideas of health and sickness and the medievalising and Graeco-Roman impulses that coexist in the New Sculpture as a whole.

A shorter chapter follows, which focuses on perceived contradictions at the heart of the movement. Here we reframe the perceived duality of purpose and genre – what has been explored chiefly in terms of ‘naturalism’ and ‘Symbolism’ in Chapter Two – as a real or imagined distinction between the representation of body

and soul, an opposition that brings us close indeed to Ruskin's suggestion, also explored in the previous chapter, that the 'solid' and the 'spectral' could both be classed as aspects of nature. The chapter shows that this could be seen as an apparent contradiction not only for the New Sculpture, but for the art of sculpture in general, elsewhere explored in terms of the real and ideal, the human and the visionary, or other related oppositions. We focus here on critical observations from contemporary voices (on both sides of the Channel) attempting and struggling to define the movement or particular works that might be seen as representative of it. It is clear that critics were not always wholly sympathetic. The title, 'Dual Natures', itself comes from Marion Hepworth Dixon, a more sympathetic critic who knew and wrote extensively – and successfully, in the eyes of some modern scholars – on Edward Onslow Ford's aims and achievements as a sculptor. The chapter draws attention to Dixon's feeling that Ford's *Study* of 1886 was reminiscent of the so-called 'Psyche' of Capua, pointing to a mythological undercurrent that was important for the movement as a whole and for some of its painter associates. This myth, which concerns the union of physical and spiritual love, was one of the means by which the supposed contradiction could be addressed, along with the apparent disjunction between the modern and the antique.

Chapter Four advances from contradiction to controversy, dealing with the unlucky figure of Thomas Stirling Lee, whose relief panels for St George's Hall in Liverpool formed a great distraction from proceedings at the first meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry in December 1888. Lee, who was seen as taking sculpture too far into the realm of the picturesque, and far indeed from the antique, had in reality attempted to retain a

certain classicality of arrangement, producing in the second panel especially – rejected by the committee – a work with half-disguised mythological undertones. The chapter sets this panel alongside the then-famous ‘Orpheus relief’, known in multiple examples, which must have been one of the sculptor’s principal sources, and the *Adieux* (1849) of a resoundingly classical ‘neo-Attic’ French sculptor of an earlier generation, Jean-Joseph Perraud, comparing the way meaning and narrative are expressed through form and gesture in each. The ‘Indecision’ of the chapter’s title refers both to the apparent attitude given to the figure of Justice in Lee’s relief and to the sculptor’s unsculpturesque ‘losing and finding’ of form or ‘decision’ in drawing; it may also be taken as alluding to the hesitancy and vacillation of the relevant commissioning body. A wholly new insight into some of the ways in which Gosse’s earlier and later accounts of the movement differed is given in this place by a more extended discussion of Perraud’s work and status in relation to the New Sculpture, and by a focus on the difficult problem of how best to manage low relief, that key discovery, in Cox’s eyes, of the Quattrocento.

Chapter Five proceeds by addressing a matter closely connected with the topic of modelling in relief. The concept of *couleur*, or ‘colouristic modelling’, must be recognised as one of the most important respects in which sculptors associated with the New Sculpture broke away from the theory and practice of the earlier part of the century. In their pursuit of *couleur* they largely rejected the more exclusively form-conscious approach towards the art advocated by many of their predecessors, and it is worth stressing that – unlike the quest for polychromy proper – this was indeed a pursuit in which all the leading figures of the movement were united, though they approached the problem in different ways. If, however, the turn towards

'picturesque' sculpture involved a rupture with a more or less living tradition, we shall see that the justifications for it were found through a reinterpretation of the sculptural practices of antiquity as well as its later revivals. Just as Cox claimed that the sculptors of the Quattrocento were colourists on account of their management of low relief even in works in the round, it was suggested that the Greeks, too, 'considered colour in form an essential'. The chapter begins by gathering together and sifting through numerous attempts from critics and sculptors, some more successful than others, to define what *couleur* was and how it might be achieved. The chapter argues that Cox's 'Quattrocentist' interpretation of *couleur* as a 'system of delicate half-modeling' should be taken alongside a more 'chiaroscurist' or even 'Phidian' understanding of the concept, like that explored by Thornycroft in particular, involving deeper undercutting and heightened projections where necessary to imply darker colours or for the sake of contrast with passages of sparser modelling. Inevitably, the term has painterly connotations, and we seek to contextualise it in relation to earlier nineteenth-century writing about art as well as the criticism of the 1880s and 90s, but the chapter also demonstrates that *couleur* could potentially mean one thing in a dim interior and another in bright sunlight and an architectural context, the appearance of naturalism in any situation requiring a flexibility and judiciousness of interpretation from the artist rather than a literal translation of form from one material to another.

The final chapter brings together many of the threads explored in earlier chapters: it develops further the idea of sculpture as an art caught in this period between painterly and architectonic modes of expression, but also between different forms of classicism ranging from the 'Pseudo-Archaic' to the Quattrocentist and

even Venetian revivals that helped shape the diverse and learned artistic expression of the late nineteenth century. Three of the New Sculpture's guiding lights, each of whom has been associated – often very simplistically – with one type of classicism, will be explored, with a particular emphasis throughout on the relationship between painting and sculpture, which, if framed in terms of influence, did not flow in one direction so much as reflect back and forth between media, master, mentor, and student. The key figures are Frederic Leighton, Alfred Stevens, and George Frederic Watts, all 'painter-sculptors' whose importance for the New Sculpture was, it has been thought, disproportionate, though the chapter emphasises some of the ways in which the sculptural interventions of the first and last named were themselves shaped by the impetus given to the art by the younger men they had encouraged and inspired. Leighton has for critics, commentators, and scholars proven rather difficult to pin down, his sculptural contributions having been connected with Archaic and Hellenistic sculpture, with Praxiteles, Michelangelo, and with the modern Florentine revival in French sculpture, as well as with painters like Correggio, while Watts himself ensured that his name would be associated most strongly with Phidias and Titian, regardless of the fact that he drew on a much more varied range of sources than most of his recorded comments on the subject would seem to imply. We contrast what Harry Quilter referred to as the 'Universality' of Leighton with the comparatively rigid and possibly wayward 'principles of form' and 'theory of curves' set down by Watts, evaluating the influence that each had in the construction of the New Sculpture and moving beyond discussion of the exhibition pieces only that have hitherto dominated writing on the subject, since both figures were close enough to the principal actors of the movement that relationships could be formed through humble sketches, informal meetings, and conversation as much as through

the more cumbersome mechanism of the Royal Academy exhibition or even the formality of its modelling room. The chapter demonstrates that any theoretical dialogue between these elder ‘sculptor-painters’ and younger sculptors was entirely framed in terms of historical *exempla*, which might in practice be interpreted in greatly divergent ways or combined and reformulated to produce surprising results that seem to break away from any merely verbal shackles.

We shall see that the so-called New Sculptors, differing among themselves but also converging in many respects, were in no hurry to cast off the past in its multifaceted and many tinted totality, but were keen to use it always as a means of advancing, with a profound sense of continuity and the value of tradition informing even the most radical aspects of their practice, though continuity with the past did not mean something ‘perpetual and unchanging’. The novelty of the New Sculpture was largely in its continual remodelling of the past with a freedom and flexibility that was responsive to the shifting demands of subject and situation.

CHAPTER ONE

1. French Neo-Florentinism and the ‘Anglo-Florentine Renaissance’: The New Sculpture and the Quattrocento

In his 1901 monograph, *British Sculpture and Sculptors of To-Day*, M. H. Spielmann attempted to define the work of the New Sculptors in terms of the movement’s origins:¹³⁴

Although it is true that a nation can no more afford to borrow its art from abroad than its literature, the modern growth of British sculpture, where it is not coloured direct from the Italian Renaissance, is certainly influenced from France. Mr. Thornycroft and Mr. Brock themselves, classic though they are in their main sympathy—classic romantics, if such a term be permissible—have not entirely withstood the wave. Mr. Thornycroft may represent the Greek; Mr. Brock may carry on something of the feeling of Alfred Stevens; they are both in greater measure or in less in the eddy of the flowing stream.

The most representative members of the group associated with the movement, were then, in this critic’s eyes, the artistic product of two merging streams: that of the Italian, and more particularly Tuscan, Renaissance, and that of modern France, whose powerful contribution to late-nineteenth century ‘statuomania’ was impossible to ignore: Spielmann, in many respects a keen observer, referred to the latter stream – perhaps the more significant of the two in his estimation – as ‘romantic realism’, but opted not to draw any obvious connection between this trend or movement, if

¹³⁴ Spielmann, 1901, 2.

indeed it can be called such a thing, and the source from which its fresh inspiration had been claimed to have been discovered. In its similar return to this same source, the early Florentine Renaissance, the New Sculpture would in many respects reflect developments that had taken place in French sculpture a number of years earlier. Spielmann was certainly aware that his own important study of British sculptors living at the turn of the century, while constituting a feat at the time unprecedented in scope, was itself subject to a current that had become apparent in the 1880s. This much is suggested by the critic's choice of metaphors. As many as eighteen years earlier – a considerable length of time before the New Sculpture would receive at the same hands something akin to an art historical baptism – Edmund Gosse had been unable to resist playing with a similarly literal imagery of influence:¹³⁵

Sculpture in England has had to begin anew, faintly encouraged, I cannot doubt, by the greater revival across the Channel. The pre-raphaelitism of Mr. Woolner, and the independent movement toward realism of Mr. Armstead, were the first steps toward the light [...] They have led the way to a generation of younger artists, who move on the crest of a second wave of revival, a wave much more plainly tending toward us from the shores of France, and of the very highest interest and importance to students of our national art.

For Gosse, the chief representatives of this new revival across the Channel were 'Chapu and Dubois, Falguière and Mercié',¹³⁶ all of whom have in the literature on

¹³⁵ Gosse, 1883, 166.

¹³⁶ Gosse, 1883, 166.

nineteenth-century French sculpture been associated in varying degrees with the rediscovery of the early Renaissance during the 1870s.

1.1. The Siege of Paris and the Lure of Florence

The decade did not open auspiciously. The Franco-Prussian War, Siege of Paris, and Commune of 1871 are of only peripheral concern here, providing as they do not so much roots for the artistic revival as accidental developments which shaped some aspects of its growth. Some acknowledgement must be made of the grim context of these events. One reason for this is that much attention has been given in histories of the New Sculpture to the presence of Dalou, Legros, and Lanteri in London during the 1870s and the direct influence of these Frenchmen on art tuition that resulted from, at least in the former's case, post-Paris Commune exile status. Dalou's importance has not been overstated: in an 1898 letter to Alfred Lys Baldry, Pomeroy wrote that '[i]t was not until "Dalou" came to instruct in the new modelling schools, founded & endowed by the City Guilds at Kennington in 1899 [read 1879], that any decided progress was noticeable. But the enthusiasm & knowledge he brought to bear on the Students, resulted in the founding of a really good modelling class.'¹³⁷ A fuller appreciation of Dalou's connections with Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and others would certainly add significantly to present knowledge, and it must be admitted that the idea of a streamlined descent from Carpeaux, through Dalou, to Pomeroy, Drury

¹³⁷ Pomeroy to Baldry, 4 Aug 1898: National Art Library, MSL/1972/4950/122. Dalou had already been engaged in teaching at the National Art Training School in South Kensington since 1877: his stint at the Lambeth or South London Technical School of Art (since 1937 named the City and Guilds of London Art School) was only brief as he would return to Paris in 1879.

and various other sculptors makes for an attractive narrative, but we should also be cautious not to stress this sculptor's influence over the younger generation of sculptors to the exclusion of other factors, not least because there were certainly other conduits through which an awareness of French sculpture more broadly could, during the period, be nurtured. Another reason for alluding to the events of 1870-1 is the more intangible sense that it ought to have altered the artistic productions of the age in much the same manner as the Great War forty years later. Against the retrospective doubt of more recent commentators who have not found in French sculpture of the 1870s a change radical enough to satisfy current tastes for stormy revolution in the arts, we may weigh Gosse's feeling as early as 1873 that, following a pause, some transformation had indeed occurred.

The year that Henri Regnault died,—
The sad red blossoming year of war,—
All nations cast the lyre aside,
And gazed through curvèd fingers far
At horror, waste and wide.

As Gosse put it, 'fresher aims / Sprang in the wilderness of art, / [s]erener pathos, nobler claims / [o]n man for his best part.' As for which divinity should preside over and guide the rejuvenated art, the writer was clear that it must be '[t]he great god Pan redeified'.¹³⁸ The fresh aims would involve then, he felt or at least hoped, a renewed and somewhat pagan feeling for nature.

¹³⁸ Gosse, 1873, 152-5.

In 1871, the year of Regnault's death, Thornycroft – in Spielmann's view the most 'Greek' of the so-called New Sculptors – became not only the first of his peers to examine first-hand and begin to absorb the extraordinary developments taking place in French sculpture during the decade, but also the earliest to visit Venice, Florence, and Rome, in a seven-week tour that would have, as his daughter, Elfrida, later recalled, 'an immense influence on [his] artistic development.' Thornycroft and his sisters found a Paris burnt and pitted with bullet holes from the recent upheavals. Barricades were still standing. The siblings admired the works of Dubois and Falguière, as well as the *Venus de Milo*. In Florence they paid particular attention to Donatello, Verrocchio, Ghiberti, and Michelangelo, returning home 'with their minds filled with the glories of the Italian Renaissance and the exciting work of the new French school of sculpture, so unlike anything they had known hitherto.'¹³⁹ A flying visit, admittedly, but Thornycroft continued to pay close attention to the Paris Salons over the following years and, according to Gosse, also revisited Florence and Rome at some point between 1876 and 1883 for further study of Renaissance sculpture.¹⁴⁰

The *topos* of a pilgrimage to Florence, and of a preference especially for Renaissance sculpture over the art of antiquity, is thoroughly ingrained in the story of the New Sculpture, though it often resurfaces, strangely enough, as a means by which critics and scholars can avoid giving full recognition to the international

¹³⁹ Manning 1982, 57. Manning mentions the work of Mercié as well, though this is rendered implausible by the fact that his breakthrough did not come until later. That Thornycroft was aware of his work by 1875, when he modelled his *Warrior Carrying a Wounded Youth from the Field of Battle*, would, however, seem clear.

¹⁴⁰ Gosse, 1883, 179.

context in which this cultural phenomenon occurred. Alfred Gilbert's first famous excursion to Florence – some years after Thornycroft's first visit – and to other Italian cities in which Florentine sculpture may be found, is generally treated as an entirely personal undertaking and experience. This, in part, it must have been, but Gilbert's attraction to Florence must, like Thornycroft's, be understood in relation to the French neo-Florentine revival which is so often given a merely cursory treatment in the literature.

Gilbert was in Italy with his young family for a more protracted spell, from September 1878 until the end of 1884 or beginning of 1885 (he was in London in January). Apart from Rome, where he maintained a studio throughout this period, it is recorded that he also passed very briefly through Turin,¹⁴¹ spent at least two summers (1881 and 1882) outside Bocca d'Arno, near Perugia, visited Florence more than once, Venice, and Capri, where Alice Gilbert settled with the children and where the sculptor modelled his famous *Head of a Capri Fisherman* (first cast in 1884). For work in bronze during this period, we should note that he turned to Neapolitan founders, though it may be the case that he had some dealings with a foundry in Rome too.¹⁴² Finally, at a late stage in his Italian period, under the influence of Horace – 'It must have been Horace's account of his journey to Brundisium in company with his patron Maecenas, that inspired me to emulate the poet's example', the sculptor later noted, 'I loved and admired him as a schoolboy, even as much as my old schoolmaster, Alfred Leeman, who used constantly to quote

¹⁴¹ McAllister, 1929, 51.

¹⁴² See Dorment, 1985, 37, 57-8.

him as his favourite Latin author' – Gilbert travelled alone on foot from Venice to Brindisi, a romantic and mysterious enterprise taking in, he later told Isabel McAllister: Padua; Ringo (Rovigo?); Ferrara;¹⁴³ Bologna; Piofa (?); Florence, and Rome. This is not so easy to plot on a map. Gilbert moved sometimes through 'uninviting' and volcanic terrain (recorded as 'the Volcain mountains' – Volscian? – where one night he clobbered a menacing herdsman with his stick and left him unconscious, like Oedipus or some other traveller of old) and often slept on the bare turf; fellow wayfarers he apparently addressed in their own dialects, and innkeepers he paid in 'Neapolitan love-songs' peppered with appropriate 'topical allusions'; upon arriving in Brindisi, we are told, he crossed over (land as well as sea we must suppose) to Capri to rejoin his family, and thence returned to Rome. All this wandering must certainly have given the sculptor a few formative experiences *tipo trekking*, but Gilbert stressed to McAllister that his travels were also a means of carrying out some personal research of an art historical nature:¹⁴⁴

Upon arriving in Padua, the first thing I went to find was Donatello's great masterpiece. Although an admirer of his work, I was unprepared to see him in the light this grand work of art revealed; so unlike, as it is, to the sweeter and almost effeminate examples in Florence. I was so taken aback that I was unable to form any comparison between this statue and that of Colleoni by Verrochio [*sic*].

¹⁴³ McAllister (1929, 79) mentions Florence here, but apart from geographical considerations Gilbert's reference to it as 'the birthplace of Savonarola, [...] a city intimately connected with Aristotle and Tasso' makes clear that Ferrara is meant.

¹⁴⁴ McAllister, 1929, 171-82.

Gilbert himself was largely responsible for his subsequent reputation for great individualism. In 1903 he told the journalist Joseph Hatton that he had, during the late 1870s, ‘grown tired of French influence, in which [he] felt [his] own individuality was overshadowed.’¹⁴⁵

I availed myself of an opportunity to visit Florence, and there it was that the scales fell from my eyes. I saw, for the first time in my life, the works of the fathers of the Renaissance; and I was struck by the absolute independence and freedom of thought and truthful representation of the ideas they possessed.

For the unswervingly devoted Isabel McAllister, twenty-six years later, this seemed, together with his later visit to Padua, a pivotal moment in the sculptor’s development, and Gilbert’s Parisian period something that needed to be downplayed.¹⁴⁶

A visit to Florence about this time proved of immense value to him. He was tired of the French influence, which he felt to overshadow his own individuality; and in Rome this same dissatisfaction prevailed, extending even to the works of art that he saw. They were too classical in feeling, too detached and cold for what he was eagerly seeking to express; in fact, art in Rome was too reminiscent of archaeology. It was not until he had seen the Colleoni in Venice, the greatest of Donatello’s works in Padua, and other masters in

¹⁴⁵ Hatton, 1903, 9-10.

¹⁴⁶ McAllister, 1929, 55.

Florence, that he realised that he had found his “Golden Milestone” in the Fathers of the Renaissance.

Though Gilbert had found his years attending the *École des Beaux-Arts* in certain respects frustrating,¹⁴⁷ it is manifestly implausible that he can have been completely unaware of the renewed enthusiasm for Florentine sculpture within France: if in turning towards Florence he was attempting to break free of French influence, he can only, in a sense, have succeeded in doing the opposite. A revealing letter demonstrates that Gilbert had in fact set his mind on Donatello and the other Florentines well before he had come face to face with their works. On October 26th 1878, the young sculptor had written the following to his parents from Rome, where, as had long been conventional for the most distinguished French students, he had first sought to find inspiration in the antique:¹⁴⁸

I find to my utter disappointment that many of the grand works of art, which I had so longed to see, and which I thought to find in Rome, are in reality in Florence; of course I knew that most of the productions of the great masters of the Florentine School were in the city that gave them birth, but I at least expected to find those grand masters more liberally represented here than they are.

Gilbert’s feelings upon visiting Florence and especially upon seeing Cellini’s *Perseus* for the first time are well documented, though he was even more greatly

¹⁴⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that despite the hardships and discouragements encountered during this period, Gilbert later remembered it as ‘part of the real summer of his life’: Bury, 1952, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Bury, 1952, 91, Note 12.

struck later on by the *Gattamelata* in Padua. His *Perseus Arming* was the immediate result of the first trip to Florence. *Icarus*, also, he sought to make ‘Florentine rather than classical’, and more specifically ‘*Cinque Cento*’, in character,¹⁴⁹ though there can be no doubt that Gilbert’s much vaunted and much celebrated seeking for inspiration in the Italian Renaissance rather than the antique was for a former student of the *École des Beaux-Arts* during the 1870s, stylistically speaking, hardly a choice at all. Although Gilbert later claimed that he had found a still ‘closer sympathy’ in Venice (which he visited for the first time in 1883),¹⁵⁰ the fact that Florence continued to loom large in his imagination decades later is amply demonstrated by his rather unconventional lectures at the Royal Academy after 1900, of which a record was published in Spielmann’s *Magazine of Art* in 1903: across a number of these, delivered in January of 1901, Gilbert delighted students by recounting a dream of his in which Donatello, Michelangelo, and Cellini had decided to collaborate on a single project. Naturally for Gilbert (if not anyone else), ‘their choice fell upon a necklace for the Venus of Milo’,¹⁵¹ which he subsequently sought to capture with the assistance of a nearby blackboard. Among other figures associated with the New Sculpture, Bates, Frampton, and Pomeroy all visited Italy, where the latter was

¹⁴⁹ McAllister, 1929, 63. Despite Gilbert’s insistence on the Cinquecento, critical comparisons have overwhelmingly tended to focus on Donatello: see, for instance, Bury, 1952, 8, 41: ‘Masterpiece as is Cellini’s work, his conception is as coarse as the modern sculptor’s is refined. I would prefer to compare Gilbert’s statuettes, the one of ‘Icarus’ particularly, with Donatello’s bronze ‘David’ in the Museo Nazionale, Florence, for we are at once struck by a similarity of vision and sentiment’; see also Dorment, 1985, 49.

¹⁵⁰ McAllister, 1929, 71-2

¹⁵¹ ‘It was true that the Venus of Milo had not been discovered at the time, but it seemed to the dreamer, nevertheless, that the necklace was for her and no other’: Whitley, 1903, 547.

greatly influenced by ‘the Naples + Pompeian sculpture’.¹⁵² Edward Onslow Ford also made at least two trips to Italy that have been documented: there is no record of a visit to Rome, interestingly, but the first of these involved a journey by sea to Naples, and the second was intended as a ‘separate pilgrimage’ to Florence specifically to study the work of Donatello; according to one of the letters of condolence to Ford’s widow preserved in the Archive of Sculptors’ Papers at the Henry Moore Institute, the sculptor and his son Wolfram also passed through Milan and Carrara in September 1898.¹⁵³ In an article published that year on this sculptor, whose commitment to naturalism was perhaps in some respects greater than that of either Gilbert or Thornycroft, Marion Hepworth Dixon stated that ‘[f]rom an artistic standpoint, Donatello is the spring to which every sculptor must, sooner or later, seek to assuage his thirst.’¹⁵⁴

While using the terminology that originated with Gosse, Beattie has argued assertively that his highly influential view of the New Sculpture as a movement guided by ‘a close and reverent observation of nature’ constitutes a ‘fundamental misinterpretation of its character’.¹⁵⁵ Naturalism of a kind informed by the study of Italian Renaissance sculpture was, however, an essential component of the artistic revolution that occurred in Britain in the 1880s, and something distinctly new in

¹⁵² Pomeroy to Baldry, 4 Aug 1898, National Art Library, MSL/1972/4950/122.

¹⁵³ A. Hoffman & son (Carrara, Leghorn) to Mrs Onslow Ford, 27 Jan 1902: Henry Moore Institute and Archive, 2011.311/A/20.

¹⁵⁴ Hepworth Dixon, 1898, 296; see also Hepworth Dixon, 1899, 559: Onslow Ford went ‘straight for his inspiration to the masters of the early Renaissance, and sat [...] at the feet of the inimitable Florentine, Donatello.’

¹⁵⁵ Beattie, 1983, 3, 5.

Britain, which still clung to a type of classicism that to French observers was rapidly beginning to appear old-fashioned.¹⁵⁶ Gosse's view that the primary motive of the New Sculpture was greater truth to nature was certainly shared by Thornycroft. In 1886, this sculptor drew up a 'Chart of Sculpture' – almost a family tree in which various historical periods were arranged, with parentage and pedigree sketched out in full; Thornycroft's daughter, Elfrida Manning, later described the attempt as follows: '[o]n the one side he placed the Classicism of the Ancients, Egyptians, Assyrians and Greeks, and on the other the Realism of the French nineteenth century Renaissance. In the middle he placed 'Nature', giving birth to Greek Classicism and the Italian and French Renaissances. He himself appears as the offspring of Greek Classicism and the Italian Renaissance, while also acknowledging a debt to the Frenchmen, Carpeaux and Dubois [...] he indicates that he had arrived, more or less independently of French influence, at his own style; indeed, he always maintained that he had had two masters only, Nature and the Elgin Marbles'.¹⁵⁷ This question of naturalism is one to which we shall return later.

1.2. Henri Chapu on British Sculpture

¹⁵⁶ Jeremy Cooper regarded the three 'principles' of the New Sculpture as 'naturalism, idealism and symbolism': Cooper, 1975, 79.

¹⁵⁷ Manning, 1982, 95. The claim unmistakably echoes, of course, Watts' famous claim that he learned 'in no school save one, that of Pheidias, and in that school had never ceased to learn': Watts, 1912 I, 26; cf. Gosse (1883, 179) on Thornycroft: 'His own work has shown manifest good result from the combined study of the Elgin marbles and of Michelangelo, the two schools of art in which he has most deeply graduated.'

A valuable French perspective on the sculpture in the English section at the 1878 Exposition Universelle was given by Henri Chapu, who prefaced his positive comments about specific works including Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* with an indication of a rather unenthusiastic general impression:¹⁵⁸

L'Angleterre nous réclame. Cette nation doit encore être rangé parmi celles qui sont tributaires de l'Italie contemporaine de Canova. M. Fontana, l'auteur de *Cupidon fait prisonnier par Vénus*, M. Fuller, l'auteur de la *Péri*,¹⁵⁹ ont donné à leurs oeuvres cette grâce cherchée où l'on voudrait à la fois plus de naturel, plus de simplicité et plus d'accent.

From Chapu's perspective, British sculpture in the late 1870s appeared to lack most of all the naturalism of recent French efforts, which had been largely guided by a renewed focus especially on the early Italian Renaissance. That Gosse and Spielmann would subsequently trace the developments of the following decade to the example set by Chapu and his peers has been shown above. The literature on the New Sculpture has, however, persistently returned to the idea that the type of naturalism that blossomed during the last decades of the nineteenth-century was the product of unmediated contact with Italian sculpture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Spielmann had suggested something of this nature in his claim that 'the modern growth of British sculpture, where it is not coloured direct from the Italian Renaissance, is certainly influenced from France.'¹⁶⁰ More significant still is the fact

¹⁵⁸ Chapu, 1884, 8-9.

¹⁵⁹ Giovanni Giuseppe Fontana (1821-93) and Charles Francis Fuller (1830-75).

¹⁶⁰ Spielmann, 1901, 2.

that Claude Phillips, another influential critic during the 1890s, had attempted to classify the New Sculpture as '[t]he Anglo-Florentine Renaissance',¹⁶¹ even before Gosse had bestowed upon the movement the name by which it is still somewhat awkwardly known.

Mention is frequently made in the scholarship concerning nineteenth-century sculpture of a movement, a school, or even a 'corporation' of French neo-Florentine sculptors who rose to prominence during the 1860s,¹⁶² though few serious attempts have been made to understand with any accuracy or genuine insight the intentions, importance, or even associated members of this supposed group, whose influence upon the New Sculpture in Britain, as well as upon French art generally was nonetheless of very great significance. If the so-called New Sculpture could be considered partly as an 'Anglo-Florentine' revivalist movement, 'coloured direct', as Spielmann suggests, 'from the Italian Renaissance', it was in this respect more than any other produced by British sculptors having been raised aloft on the crest of a wave tending from across the Channel.

In 1883, Gosse had expressed his hopes for the future of British Sculpture in an extraordinary passage that might well be considered in the context of first-wave Pre-Raphaelitism, employing a distinctively Ruskinian form of rhetoric to advocate the complete rejection of the artistic principles of the late seventeenth, eighteenth

¹⁶¹ Phillips, 1893, 397.

¹⁶² Absalon, 2010, 62.

and early nineteenth centuries,¹⁶³ and simultaneously to claim for France the rebirth of ‘pure Greek feeling’:¹⁶⁴

Now it may seem to some readers a bold thing to say, and yet is merely a truism to those who think on the subject, that so great has been the rise in sincere and capable treatment of sculpture in the French schools within two generations, that any one who visits the Salon at Paris will see, even in an unfavourable year, several imaginative statues which show more real knowledge of the body, a truer sense of beauty, a livelier fidelity to pure Greek feeling, than is to be found in all Canova’s work, in most of Thorvaldsen’s work, and in all else that Europe produced in sculpture from the death of Bernini (1680) until the present age. We need to have this said plainly, and to clear our minds of tradition and prejudice. If we want to see what is truly beautiful in sculpture, let us look at such fragments of genuine old Greek work, down to the age of Praxiteles, as the piety of the modern world has collected out of chaos; in Christian sculpture at the alto-relievos of Ghiberti, the penciled bass-reliefs of Donatello, the saintly terra-cottas of Della Robbia, and the virile monuments of the pagan Italians from Verrochio down to Michelangelo; then at nothing else, however much the amateurs of two centuries may have praised it, until we come to the work of Frenchmen who are not yet old, Chapu and Dubois, Falguière and Mercié.

¹⁶³ Cf., for example, Ruskin (*Lectures on Architecture & Painting*, Lecture III, 94 [delivered 1853]: 1905, 165) on landscape painting: ‘[y]ou have, first, your great ancient landscape divided into its three periods—Giottesque, Leonardesque, Titianesque. Then you have a great gap, full of nonentities and abortions; a gulf of foolishness, into the bottom of which you may throw Claude and Salvator, neither of them deserving to give a name to anything.’

¹⁶⁴ Gosse, 1883, 166.

In reality, sculptors had occasionally looked to Florence for inspiration before the so-called *florentins*: Antoinette Le Normand-Romain has noted that a Florentine revival had already occurred among French *pensionnaires* in Rome during the 1830s under the leadership of Ingres;¹⁶⁵ Luc-Benoist referred in 1963 to Rude and Duret especially as the ‘premiers “pre-Raphaelites” qui adoraient Florence et l’opposaient à Rome’, though the latter has also been remembered at times as a stern neo-classicist.¹⁶⁶ Gosse had indeed credited the former as the ‘first [who] dared to set entirely aside those rules and exceptions, traditional bondage of the schools, which every sculptor had bowed down to until his time.’¹⁶⁷ In due course, Rude’s student and colleague, Ernest Christophe, would produce works during the 1850s that reminded critics of Michelangelo, Giambologna, and Cellini.¹⁶⁸ In Britain, meanwhile, Alexander Munro’s *Paolo and Francesca*, the marble version of which was commissioned by Gladstone and exhibited in 1852, had been acknowledged by the *Morning Chronicle* as a rejection of ‘Academic idealism’ in favour of ‘Gothic naturalism’.¹⁶⁹ In Munro’s other work Benedict Read saw ‘a formal simplicity and purism that relates to the theory of Pre-Raphaelitism, taking as models works of art from periods before a more developed maturity has pushed out that breath of juvenile springtime.’¹⁷⁰ Gosse, in seeking to direct British sculptors towards the

¹⁶⁵ Le Normand-Romain, 1986, 56.

¹⁶⁶ Benoist, 1963, 162.

¹⁶⁷ Gosse, 1883, 164.

¹⁶⁸ Absalon, 2007, 58-9.

¹⁶⁹ Harrison—Newall, 2010, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Read, 1982, 180.

Renaissance, would select Michelangelo as the last before his own time whose works he thought worthy of serious study. In fact, the parallel between mid-century British Pre-Raphaelitism and the neo-Florentine movement in France is made all the more conspicuous by the fact that it was to an earlier period that French sculptors had chiefly looked from the 1860s onwards.

This neo-Florentine or Quattrocentist movement – which might, in its reference to the springtime of the Renaissance, even more properly be judged ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ in its initial sympathies than any earlier rediscovery of Florentine sculpture – was again instigated by French sculptors living in Rome. Of the four names Gosse thought fit to mention in 1883, three had been winners of the Prix de Rome, and all had spent time there. However ironic it may seem, the most important of the so-called *florentins* might perhaps, with equal justification or greater, be given the name of *romains*: there is some evidence, at least, that they continued to use this term among themselves many years later, although its application would also have included non-sculptors.¹⁷¹

We have already encountered one of these Prix de Rome winners above, criticising British sculpture of the 1870s for its dearth of naturalism. In a discussion specifically concerning the place of Florence as a secondary pole of attraction for French students at the Villa Medici, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain has singled out Chapu’s remarkable relief *Christ aux anges* (plaster, 1857, Musée municipale Henri Chapu) as one of the pioneering works of neo-Florentine naturalism produced during the period, although one of the primary influences for this must unquestionably have

¹⁷¹ See Du Castel, 1964, 33, 120-1.

been Jean Goujon rather than, say, Donatello, and especially the *Déploration du Christ* or *Notre-Dame de pitié* of 1544-5 (Musée du Louvre).¹⁷² Despite this, Chapu's higher relief and startlingly unconventional treatment of the draperies, whose simple masses are disrupted by a profusion of deep, dynamic folds that amplify the contrast between flesh and raiment and give an effective impression of fluttering movement, also suggest close study of the draped figures of the Parthenon, both free-standing and on the frieze, in as much as they may be said to resemble in a surprising degree Watts' lesser-known sculptural essays in 'Pheidian' drapery of more than a decade later.¹⁷³ Anne Wagner has described it as 'one of the loveliest works sculpted at the Villa Medici'.¹⁷⁴ The relief of *Cléobis et Biton* with which Chapu had won the Prix de Rome two years earlier had displayed a similarly picturesque treatment of the draperies, albeit with greater restfulness: in this case the likeness with ancient frieze sculpture had perhaps been heightened by the fragmentary condition in which the work was exhibited – the result of an accident rather than affectation, but one that did not, in the event, forestall the young artist's victory.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Le Normand-Romain, 1986, 56.

¹⁷³ The principal examples are the *Dr Lonsdale Bishop of Lichfield* (1869-71, Lichfield Cathedral), and *Lord Lothian* (1871-4, Blickling Church, Norfolk). As in Chapu's case, this treatment of the drapery has sometimes been thought overwrought or distracting. Stephanie Brown has written that 'the effect of this treatment, particularly in the *Lothian Monument*, is precisely the reverse of that suggested by Watts [namely to give by contrast greater emphasis to the head and limbs]. The limbs are concealed and the heads struggle to define themselves above the contoured convolutions of drapery': Brown, 2004, 93.

¹⁷⁴ Wagner, 1986, 123-4.

¹⁷⁵ The day before the exhibition opened, a cable snapped and sent the relief crashing to the ground, mutilating the more delicate portions of its modelling. Remarkably, the judges still preferred Chapu's work to that of his rivals and unanimously voted in its favour: Fidière, 1894, 10-11.



Fig. 5. Henri Chapu, *Christ aux anges*, 1857, Plaster, Musée Municipale Henri Chapu, Le Mée.



Fig. 6. Henri Chapu, *Piété filiale de Cléobis et Biton*, 1855, Plaster, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

Chapu's *Christ aux anges*, however, was not at all well received by the Institut, whose stern judgement of the relief was that it possessed none of 'le calme et l'onction que comporte le sujet'. Singled out for criticism was 'le mouvement désordonné des draperies des anges'.¹⁷⁶ Chapu received little comfort from his old master, Francisque Duret, who, failing to recognise in the relief any sign of classicism as he conceived it, accused his former pupil rather outlandishly of having made 'le plus affreux envoi que j'aie jamais vu', and instructed him to study 'la belle

¹⁷⁶ Speech read publicly on October 2nd 1857, quoted in Fidière, 1894, 21. Remarkably, Fidière himself, almost forty years later, appears to have concurred with this judgement, criticising 'les draperies d'un dessin lourd et confus': Fidière, 1894, 23.

sculpture grecque ou celle de Michel-Ange, et non des peintures *rococo*.’¹⁷⁷ We must not forget that Duret has himself been remembered as a promoter of a proto-neo-Florentinist trend; nothing, perhaps, demonstrates the gulf between the naturalism of the 1830s and the later nineteenth century so profoundly as Duret’s excessive disappointment with the work of his former student.

The young sculptor’s work was thought in 1857 to evidence the influence, then, not of the French or Italian Renaissance, or even that of ancient relief sculpture, but that of the eighteenth century. Despite the early critical incomprehension of both Chapu’s aims and his sources, it later became almost a commonplace of nineteenth-century criticism of French sculpture that he was ‘perhaps the only eminent sculptor of the time whose inspiration [was] clearly the antique’.¹⁷⁸ Chapu did study Florentine sculpture closely during his time in Italy, but by 1859 had reached the conclusion that Renaissance sculptors, including most particularly Michelangelo, were for the student of sculpture a dangerous influence; at the same time, he expressed a conviction that to seek to be classical through academic formulae could lead only to mannerism.¹⁷⁹ Concerning the sculptor’s love for antiquity, Fidière claimed that ‘[n]i la sincérité naïve des Quattrocentistes, ni la grandeur tragique de Michel-Ange ne le détourneront d’un culte auquel il restera toujours fidèle’.¹⁸⁰ As extraordinary as the *Christ aux anges* might have been, its author did not lead the

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Fidière, 1894, 22.

¹⁷⁸ Brownell, 1886, 194.

¹⁷⁹ Fidière, 1894, 24-5; 30-1.

¹⁸⁰ Fidière, 1894, 179.

neo-Florentine revival that was to occur in the early 1860s – a period that was in any case difficult for Chapu, whose talents were out of necessity largely devoted to diverse ornamental productions and even shop signage in these years.¹⁸¹



Fig. 7. Jean-Jacques Henner, *Henri Chapu*, 1861, Oil on canvas, 31×24.7cm, Musée national Jean-Jacques Henner, Paris.

Nevertheless, Chapu's importance has unjustly been downplayed by the majority of later critics, in part perhaps because his classicism remained throughout his subsequent career so much more explicit than that of any of his contemporaries.

¹⁸¹ Fidière, 1894, 51 n. 1.

Jeremy Cooper made a grave error of judgement in calling Chapu ‘one of those adept but uninspired sculptors who carried the least forceful stylistic habits of both the July Monarchy and the Second Empire into the Third Republic.’¹⁸² To certain critics during the twentieth century, as well as the nineteenth, this classicism appeared to run entirely in opposition to the dominant tendency of the age in which he lived, that is, the preference for renaissance sculpture; to at least one later observer, Chapu’s legacy was a ‘vain’ but ‘dignified protest’.¹⁸³ Carpeaux, whose work has attracted greater attention, and whose fame has more forcefully endured transient critical disfavour, was described, in all probability without exaggeration, by Octave Fidière as ‘la vivante antithèse de Chapu’,¹⁸⁴ but the two were nevertheless together among the first members of a fraternal association initiated by Chapu’s closest friend in Rome, Léon Bonnat, around 1860: this group of *Cald’arrosti*, as they called themselves (after the cry, ubiquitous in Rome, of roasted chestnut vendors – a particular favourite of the *pensionnaires*), to which such names as Falguière and Chaplain would soon be added, certainly seems to have played an important role in promoting closer relations especially between the artists who were then living at the Villa Medici. Significantly, the group’s motto, *semper ardentes* (a droll repurposing of Horace, *Odes* 2.8, line 15),¹⁸⁵ appears in a few sketches by the young Chapu which give a clear indication not only of his devotion to the group but also of the fact that the phrase had acquired for him, at least, another resonance within the context of

¹⁸² Cooper, 1975, 41.

¹⁸³ Taft, 1921, vii.

¹⁸⁴ Fidière, 1894, 28.

¹⁸⁵ Fidière, 1894, 63-4.

his work as a *statuaire*. Then again these are, as it happens, designs for medallions, and Chapu's central role, alongside Charles Degeorge and Chaplain, in giving a fresh impetus to this most picturesque branch of the sculptor's art – one very much associated with early-Renaissance work – must be acknowledged, both for the high quality of his portraits in this category and for the fact that it was his example that moved the American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to turn to low relief.¹⁸⁶



Fig. 8. Henri Chapu, Sketch for a medallion with the legend '*Semper Ardentes*', c. 1860, Pen and brown ink on (mourning) paper, 10.4×10cm, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

¹⁸⁶ Saint-Gaudens I, 216.



Fig. 9. Henri Chapu, Sketch for a medallion representing 'le génie de la Sculpture', c. 1860, Pen and brown ink on paper, 20.9×13.4cm, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

Another member of this group of *Cald'arrosti* is worthy of mention, not least because his name would later appear as one of the most important French sculptors in Gosse's estimation. Numerous sources cite Alexandre Falguière's *Vainqueur au combat de coqs*,¹⁸⁷ modelled in 1862 and exhibited in bronze two years later, as the

¹⁸⁷ Jeremy Cooper, for instance, refers to Falguière as the leader of the *Florentins*: Cooper, 1975, 29-31, 37.

work that ‘launched [the] major trend’ of neo-Florentinism, though Falguière seems to be credited by some merely as a surrogate for Carpeaux, whose influence and friendship the younger sculptor acknowledged.¹⁸⁸ The trend, however, was in its early years a revival neither of the Michelangelesque nor of the Giambolognesque, as this proposed derivation would seem to imply, but was generally recognised as a return to the earlier Quattrocento.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, Falguière’s *Vainqueur*, which might just as likely have developed from the central figure of Lausus in the earlier classical relief work, *Mézenze blessé*, with which the sculptor had won the Prix de Rome in 1859, than from Florentine models, had in fact also alluded openly to Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Jeunes Grecs faisant battre des coqs* of 1847, a work of avowedly *néo-grec* rather than neo-Florentine sympathies. Certainly it marked an advance in naturalism, though together with Moulin’s *Trouvaille à Pompéi*, the *Vainqueur* has much in common with Eugène-Louis Lequesne’s similarly Pompeii-inspired *Faune dansant*, which had been modelled in Rome eleven years earlier.

¹⁸⁸ Papet, 2014, 115, 338 n. 37.

¹⁸⁹ One critic even described the change as one ‘from the antique and the Cinquecento to the early Italian renaissance: Muther II, 1907, 372.

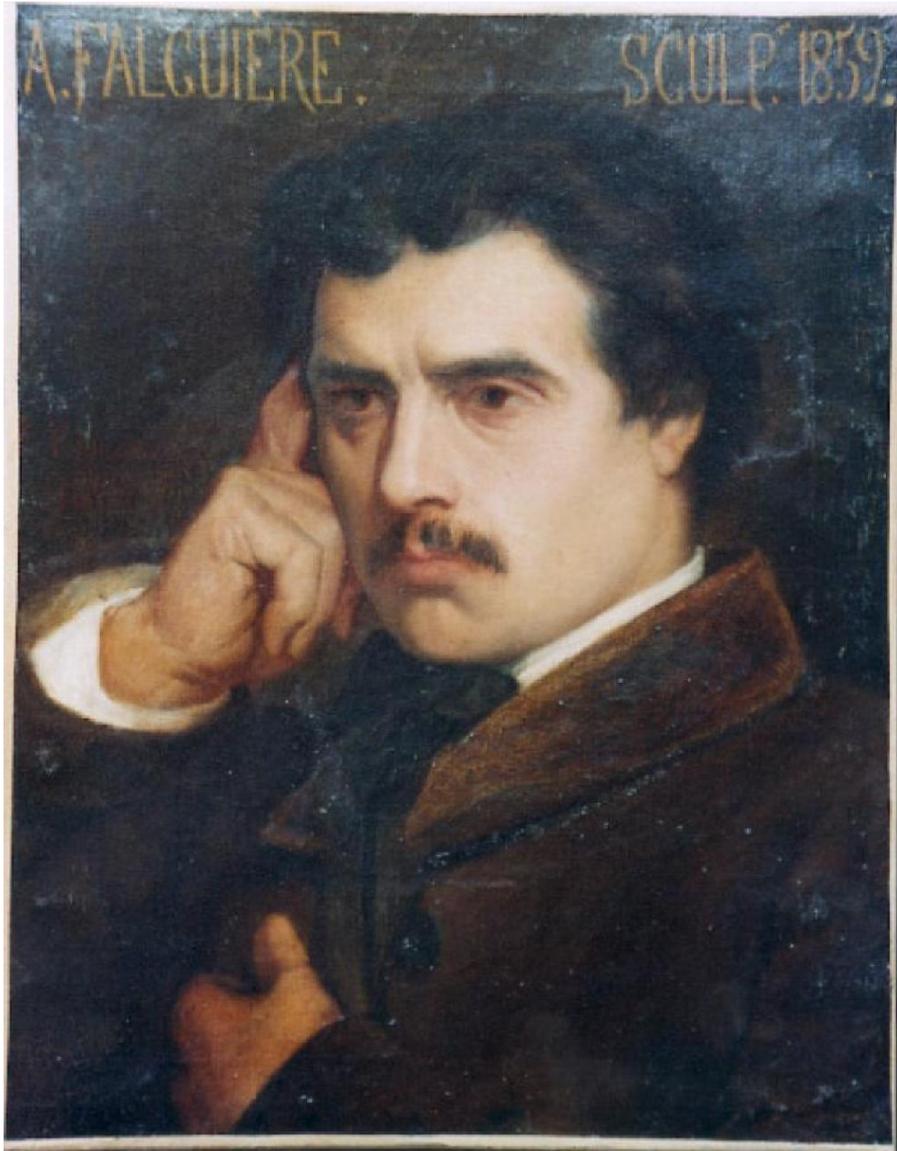


Fig. 10. Benjamin Ulmann, *Alexandre Falguière sculpteur*, 1859, Oil on canvas, 48×37.5cm, Académie de France à Rome, Villa Medici, Rome.



Fig. 11. Alexandre Falguière, *Le Vainqueur au combat de coqs*, 1862 (exhibited 1864), Bronze, 174cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 12. Alexandre Falguière, *Mézenice blessé, préservé par l'intrépidité de son fils Lausos*, 1859, Plaster, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.



Fig. 13. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Jeunes Grecs faisant battre des coqs* (also known as *Un combat de coqs*), 1846, Oil on canvas, 143×204 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 14. Hippolyte Moulin, *Une Trouvaille à Pompéi*, 1863, Bronze, 187cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 15. Eugène-Louis Lequesne, *Faune dansant*, 1850, Bronze, Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris.

Paul Dubois occupies a unique place among his contemporaries. Although he has generally been portrayed in misinformed twentieth-century scholarship as the archetypal academic sculptor, his career was highly atypical. He did not – as is often erroneously claimed – attend the *École des Beaux-Arts* as a student, but would

nevertheless serve as its director for twenty-seven years. Unlike Carpeaux, Chapu, Falguière, and almost every other sculptor who rose to prominence during the period in question, Dubois did not win or even compete for the Prix de Rome due to the fact that when the opportunity might have arisen, he had already spent several years studying law and had consequently, at the age of thirty, passed the age of admission. Having set off for Rome through his own means, however, he formed lasting friendships with the *pensionnaires* at the Villa Medici – at that time including both Chapu and Falguière – and more than any of the other sculptors discovered the art of the Quattrocento. The consequences of this rediscovery, made by an outsider of the Academic system, were immense, international, and long-lasting. More than fifty years later, the American sculptor Lorado Taft saw Dubois as the pioneer *par excellence*:¹⁹⁰

His grasp of the significance of the early Italians meant not only freedom for himself but the emancipation of a national art. From it the whole French school received a new baptism. [...] for our new sculpture is inspired by this same modern French school, led, if not founded, by Paul Dubois. It means with us the blessed advance from Greenough and Randolph Rogers to St. Gaudens, French and MacMonnies.

The “classic school” was swept out of sight. Donatello was canonized saint of the new faith, the re-renaissance. There have been extremes and reactions during the wonderful thirty-five years of aritsic [*sic*] development which has

¹⁹⁰ Taft, 1916, 56.

gone by since then, but M. Dubois has never had to resign his proud place as leader.

Paul Mantz, writing in 1865 in the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, placed great emphasis on the *newness* of Dubois' conceptions, as well as his freedom from Academic conventions: 'L'inquiétude du nouveau, cherché en dehors des voies académiques, est évidemment au premier rang des préoccupations de M. Paul Dubois. Or, on l'a dit il y a longtemps, quoi de plus nouveau que ce qui est oublié? Une promenade en Italie est, sous ce rapport, pleine de révélations.'¹⁹¹ From this moment Paul Dubois, as Mantz observed, had become 'une des espérances de la sculpture moderne.'¹⁹² As many as forty years later, Henry Roujon, the *secrétaire perpétuel* of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, could still proclaim the modernity of Dubois's early works in similar terms, albeit with a more cautious conception of novelty:¹⁹³

Il était de ceux qui peuvent s'abandonner sans péril aux séductions d'un esprit nouveau.

Du nouveau! En trouver à tout prix, fût-ce au prix de la raison même, cette gageure est la perte des faibles. La recherche de l'originalité quand même fait tous les jours des victimes nouvelles. Rien ne dure moins que ces révolutions annoncées d'avance. Le nouveau ne se fait pas exprès.

¹⁹¹ Mantz, 1865, 34.

¹⁹² Mantz, 1865, 36.

¹⁹³ Roujon, 1912, 96.

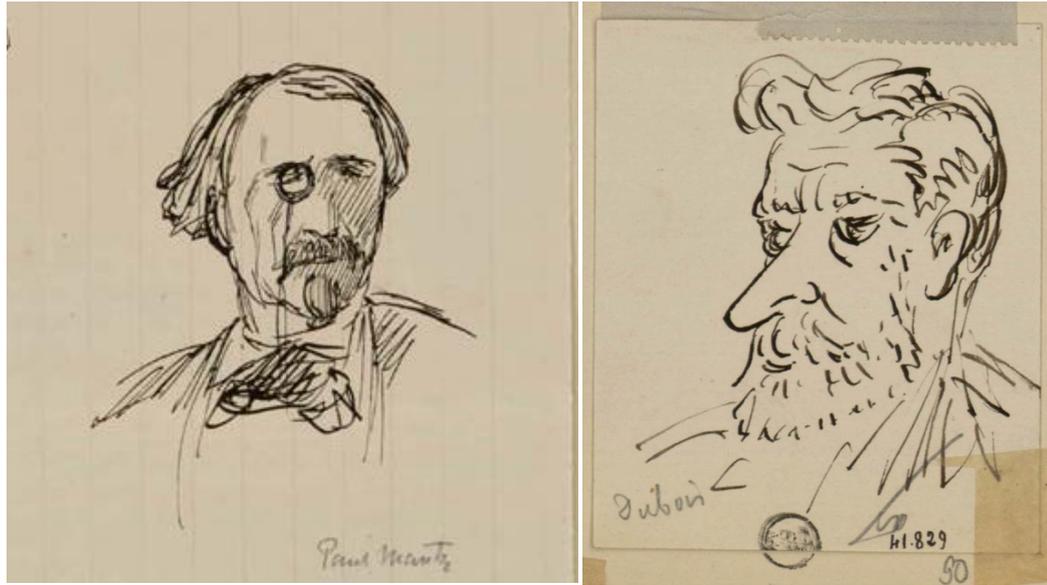


Fig. 16. Charles Garnier, Detail of a caricature of Paul Mantz, Pen and ink on paper, 22.1×19.2cm, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Charles Garnier, Caricature of Paul Dubois, Pen and ink on paper, 7.1×5.9cm, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

Reviewing the Salon of 1863, Viollet-le-Duc had recognised ‘les germes d’une sculpture très personnelle et distinguée’.¹⁹⁴ These *germes* were two statues whose overtly Florentine inspiration would in time prove to be enormously influential – both by Paul Dubois. The more famous of these was a figure of the patron saint of Florence, a *Saint Jean-Baptiste enfant*, modelled in Rome in 1861. This statue, affectionately but also allusively (Mathew 3:4) called a ‘maigre mangeur de sauterelles’ by Jules Claretie,¹⁹⁵ attracted a great deal of attention along with its partner, the *Narcisse* (modelled in 1862), but Dubois’ overt citation of Florence was perhaps only made obvious to all two years later, with the unprecedentedly

¹⁹⁴ Viollet-le-Duc, 1863, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Claretie, 1884, 328.

successful *Chanteur florentin*. Richard Muther later wrote that '[a] new world was opened to sculpture' by this statue.¹⁹⁶ To Chapu's biographer, it was 'un des plus brillants succès dont il soit question dans les fastes de la sculpture'.¹⁹⁷ Here the allusion to Florence could not be missed.

¹⁹⁶ Muther II, 1907, 372.

¹⁹⁷ Fidière, 1894, 61.



Fig. 17. Paul Dubois, Study for *Saint Jean-Baptiste enfant*, c. 1861, Pencil, pen and brown ink on paper, 13.6×8.2, Musée Camille Claudel, Nogent-sur-Seine.



Fig. 18. Paul Dubois, *Saint Jean-Baptiste enfant*, 1861, (exhibited in plaster 1863, in bronze 1864), Bronze, 163×58×64cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 19. Paul Dubois, *Narcisse*, 1862, (exhibited in plaster 1863, in marble 1867),
Marble, 185.2×67×62 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 20. Paul Dubois, Study for *Le Chanteur florentin du XV^e siècle*, c. 1865, pencil on paper heightened with white pencil, 21.1×10.1cm, Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 21. Paul Dubois, Maquette for *Le Chanteur florentin du XV^e siècle*, c. 1865, wax, 26.7cm, Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne.



Fig. 22. Paul Dubois, *Le Chanteur florentin du XV^e siècle*, 1865, Silvered bronze, 155×58cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Retrospectively, the *Saint Jean* was declared by Jules Claretie to have been ‘aussi [...] un *précurseur* en sculpture’.¹⁹⁸ To later critics this witticism was irresistible.

¹⁹⁸ Claretie, 1884, 328.

Theodore Child, in particular, adopted the idea with eagerness, freely translating (but not crediting) Claretie's own properly acknowledged quotation of Émile Bergerat:¹⁹⁹

Twenty years ago France had almost forgotten the very existence of the "primitives." M. Dubois's "St. John," if the allusion may be permitted, was a forerunner in sculpture. By his inspired movement, by the prophetic ardor of his gesture, by his delicate boyish head, with fixed eyes and speaking lips, he carried with him all the young French sculptors, and led them to Florence, where they proclaimed Donatello to be the honoured ancestor of modern plastic naturalism.

That Donatello was more widely worshipped as a 'saint of the new faith' when these words were written (and indeed repeated) than in the early 1860s is demonstrated by the way in which criticism during this period tended to look to painting for parallels first. Both Paul Mantz and Maxime du Camp wrote in 1865 that the *Chanteur florentin* seemed to have stepped from one of Masaccio's frescoes, the former specifying the Brancacci Chapel.²⁰⁰ René de Saint Marceaux later returned to the same idea, albeit without naming a source with such specificity: he

¹⁹⁹ Child, 1892, 243; cf. Bergerat, quoted in Claretie, 1884, 328. See also Taft, 1916, 56, where the expression is credited to Child.

²⁰⁰ Mantz, 1865, 34-6; Du Camp, 1865, 653-4. Cf. also Claretie's later suggestion that Dubois' bust of his childhood friend, the doctor Jules Parrot (1875), was 'un des visages entrevus dans les fresques de Masaccio': Claretie, 1884, 331. Mantz probably thought of the conceit first. This critic, who worked along with a number of other critics on the ambitious *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles depuis la Renaissance jusqu'à nos jours*, would later make his most significant contribution to the 1876 volume covering the Florentine School, including an article on Masaccio (1-8). The comparison with Masaccio is given a strangely negative slant in Cooper (1975, 31), where the imaginative and by no means disapproving notion, expressed by both Mantz and Du Camp, of a fresco coming to life is misinterpreted as a prosaic suggestion of plagiarism. The point is unimportant, but Cooper's reference to the statue's 're-creation of the mood of Dante's Florence' also ignores the hundred years or so that lay between the poet and the painter.

referred after Dubois' death in 1905 to 'ce charmant éphèbe descendu d'une fresque pisane ou florentine'.²⁰¹ While the sculptor's study of Florentine sculpture is self evident, the early focus on painting was in some respects perceptive: Dubois had in fact made careful studies after frescoes by Orcagna (at the Campo-Santo in Pisa), Benozzo Gozzoli (in particular the *Adoration of the Magi*, 1460, in Palazzo Riccardi, Florence), Pinturicchio and Lorenzo da Viterbo.²⁰² In this Dubois was not completely alone. Among the *pensionnaires* at the Villa Medici around 1860, the one whose work may be seen as corresponding most closely with Dubois' early productions is undoubtedly Jules-Élie Delaunay, shown here depicted by Chapu in a fine medallion portrait (1864), who was in Rome between 1856 and 1861. From his hand survives a portrait of the sculptor dated 1862 (Musée Camille Claudel, Nogent-sur-Seine). Seemingly alone among critics did Richard Muther recognise in Delaunay's crisply drawn male figures 'the essential elegance and powerful rhythm of Dubois' statues', derived chiefly from a shared devotion to Quattrocento painting.²⁰³ Certainly a suggestive comparison may be made between Dubois' *Chanteur* and Delaunay's *La leçon de flûte* (1858, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes), or between the *Saint Jean* and *David triomphant* (1874, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes). Muther had suitably described Delaunay's pictures as having 'a something bronze-like and stony [...] finished as they are with the firm impress of

²⁰¹ Quoted in Magny, 2017, 106.

²⁰² Bergerat, 1875, quoted in Claretie, 1884, 325; Piette—Therre, 2005, 19-20, figs. 6-10.

²⁰³ Muther II, 1907, 291.

medals.’²⁰⁴ Indeed, one of his studies of a group of singing boys points not only to fresco, but also to relief sculpture as a source for the two artists, evoking as it does Luca della Robbia’s *Cantoria* (1431-8, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence).



Fig. 23. Paul Dubois, Copy after Lorenzo da Viterbo, *Sposalizio della vergine* (Cappella Mazzatosta, Santa Maria della verità, 1469), c. 1859-63, pencil and oil on grey paper, 24.4×15.6cm, Louvre, Paris.

²⁰⁴ Muther II, 1907, 291-2. Muther attributes a similar quality to Ingres’ portraits. These, he writes, ‘imprint themselves on the memory like medals struck in metallic sharpness in the style of Mantegna’: Muther II, 1907, 251.

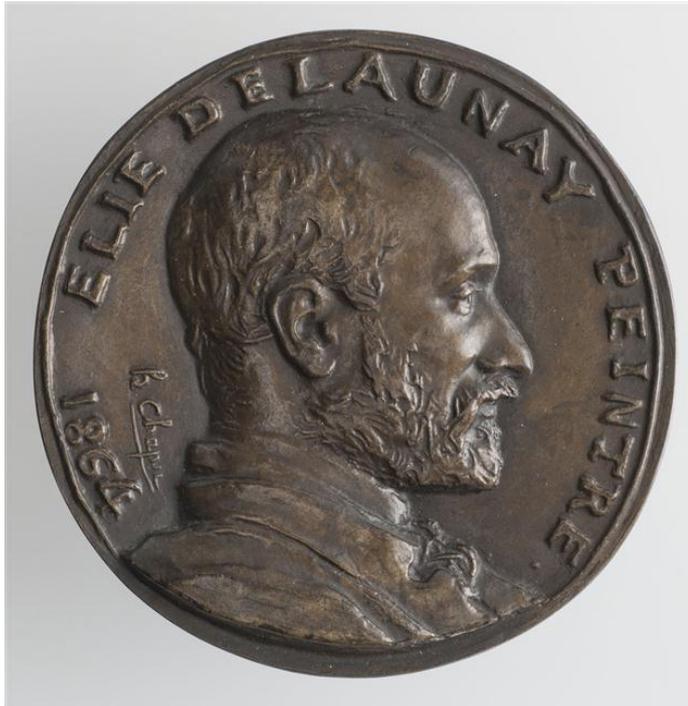


Fig. 24. Henri Chapu, *Élie Delaunay peintre*, 1864, Bronze, 10.1cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 25. Jules-Élie Delaunay, *Paul Dubois*, 1862, Oil on wood panel, 26×21.5cm, Musée Camille Claudel, Nogent-sur-Seine.



Fig. 26. Jules-Élie Delaunay, *La leçon de flûte*, 1858, Oil on canvas, 160×115cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Nantes.



Fig. 27. Jules-Élie Delaunay, *David triomphant*, 1874, Oil on canvas, 147×114cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, Nantes.

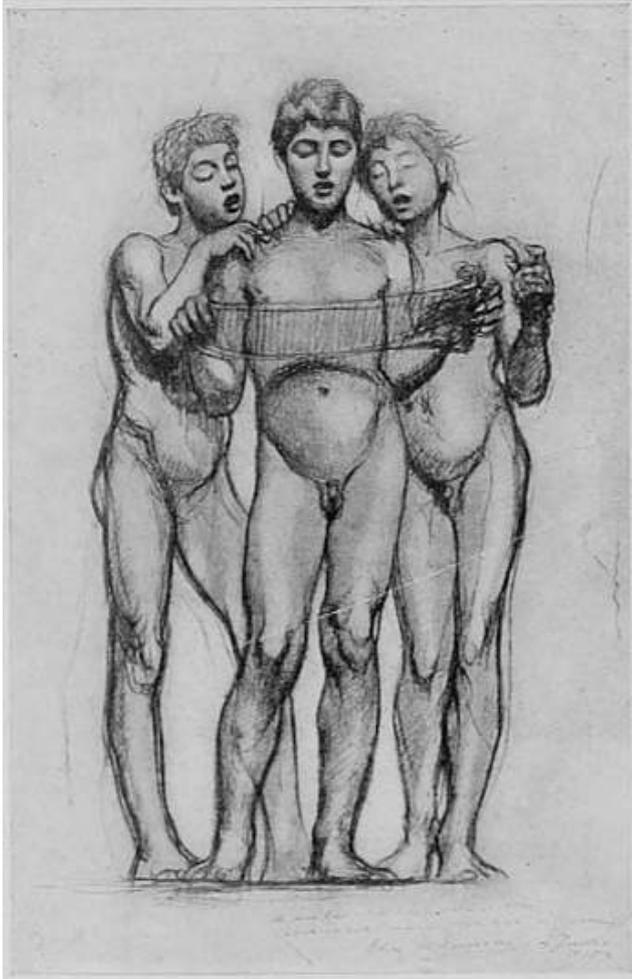


Fig. 28. Jules-Élie Delaunay, Study of singing boys, Pencil on paper, from Muther II, 1907.



Fig. 29. Luca della Robbia, Details of the *Cantoria*, 1431-8, Marble, 328×560cm, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.

Like Lorado Taft, the American painter Kenyon Cox saw Paul Dubois as the initiator of the turn towards the Florentine Renaissance. As early as 1879 he had written from Paris to his father marking Dubois out as 'the first sculptor since

Ghiberti and Donatello’ and declaring his work ‘the finest that has been done since the 15th century’.²⁰⁵ His influential 1884 essay on ‘Sculptors of the Early Italian Renaissance’, published in *The Century* and later republished with a few alterations in *Old Masters and New: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York, 1905), opened with a lyrical reference to Dubois’ works of the early 1860s:²⁰⁶

Donatello, Verrocchio, [the 1905 version inserts ‘della Robbia’ here], Mino da Fiesole, Benedetto da Majano—their very names are a sweet music in our ears, calling up visions of ineffable grace and beauty. Their charming art has influenced the best art of our own day more, perhaps, than any other. From the time when Paul Dubois turned to them for inspiration, and produced his little “Saint John Baptist” and his “Florentine Singer,” a new and glorious epoch of French sculpture began, and Falguière, Mercié, and the rest of that brilliant school, with such men as our own St. Gaudens [the 1905 version includes also ‘French, and Adams’], owe much of what is purest and best in their works to the study and the example of these old Italians. Many even of the best painters of to-day would own their deep indebtedness to the “sweet influence” of this placid constellation shining serenely through the ages.

It is significant that this ‘sweet influence’ was in Cox’s view to be found in the fifteenth century as opposed to the sixteenth, and was thought to have been popularised by Dubois rather than by any revivalist of the Cinquecento. The names of Quattrocento sculptors, which to Cox seemed graceful and musical, had become

²⁰⁵ Cox, 1 May 1879, in Morgan, 1986, 156.

²⁰⁶ Cox, 1884, 62; Cox, 1905, 3.

inextricably associated with the *Saint Jean* and more particularly with the *Chanteur florentin*, depicted, as Roujon suggested, listening to himself ‘chanter le poème de la nature’ with a mandolin ‘où vibrait un echo de Florence’.²⁰⁷ To Taft, this vibration was ‘a note of truth’.²⁰⁸ Claretie wrote that ‘[l]’art français se retrempait dans l’Arno’. American artists, likewise, saw themselves as occupying a shady spot within this same cultural milieu, returning, as Dubois had done, to assuage their thirst at the sweet spring of Tuscan influence. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, mentioned by both Taft and Cox, and generally regarded as the greatest representative of the American school, indeed held a deep admiration for Dubois’ sculpture. He wrote many years later that the French sculptor ‘held a higher place in my esteem than any of the others, for his “Joan of Arc” is, to my thinking, one of the greatest statues in the world.’²⁰⁹

That the *Chanteur florentin*, which Saint-Gaudens regarded long after as ‘a lovely masterpiece’,²¹⁰ was widely imitated and even plagiarised during the late nineteenth-century in France is clear enough;²¹¹ a compelling case may be made also that, well into the twentieth century, there cannot have been many works in sculpture with musical subjects that did not in some sense provide an echo of the *Chanteur*’s earlier song. An important British example can be found in George Frampton’s *Songster* of 1887, whose exhibition immediately preceded the young sculptor’s

²⁰⁷ Roujon, 1912, 99-100.

²⁰⁸ Taft, quoted in Weller, 1985, 268.

²⁰⁹ Saint-Gaudens, 1913, 183.

²¹⁰ Saint-Gaudens, 1913, 184.

²¹¹ Piette—Therre, 2005, 20.

departure for Paris,²¹² where he would work as an assistant in the studio of Antonin Mercié – himself a student of Falguière, and one of the most prominent of the younger French neo-Florentine sculptors: among Mercié’s own possessions, significantly, was a reduction of the *Chanteur* in silvered bronze.²¹³ In this respect, Paul Dubois can be seen as having anticipated the later notion, associated with the Aesthetic movement, that all art should aspire to the condition of music. Certainly, if critics enjoyed utilising watery metaphors to explore the subject of influence and as a means of capturing something of the reflective qualities which pervade certain works of art, musical terminology began to offer an equally appealing alternative to writers and sculptors alike. If Dubois’ work gave to the modern world, as Henry James would later suggest, ‘an echo with a beautiful cadence’,²¹⁴ others too would find in its suggestion of music a powerful means of exploring intertextuality. This, as well as ‘a synaesthetic evocation of sound and harmony’, as David J. Getsy has put it,²¹⁵ would later characterise the most important ideal sculpture of Edward Onslow Ford – including *The Singer* and *Applause* (1889 and 1893, Tate Britain), *Music* and *Dancing* (1890, Anand Bagh Palace, also known as Lakshmivilas Palace, Darbhanga, Bihar, India; also as the *Marlowe Memorial*, Canterbury, and at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight) – and find, thirty years later, its definitive statement in one of the seldom acknowledged masterpieces of the New Sculpture: *Echo* (1895, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). Onslow Ford’s musically

²¹² See Jezzard, 1999, 11-12.

²¹³ Hotel Drouot, 18-21 December 1918, Lot 71.

²¹⁴ James, 1900, 113.

²¹⁵ Getsy, 2003, 79.

themed statues (though *Echo*, of course, also carries certain mythological connotations) are in another respect also the most obvious descendants of the *Chanteur*, in as much as that each of these figures is self-regarding, or, as Rilke put it when confronted with Rodin's work, 'better at "looking away"' than at meeting the viewer's gaze, and in this sense 'totally occupied with itself.'²¹⁶ Though downcast eyes would become a characteristic feature of many New Sculpture works, appearing, for example, in nearly all of Gilbert's early statuettes – in *Icarus*, the downward gaze and consequent sense of ponderous concentration provide the principal focus and grounding force of the composition – Spielmann later associated the gesture most especially with Onslow Ford's female subjects, in which he judged it to be 'not a trick or a mannerism, but a personal conception of female charm and modesty.'²¹⁷ Such an interpretation hardly accounts for all of the effectiveness of the gesture, which may be better understood in the light of Rilke's rather less indifferent observations. In the *Chanteur*'s 'yeux baissés' most of all, Maxime du Camp had found 'un caractère grave et concentré'.²¹⁸ The same gesture would occur again in Dubois' work, and it had in fact already featured two years earlier in his *Narcisse* – a figure more truly 'occupied with itself' than any other.

²¹⁶ Rilke, reprinted in Rilke, 1986, 73.

²¹⁷ Spielmann, 1901, 55.

²¹⁸ Du Camp, 1865, 653. The age represented by the sculptor – a transitory one – was perhaps just as significant as the momentary attitude of the figure in foreshadowing what was to come. Du Camp praised the hands 'à la fois fines et osseuses comme celles des enfans qui vont entrer dans l'adolescence'. The New Sculptors' preoccupation with the attempt to capture something of the ephemeral nature of adolescence would be deeply ingrained in the work of Gilbert, Onslow Ford, and Thomas Stirling Lee during the 1880s.



Fig. 30. George Frampton, *The Songster* (also known as *Girl Singing*, *Boy Singing* and *The Singing Girl*), c. 1887, Plaster or terracotta, Untraced.



Fig. 31. Edward Onslow Ford, *The Singer*, 1889, Bronze and coloured resin-paste and semi-precious stones, 90.2cm, Tate Britain, London.



Fig. 32. Edward Onslow Ford, *Applause*, 1890, Bronze, silver, enamel, and semi-precious stones, 67cm, Tate Britain, London.



Fig. 33. Edward Onslow Ford, *Marlowe Memorial*, 1891 (adapted from *Music*, 1890), Bronze, Canterbury.



Fig. 34. Edward Onslow Ford, *Dancing*, 1890, Bronze, 178cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.



Fig. 35. Edward Onslow Ford, *Echo*, 1895, Bronze, 246cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.

The importance of Dubois' *Saint Jean*, which stares, by contrast, directly at the viewer, is no less difficult to trace. The figure was not only extremely popular in reproduction – perhaps more so even than the *Chanteur florentin* – but also extensively imitated by French artists in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, though most derivative works in sculpture and painting alike tended towards exaggeration where Dubois had shown restraint, and greater movement where he had sought balance and harmony. Despite these differences, it was unquestionably the *Saint Jean*, of stern and anxious expression, rather than Falguière's *Vainqueur au combat de coqs* or Moulin's *Trouvaille à Pompéi* – both triumphant adolescents drawing more obviously on antique works – which came to be remembered as the work responsible almost single-handedly for announcing the rebirth of Quattrocentist

naturalism and the rediscovery of Donatello. For all its reminiscence of older works, however, the statue's modernity was apparent enough: though Dubois' model must have been Italian, Ernest Chesneau wrote upon seeing it in 1863 that 'il est peut-être un peu gamin de Paris'.²¹⁹ Commenting on a later *Saint Jean-Baptiste*, a 'gavroche parisien' exhibited in 1872 by a M. Humbert, Claretie would write that '[d]epuis que M. Paul Dubois a sculpté son *saint Jean* d'après un enfant parisien, efflanqué et nerveux, les artistes ont continué l'apothéose du gamin de Paris. Ils ont idéalisé sa maigreur et son rachitisme.'²²⁰ Jules Lafrance's lively *Saint Jean*, he wrote, was also 'un gamin de Paris, courant nu, malgré les ordonnances de police.'²²¹ On the less dishevelled end of the spectrum were such unmistakable instances of imitation as Léon Perrault's *Saint Jean le Précurseur* (1876, Cathédrale Saint-Louis, La Rochelle). The overpowering temptation which compelled numerous writers to see the *Saint Jean* as the forerunner of an international movement of great significance was, for all its fitness, nonetheless something more than a mere contrivance.

²¹⁹ Chesneau, 1863, 2.

²²⁰ Claretie, 1874, 229.

²²¹ Claretie, 1874, xxiv.



Fig. 36. Jules-Isidore Lafrance, *Saint Jean-Baptiste enfant*, 1873 (exhibited in plaster 1874, in marble 1878), Marble, 149cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 37. Léon Perrault, *Saint Jean le Précurseur*, 1876, Oil on canvas, 167×66cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In the years preceding Gilbert's first journey to Florence in 1879, the first result of which was to be his *Perseus Arming*, the Florentine revival in France had already been in full swing for some time. Gilbert was, in a sense, behind the curve. An important sign of the new respect for Florentine sculpture was the fact that a full four years earlier, in November of 1875, the journal *L'Art* had founded the Prix de Florence under the patronage of Ubaldino Peruzzi, then the Syndic of Florence, and Aurelio Gotti, the director general of the museums of Florence, ostensibly in

celebration of the quatercentenary of Michelangelo's birth.²²² The prize, which consisted of a stipend of five-thousand francs to allow two years of study in Florence, was theoretically open to all nations and – according to the advertising – to architects, painters, sculptors, and engravers who had distinguished themselves at the Salon.²²³ In the actual event, the winners in 1876, 1878, and 1880 were all French sculptors.²²⁴ In relocating from Paris to Rome in September 1878, where he at first found himself only disappointed and disillusioned, Gilbert was, therefore, following most closely in the footsteps of French sculptors of an earlier generation and did not perhaps fully understand the degree to which his subsequent discovery of Florence would retrace the beginning of the Quattrocentist revival that had occurred twenty years earlier, even if his own taste would lead him largely to a later period in Florentine art. Certainly, it was not in the interests of eulogising British twentieth-century texts on the sculptor to acknowledge this more international context.

The text which gave the New Sculpture its name had, however, done just this. In the first of his influential 1894 articles on the New Sculpture, Edmund Gosse expressed the conviction that, before producing the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* (1877) – ‘something wholly new’ in British art, with ‘a wholly new force’ – Leighton must have been ‘deeply impressed’ by what he had seen at the Paris Salon of 1876. Incredible as it may seem, scholars of late nineteenth-century British sculpture have either intentionally ignored or inadvertently overlooked Gosse's

²²² The jury consisted of Eugene Guillaume (the president), William Quiller Orchardson (vice-president), Eugène Véron (editor of *L'Art*), the architect Anatole de Baudot, two painter-engravers, Léon Gaucherel and Paul Fesse, and Charles Waltner, listed as an ‘amateur’: Véron, 1876, 218.

²²³ Véron, 1876, 217-18.

²²⁴ See Peigné, 2010, 96-7.

significant description of this exhibition of French works as ‘the most accomplished, and at the same time most promising, collection of New Sculpture ever brought together anywhere in the modern world.’²²⁵ Here and perhaps nowhere else is the New Sculpture defined without parochialism as a fully international movement, and British sculpture considered as part of a greater whole. Gosse’s use here of the term ‘New Sculpture’, including capitalisation, to describe French rather than British works suggests a much more expansive conception of the movement.

In 1876, the year Gilbert arrived in Paris, and the year in which Gosse considered not only French, but *modern*, sculpture definitively to have reached its summit, it was in fact Dubois whose works had, more or less alone, formed the principal attraction of the Paris exhibitions, in a spectacular and unprecedented achievement that had seen him proclaimed by one critic the ‘trionphateur’ of the Salon.²²⁶ Indeed, even though Gosse could list a number of admired works by other sculptors as well as Dubois, most critics cared comparatively little for the rest of the sculpture on display. Henry James, who was profoundly moved by what he saw, wrote to *The New York Tribune* that ‘everything this year is cast into the shade by the two figures of M. Paul Dubois—portions of a monument about to be erected to Gen. Lamoricière at Nantes. These two figures are of surpassing beauty, and altogether the most eminent works in the Salon. [...] They are not only better in degree than any other work of art of the year; they are quite unique in kind.’²²⁷ When

²²⁵ Gosse, 1894, 140.

²²⁶ Proth, 1876, 75.

²²⁷ James, June 5 1876, reprinted in James, 1957, 155.

the announcement came that Dubois was to receive not only the grand medal of honour for the two statues, but also a first class medal for his painting, James' approval was effusive: '[n]ever was an honor better earned, and never can it have been adjudged with more ungrudging unanimity.'²²⁸ Decades later, despite having made some conscious efforts to temper his admiration for the completed monument with reservations of different kinds, James still felt 'lost in admiration of the deep aesthetic experience, the enlightenment of taste, revealed by such work.'²²⁹

The French artist's extraordinary success in two different media must certainly have struck a deep chord with Leighton at this point, even if work had already begun on the *Athlete* which would be shown the following year. Dubois and Leighton apparently considered themselves friends – according to the young Paul Valéry – though the connection between the two has entirely eluded scholarship on both French and British sculpture.²³⁰ That Dubois planned a dinner to celebrate Leighton's visit to Paris in 1882, to which the painters Paul Baudry, Léon Bonnat, Alexandre Cabanel, and Jean-Jacques Henner were also invited, is confirmed by a letter that appeared at a Belgian auction house in September 2019.²³¹ Leighton's election to the role of President of the Royal Academy in 1878 would find a striking parallel in Dubois' appointment the same year as the director of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, positions from which both men would work behind the scenes for many

²²⁸ James, July 1 1876, reprinted in James, 1957, 175.

²²⁹ James, 1900, 114.

²³⁰ Valéry, 1896, 134.

²³¹ Morel de Westgaver, *Livres et curiosités*, 28 Sep 2019, Lot 169.

years to reform the attitudes of these respective institutions towards the art of sculpture. Gosse's retrospective insistence that the salon of 1876 must have been the event that spurred Leighton into action might have been, in part, guess work, but it nevertheless carries within it the seed of a greater truth that, though deserving of closer scrutiny, has not yet been properly acknowledged.

In 1877, the year that Leighton's *Athlete* was revealed to unsuspecting viewers at the Royal Academy Exhibition, a cast of one of Dubois' allegorical figures – the *Courage militaire* – was acquired by Sir Coutts Lindsay as the centrepiece of the debut show of the Grosvenor Gallery, along with Chapu's *Jeanne d'Arc à Domremy* and Eugène Delaplanche's *Éducation maternelle*, forming a trio of naturalistic French works reminiscent in varying degrees of Florentine sculpture, that, although in plaster, made perhaps as deep an impression on young British sculptors as Leighton's sensational essay in bronze.²³² According to Eugène Véron, who would have preferred any casts from the originals to stay in France, Coutts Lindsay had made a special effort to obtain Dubois' work in particular to serve as a 'modèle aux sculpteurs de son pays.'²³³

²³² Gosse, 1894, 140-1. See also Read, 1982, 301; Beattie, 1983, 135-7.

²³³ Véron, 1877, 275.



Fig. 38. Paul Dubois, *Le Courage militaire*, 1876, Plaster; finished bronze (1879) in Nantes Cathedral.



Fig. 39. Paul Dubois, *La Charité*, 1876, Plaster; finished bronze (1879) in Nantes Cathedral.



Fig. 40. Henri Chapu, *Jeanne d'Arc à Domremy*, 1870, Marble, 117×92cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 41. Eugène Delaplanche, *L'Éducation maternelle*, 1875, Marble, Square Samuel Rousseau, Paris.

What was the principal lesson that modern sculptors could learn from Quattrocento sculpture? According to Kenyon Cox, writing in 1884, it was ‘lowness of relief’, a ‘system of delicate half-modeling’ that involved ‘suggestiveness and vagueness and its accompanying naturalism and individuality.’ Despite the

traditional view of Tuscan art as favouring *disegno* over *colore*, Cox asserted that Donatello and his peers were ‘the colorists of sculpture’.²³⁴

There are Italian reliefs which are almost inconceivable in the delicacy of their modeling. They seem hardly more than sketched with slight touches of shadow upon the marble. The relief is so infinitesimal, the modeling so subtle, that they hardly seem to exist; and one fears to obliterate them with a careless brush of the hand as one might a slight charcoal drawing. They are not form, but the merest suggestion of form, faint and vague and fleeting as a beautiful dream.

But these wonderful men did not stop here. Having perfected their system of low relief, they applied it to sculpture in the round. In their busts, in their statues, they still model, as it were, in low relief. Nothing is made out, nothing is realized; the intention is indicated, and that is all. The hollows are not as deep as in nature nor the projections as high. The hand of the sculptor has paused, with delicate self-control, just before the suggested form was quite completed, and has left the rest to the imagination. This is not lack of finish, as with Michael Angelo. No; the surfaces are caressed into beauty with an infinity of loving care. It is an intentional stopping short of complete realization; it is lowness of relief.

‘Their reward’, claimed Cox, ‘was a nearness to natural truth which the Greeks could not dream of.’ Sculptors could now ‘wander at will among the thousand accidental graces and half-awkward beauties of real human beings’, offering ‘not a magnificent

²³⁴ Cox, 1884, 64-6.

abstract conception of Olympus, but an endlessly delightful portrait of the world we live in.’ Selecting at last one work with which to ground his argument – though his article was accompanied by numerous illustrations after the sculptors named in its pages – he settled on the *Femme inconnue* of the Louvre, now attributed to Francesco Laurana.

The article was published in November. On 30th of the month, Cox encountered Edmund Gosse, then on his American lecturing tour of 1884-5, at one of the regular chamber concerts held in Augustus Saint-Gaudens’ New York studio, and found him full of flattery; Gosse told Cox that his was ‘one of the names best known in England’, prompting the other to reflect afterwards that ‘they [might] know my *Century* work there’ (as opposed to his artistic productions).²³⁵ It is known that they met again and dined together during December, and Cox reported to his father on 23rd that Gosse had quizzed him about the authorship of the ‘charming’ verses given at the end of his article on early Italian Renaissance sculpture, afterwards asking for an autographed copy.²³⁶ If Cox’s name was not already known in England, as Gosse claimed, we can nevertheless be certain that the ideas he set forth in his *Century* article would reach a wide audience across the Atlantic, even becoming in a sense orthodox among sculptors of the new movement. In a paper delivered before the Architectural Association on 23rd January 1891, Pomeroy would lift many of his observations directly from Cox (emphasised here with italics):²³⁷

²³⁵ Cox to his father, 16 Dec 1884, in Morgan, 1995, 47-8.

²³⁶ Cox to his father, 23 Dec 1884, in Morgan, 1995, 48-9

²³⁷ Pomeroy, in *The Builder*, 31 Jan 1891, 87.

At the same time [the sculptor] learned to give that true *appearance of form*, its charms and dignity, and likewise to preserve *the thousand accidental graces of real human beings*. Not only in their ideas did these artists excel, but also especially in their technical excellence; and in their treatment of *low relief* they have achieved their greatest triumphs; they realised that in a good low relief the head must often project more than the other parts for the sake of effect. In their works, parts are flattened and nearly obliterated to reduce light and shade, and give effect of distance; little trenches or grooves are cut into the background where greater definition is desired; in short, the work becomes like the painters, an effect of light and shade; and the greater subtleties exercised the more charming the effect.

And the lessons which they discovered for themselves, in low relief, *the Renaissance carvers carried into their works in the round*. No rude effects of black and white, but a delicate harmony of tones—nothing quite made out, the *hollows not quite so deep, the projections not quite so high*. [...] but this paleness of treatment (if I may use the term) is not allowed to be an excuse for slovenliness or want of power in drawing; *there is no lack of finish, everything is wrought out with loving care, and cut to the highest perfection*.

Mino da Fiesole, Donatello, Verrochio [sic], Settignano, and others, whose very names call up sweet visions of grace and beauty, were all architectural sculptors in the true sense of the word.

Pomeroy's citation of the greater depth of relief given to the head 'for the sake of effect' and allusion to passages of deeper undercutting in places 'where greater

definition is required' might be seen as amounting to a peculiar interpolation of lessons learnt rather from the Parthenon frieze than from Quattrocento sculpture, since these were devices that were already employed in the fifth-century BC and hardly illustrative of the principle being discussed. Pomeroy's understanding of Cox's ideas about low relief was tempered, it would seem, by a sense that a more pronounced chiaroscuro was sometimes necessary to balance the vague and suggestive 'half-modeling' that governed throughout. On the other hand, still echoing Cox, he told his audience that Italian Renaissance sculpture had 'in modern art a greater influence than either of the before-mentioned [Greek and Gothic] schools.'

CHAPTER TWO

2. Naturalism and Symbolism in Gilbert's *Oeuvre*

It is not always recognised quite how polemical an intervention was Susan Beattie's *The New Sculpture*, published in 1983. A wonderful piece of scholarship, well researched and of unquestionable importance for the field, it nevertheless began with a series of bold claims about the movement recognised – and in a sense written into existence – by Edmund Gosse in 1894. One such claim concerns Gosse's attitude towards architectural sculpture: in the introduction to *The New Sculpture*, Beattie charges Gosse with having misrepresented the movement because of an inherited and unquestioned narrow-mindedness about 'high' and 'low art'. Chief among his crimes is the exclusion, in his 1894 articles, of sculpture that was not created with the 'Salon' setting in mind; 'without exception, [...] the milestones in the critic's history of this new movement are 'exhibition' pieces, ideal nude figures chosen precisely because they conformed to his own traditional concept of sculpture and its proper role.'²³⁸ Beattie neglects, however, to mention in this context that Gosse wrote on 'The Place of Sculpture in Daily Life' only the following year, including 'Monuments' and 'Decoration' in his survey. Regardless, he is again accused, in connection with his 1881 article on 'The Future of Sculpture in London', of thinking architectural decoration 'somehow unworthy of consideration', despite the fact that he had, just one year previously, penned an anonymous article for the *Cornhill Magazine* dealing with this very subject; Beattie quotes from that article – specifically its positive comments about Henry Hugh Armstead and J. B. Philips'

²³⁸ Beattie, 1983, 3.

work on the Colonial and Home Offices in Whitehall – approvingly enough, having failed to recognise the author.²³⁹ Gosse’s supposed inability to accept Stevens’ Wellington Memorial as ‘high art’ amounts to another unfair accusation; in fact, Gosse addressed all these questions directly, albeit not in quite the way Beattie would have liked.

As for the meaning of the new movement, Gosse’s judgements come in for severe criticism from Beattie. Where he had seen the New Sculpture as a naturalistic movement, influenced by such figures as Carpeaux, Dubois, Chapu, Delaplanche, and so on, Beattie argues forcefully for its Symbolist aspirations – looking less to Paris – excepting such figures as Rodin and Odilon Redon – than to Belgium: one problem with this is that in seeking to rescue the movement from being viewed as ‘a parochial reflection of France’, the only alternative seems to be to view it as a different kind of parochial reflection of France, one with a different cast of heroes; more spotlessly unacademic, in the popular view, but then it must be acknowledged also that academicism itself had undergone something of a sea-change during the nineteenth century and was by no means so dogmatically closed off to new approaches as might be assumed from the early, intensely partisan scholarship on Rodin, for instance. During the closing years of the century in Britain, in any case, Symbolism was sometimes seen quite as much as naturalism – if not rather more so – as an imported trend, and this in many respects it was; it is generally supposed that the term ‘Symbolist’ was first used by Jean Moréas in *Le Figaro* in an explicitly literary context in September of 1886, only coming (in Britain, at least) to be

²³⁹ Beattie, 1983, 38.

employed in relation to painting by W. B. Yeats in 1898,²⁴⁰ but it was in fact already current before this date in French art criticism: ‘modern French symbolistical art’ scoffs one British art critic in 1896, contrasting the fashion for it with that for the Quattrocento, by now thoroughly established,²⁴¹ though in reality both the naturalistic and Symbolist tendencies in late nineteenth-century art, whether French or British, can be seen as closely related aspects of the renewed interest around the middle of the century in fifteenth-century Italian art, with its combined interest in the vitality of the body and the expression of emotion or other visionary qualities.

Another issue with such an approach as Beattie’s is that it involves the unbalanced promotion of the work of Gilbert, Ford, and Stirling Lee at the expense of Thornycroft and Brock, and the partial reduction of Leighton’s influence on the movement – an absolutely crucial aspect – to a mere distraction. An element of personal preference enters into the discussion, for she finds contradictory ways of downplaying the importance of Brock in particular, whom she describes in one place as ‘the great plagiarist of the New Sculpture’,²⁴² and in another as a sculptor who produced ‘few works [...] which belong within the mainstream of the New Sculpture movement’.²⁴³ Elsewhere, his ‘severe limitations as a modeller’ are attacked, in connection with his restrained treatment of anatomical detail, a factor that might just as well be seen as signalling his acceptance in some measure of the Quattrocento-

²⁴⁰ See, for instance, Gould, 2004, 371. Albert Aurier is also credited with having discussed *Symbolisme* in a similar context as early as 1891.

²⁴¹ Phillips, 1896, 533.

²⁴² Beattie, 1983, 230.

²⁴³ Beattie, 1983, 176; see also page 241, where Beattie claims that ‘[o]nly occasionally, as in *Eve* [...] did he succeed in fully identifying with the new movement.’

influenced restraint of modelling finding new adherents during the period: attention is drawn to ‘the deadened surfaces of neck and forearm’ in Brock’s figure of Sculpture on the Leighton Monument in St Paul’s, ‘unworthy’, we are told, ‘of comparison with the work of Stevens and Bates’.²⁴⁴ Brock was certainly recognised, however, as a leader of the British school in some sense, however distant his work might seem at times from that of Gilbert and his other peers. Spielmann felt that Brock had managed to keep abreast of the new influences being introduced into British sculpture even without ‘wholly or radically chang[ing] his methods or views’: for all Spielmann’s praise of Gilbert, he also observed that Brock ‘can touch true poetry, and I have known more than one occasion when his cold marble has drawn tears to the eyes of the spectator.’²⁴⁵ We must give space for a degree of individualism and even conflict within the momentum that broadly defined the New Sculpture. Spielmann recognised this when he noted in 1908 that Thornycroft, though ‘independent enough in himself,’ was ‘troubled by the lengths to which his youthful contemporaries were disposed to go along the path of revolt’,²⁴⁶ and Gosse had alluded to something similar when he had announced rather more bombastically in 1894, that Thornycroft and Gilbert were:

the two men by whom, more than by any other, the New Sculpture was later on to be piloted into fame and universal recognition. These were to be, in their

²⁴⁴ Beattie, 1983, 223.

²⁴⁵ Spielmann, 1901, 30-3.

²⁴⁶ Spielmann, 1908, 94.

totally distinct manners, the standard-bearers of the two great wings of the army of conquest.²⁴⁷

In Beattie's view, and perhaps to some extent in Spielmann's, Thornycroft was ultimately outflanked by Gilbert, though Gosse had placed them in the same line, and certainly had reason to do so, as there were shared aims as well as points of divergence between the sides of the movement.

The status of the classical in all of this is, on the whole, ignored on the formal side, and accepted only in a much diminished role on what might be regarded as the more literary, symbolic (but not necessarily Symbolist) side. What of archaeology and myth, ancient sculpture and literature? Did these have no effect on form or meaning? We shall investigate here the two poles of naturalism and symbolism, together with a series of other oppositions closely connected with these.

2.1. Looking to the Past or the Future: A Figurative or an Anti-Materialist Proto-Abstract Sculpture?

Beattie sees in the New Sculpture neither a concern with the observable world, nor a search for physical perfection, but something altogether less concrete and even 'anti-materialist'.²⁴⁸ Conflating naturalism – which had never precluded a sense of the ideal – with the more mundane varieties of social realism, Beattie sees the crucial

²⁴⁷ Gosse, 1894, 141.

²⁴⁸ Beattie, 1983, 150.

characteristic of the movement as the representation of highly-charged emotion, of ‘suggestion and subjective allusion’, of inner life, of the ‘human psyche’, of grief, of sorrow, of ‘pure fantasy’, ‘the stuff of dreams’, and ‘the intangible, secret forces of human imagination’.²⁴⁹ Read, on the other hand, offers a more resolutely Gossean perspective on the place of realistic treatment in sculptural practice during the 1880s and 90s: this, he cautions, ‘characterized the New Sculpture irrespective of subject matter or conceptual reference.’²⁵⁰

Beattie attempts to define the movement in a number of different ways, but disparages what she regards as purely physical – including, more or less, all so-called academic French sculpture – and emphasises the importance of works in which ‘sculpture’s propensity to deal with states of mind’ is most evidently exploited.²⁵¹ When Beattie contrasts British ‘New Sculpture’ productions of the 1880s and 1890s with contemporary French works or those of the preceding decades, such as Delaplanche’s *Ève avant le péché* (c. 1891) – an example which she treats with an exaggerated lack of sympathy – or Carrier-Belleuse’s decorative *Diane victorieuse*, she selects her examples carefully. One might just as well place Falguière’s far better known *Diane* of 1882 beside Pomeroy’s *Wood Nymph* of 1908; the latter is an original study of the nude, of course, but is also at once thoroughly dependent on and substantially less moody than the former, whose wonderfully disdainful sneer had been remarkable enough to merit widespread reproduction of

²⁴⁹ Beattie, 1983, 218, 6.

²⁵⁰ Read, 1992, 3.

²⁵¹ Beattie, 1983, 150.

the bust on its own in all sizes and numerous materials, winning a genuine affection and popularity of which British sculptors could hardly dream. Peculiarly enough, Beattie selects another example from Pomeroy to illustrate her argument: '[e]ven when French precedent was followed particularly closely [by British sculptors], as in Pomeroy's *Pensée* [...] related to figures of *Eve* by Paul Dubois and by Falguière, [...] the very title betrayed the artist's intention to represent more than a physical image.'²⁵² Of Brock's *Eve* (c. 1898-1900), in Beattie's view the sole work by that sculptor worthy of consideration alongside the masterpieces of his peers, she writes that, though 'encumbered by the title given to so many voluptuous figures in the Paris Salons' the figure 'is free from arch allusion, as tentative, subjective and poignant as Alfred Gilbert's early statuettes.'²⁵³ Had Dubois and Falguière been interested only in creating 'a physical image'? The answer is of course emphatically no. The abuse of French sculpture is greatly overstated here and shows, for one thing, scant regard for the strength of sincere Catholic feeling in France during the 1870s and 80s. It is less clear, if anything, what the figure of *Eve* might have represented for Brock than for Falguière or Dubois, or indeed, for an earlier painter-sculptor like Auguste Hyacinthe-Debay, whose *Berceau primitif* or *Eve* had deservedly received great acclaim (and a prize medal) at the Great Exhibition of 1851: '[t]he First Mother appears to be lost in a reverie as to the future destinies of her offspring, the principal incidents of which are foreshadowed to the spectator in the bas-relief sculpturing on the pedestal', noted *The Illustrated London News* at the time, drawing attention inadvertently to the qualities which would later seem to set

²⁵² Beattie, 1983, 176.

²⁵³ Beattie, 1983, 177.

Brock's figure apart, namely the dreamy, reflective mood and use of the base as a means of deepening the significance of Eve's momentary melancholy;²⁵⁴ in Brock's work, the bas-reliefs featuring Cain and Abel, their unequal offerings, and the serpent-wrapped Tree of Knowledge are exchanged for a single twining snake in fuller relief. Brock would have been rather young in 1851, but a plaster cast of Debay's marvellous group remained on display at the Crystal Palace for many years after this date – it is known that Thornycroft saw and admired it there twenty years later²⁵⁵ – and it is plausible that he knew it just as well as the more recent figures by Dubois and Falguière. It is also worth pointing out that the subject of the biblical mother of mankind had by no means been in the preceding decades one confined to the Salon, or even to the French sections of international exhibitions; if Debay's contemplative Eve is in the background, Brock's statue harks back still further in certain particulars to an iconic work of British sculpture, Edwin Hodges Baily's celebrated *Eve at the Fountain* of 1822.

Pomeroiy's *Pensée* is a comparatively empty and simpering figure of unclear import: she appeared at the Royal Academy in 1896 simply as a 'statuette', albeit one coloured by a specific allusion to Robert Burns (Pomeroiy's monument to Burns in Paisley had been unveiled the previous year), since the lines 'Pleasures are like poppies spread; / You seize the flower, the bloom is shed', were present in the accompanying catalogue, making the figure a relatively straightforward allegory of transitory pleasure while also stressing, it may be, the superiority of anticipation to

²⁵⁴ *The Illustrated London News*, 11 Oct 1851, 465.

²⁵⁵ Manning, 1982, 55.

gratification: bronze casts have the girl holding an unopened but plucked bud to her breast with one hand and carrying with the other at her side a downcast poppy stem, terminating in the seed pod rather than the flower, an emblem in this case of forgetfulness or loss more broadly; encircling the base is a scroll marked with the first line of the couplet, 'Pleasures are like poppies spread'. On the other hand, photographs of the clay or plaster model, a simple cast of which was surely the version exhibited in 1896, lack both the explanatory quotation and the poppy; the retrospective title *Pensée*, given to the work by the time the bronze was exhibited at the New Gallery the following year *with* the finalised accoutrements, suggests a still less specific meaning for the work. Despite the evident poetic resonances, the work is quite without the seriousness of Dubois' *Ève naissante* of 1873, itself a work of substantial iconographical complexity and even solemnity: numerous and varied sources have been cited in relation to that work, from Il Sodoma (particularly the *Discesa di Cristo al Limbo* in Siena, 1524-6) and Leonardo, to Cranach, the Eve of Autun, and the school of Fontainebleau, largely resisting easy categorisation all the same.²⁵⁶ The gentle, smiling expression preserves a memory of one of the most celebrated models in Rome during the 1860s, the lively Pascuccia, originally from Isola del Liri, Lazio,²⁵⁷ who had frequently been seen by foreign artists in the city as a living embodiment of a Leonardesque type of beauty; Francis Wey noted of this 'ravissante fille' that the *pensionnaires* at the Villa Medici 's'efforçaient de regarder avec les yeux de Léonard';²⁵⁸ the painter Jules Salles wrote of her 'très-doux' smile

²⁵⁶ Pingot, 1986, 62-4.

²⁵⁷ Then known as Isola di Sora or Sorra: Salles, 1863, 267.

²⁵⁸ Wey, 1870, 176.

and hair ‘*comme dans les têtes de Léonard de Vinci*’.²⁵⁹ Of Pascuccia Dubois made a smiling bust (possibly about 1873) that exists in plaster (Troyes and Nogent-sur-Seine), terracotta, bronze (Private collections), and marble versions (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, acquired in 1890).²⁶⁰ In terms of pose and gesture, however, the most obvious source for Dubois’ *Ève*, and therefore indirectly for Pomeroy’s *Pensée*, is surely the depiction of the creation of Eve in the Raphael Loggia of the Vatican (c. 1517-19),²⁶¹ and this was just about recognised by contemporaries – without naming any specific source Ernest Duvergier de Hauranne wrote in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1873 that the sculptor had left the Florentine school for the Roman, and that ‘[c]’est surtout de Raphaël qu’il procède, ou du moins c’est dans ce style qu’aurait sculpté Raphaël’²⁶² – though Dubois’ statue is invested with immeasurably greater dignity and refinement than Raphael’s workshop could command, approaching the purity and innocence of an Annunciate Virgin of the fourteenth century, qualities which cannot be found in Pomeroy’s statuette, which appears sentimental by its side, or even next to another semi-derivative work, Antonin Carlès’ *Jeunesse* of 1885, which combines the vaguely Botticellesque hair tousling of Dubois’ statue with the motif of the picked flower. Granted, Falguière’s *Ève* of 1880 is conceived in a widely dissimilar spirit, but then it must also be admitted that *that* statue – a clever reinterpretation of the *Apollo Sauroctonus* in

²⁵⁹ Salles, 1863, 267.

²⁶⁰ The dating of this bust to 1873 would appear to be on the grounds of similarity with the *Eve*.

²⁶¹ As early as 1863 Dubois had exhibited at the Salon a drawing of *Adam et Ève* after a ‘*fresque de Raphaël*’, though it is unclear whether this was part of the decoration of the Raphael Loggia or the Stanza della Segnatura.

²⁶² Duvergier de Hauranne, 1873, 872.

which the tree trunk and reptile of the antique statue type are given new significance – bears little relation to Pomeroy’s *Pensée*, unless it be a kind of symbolic correspondence in the soon-to-be-harvested fruit of the one and the pre-plucked flower of the other, each equally suggestive of a kind of fall, or even the clear implication in both works of intellectual activity as well as physical grace: revealingly, a British journalist who visited Falguière’s studio in 1880 judged that the expression of the face of his *Ève* ‘convey[ed] too forcibly hesitation and conflicting thought to be described as lovely’.²⁶³

Beattie’s sweeping generalisations about the Salon nude, then, will not stand. It is worth recognising – as indeed art critics and Salon attendees did – the variety that was possible in so-called academic French sculpture of this period even within a relatively compact group of sculptors like Dubois, Falguière, and Mercié, all of whom had been to Rome and were associated in some degree with the turn towards the Quattrocento. In 1874, only a year after the appearance of Dubois’s *Ève*, a witty *Jugement de Paris* was shown at the Salon, painted by Philippe Parrot, a close friend and associate of that sculptor,²⁶⁴ that reads at once as a contrast in physical types familiar from recent exhibitions, each carrying also a certain weight of art-historical connotations, and as a celebration of the elevated and *more than physical* conception of Eve presented by Dubois in particular. The three goddesses were given – much like the representatives of Greek, Gothic, Roman, and (Venetian) Renaissance art at the centre of Delaroche’s famous *Hémicycle* in the Salon de Prix of the École des-

²⁶³ *The Architect*, 11 Sep 1880, 162.

²⁶⁴ Parrot and Dubois had visited Italy together during the 1860s, and Dubois would exhibit a bust of the painter’s elder brother, the doctor Joseph-Marie-Jules Parrot, at the Salon of 1875.

Beaux-Arts (1836-41) – in contrasting styles, deliberately evoking the work of the three great sculptors of the day: Juno, to the left, suggested the decorative flutter and dynamism of Mercié, but also the splendour of Venice; Diana, to the right, suggested Falguière, even anticipating his notorious *Diane* of 1882 and hinting at that artist's deep respect and enthusiasm for Spanish painting;²⁶⁵ Venus in the centre, a little more Florentine than Roman perhaps, receives the prize in an overt tribute to Dubois. The contest is not only between physical types, but between one aim in modern art and another.

²⁶⁵ Falguière had visited Spain in 1873 and the trip had given a fresh impetus to his own painterly ambitions.

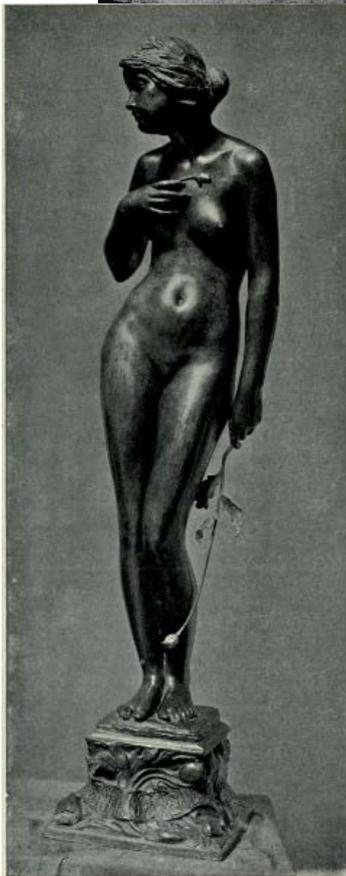
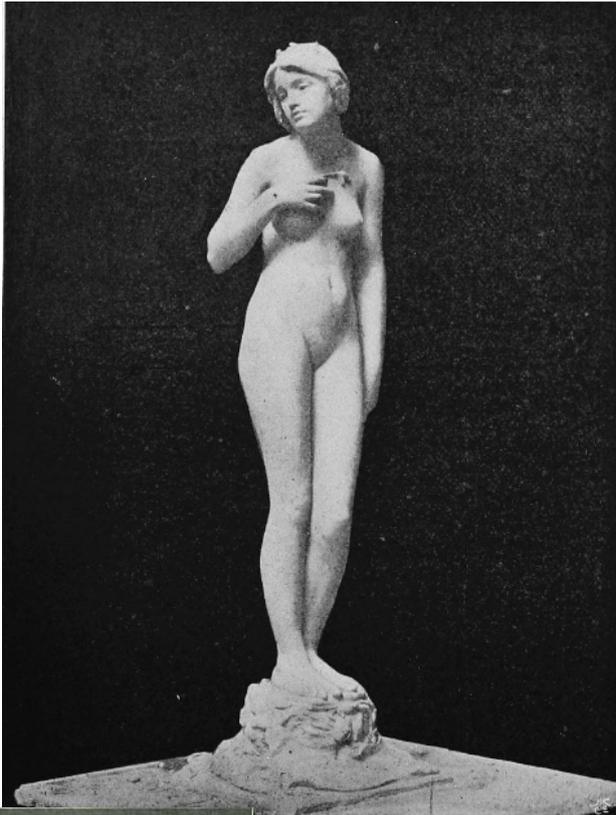


Fig. 42. Frederick William Pomeroy, *Pensée*, 1896, Untraced.



Fig. 43. Philippe Parrot, *Le Jugement de Paris*, Oil on canvas, 300×325cm, Private collection (untraced).

Rather than reaching for the stridently ornamental and florid Carrier-Belleuse as a representative of French sculpture during this period, why not look rather to a sculptor like Jean Damp, who emerged from Dubois' tutelage strongly influenced by the Quattrocento and committed, much like Gilbert and Frampton across the channel, both to the representation in solid form of insubstantial dreams and to the search for new and surprising combinations of diverse materials through which such

themes could most vividly be explored? Greater attention to such a figure might easily upset the simplistic conclusions drawn about the leading national qualities to be found in French and British sculpture.

Largely missing from Beattie's account is the awareness of sources which we might expect in a discussion of a group of sculptors who were so manifestly backward as well as forward-looking, and so deeply concerned with tradition as well as innovation. The historical parallels that nineteenth-century critics hungrily sought out when commenting on modern works as a means of shedding light on this or that motif or point of execution are for the most part excluded from her account, though the New Sculpture is seen retrospectively in the context of twentieth-century concerns even where the projection of these onto the closing decades of the previous century produces an anachronistic picture of the ambitions and allegiances of those involved. At the same time, the productions of this generation of sculptors are treated as intensely personal ones of deep 'psychological' import, an approach which is in large measure right, but which has tended to obscure the presence of ancient, medieval, or renaissance sculpture and literature in the background of these otherwise inexplicable works, as well as placing some constraints upon interpretative possibilities. Of some of the most extravagantly dreamlike works produced around the turn of the century, Beattie asserts, for instance, that the 'full psychological implications of such images, [...] have yet to be investigated', but does not herself offer any extensive analysis.²⁶⁶ Where myth is treated, as in Harry Bates' *Aeneid Triptych*, Beattie claims that '[t]heir true subject matter is neither classical myth nor

²⁶⁶ Beattie, 1983, 6.

the visible world, but yearning, grief and dream' – as though ancient myth is never concerned with precisely these things.

Yet even works regarded as comparatively bereft of mythological content are frequently not without recognisable mythological resonances or prototypes. This is true of Harry Bates' *Mors Janua Vitae*, which Beattie and many others (including contemporary critics)²⁶⁷ have recognised as a reimagining of Watts' *Love and Life*. Watts' picture is, however, itself adapted from an iconographical tradition relating to the story of Cupid and Psyche, retaining many of the essentials but partially obscuring the source. Most strikingly, Watts' figure representing 'Life' owes something to Burne-Jones' *Pan and Psyche* (painted c. 1872-4, but conceived before 1869 for Morris' *Earthly Paradise*), where the goat-legged representative of wild Nature soothes the troubled Soul. Watts had already addressed another part of the myth more directly in his *Psyche* of 1880. By the time Bates was working on *Mors Janua Vitae* in the later 1890s, he too had treated the myth in a highly pictorial series of reliefs deeply inspired by Watts' work, and must have recognised in *Love and Life* something familiar and well adapted to Apuleius' story, as, indeed, did Annie Swynnerton, whose *Cupid and Psyche* of 1891 was similarly inspired by Watts' picture. Sure enough, Life, or *Vita*, is represented by Bates as the everlasting Soul or *Psyche* in its proper sense. Love becomes Death, releasing the spirit from her earthly ties; with his left hand he offers a butterfly to the ascendant Soul, who reaches towards it, and with the other he holds a celestial coronet above her head, already garlanded with simple foliage. His own helmet, as Joseph Sharples has pointed out,

²⁶⁷ See Sharples, 2007, 837.

is ornamented with images of Cupid and Psyche adapted from the earlier reliefs; the myth, only imperfectly submerged, rises here to the surface and asserts itself.²⁶⁸ True, the motif of 'Death and the Maiden' was a popular Symbolist cliché, derived ultimately from the German Renaissance, but Bates' work draws consciously on an alternative tradition that is fundamentally classical. Sharples' suggestion that the work 'was not just a Symbolist flight of fancy' but should be thought of as 'a personal memorial' to the sculptor is right.²⁶⁹ How separate the two categories of ideal and memorial sculpture ever were is, perhaps, a matter that may be debated, but the fusion of the two is surely characteristic of much of the work associated with the new movement.

2.2. French Origins for Gilbertian Myth

Another work with overt mythological undercurrents – always present in the sculptor's work – is Gilbert's *Comedy and Tragedy: 'Sic Vita'* (1891-2). This draws on symbolism so familiar in French sculpture, in fact, that it might well have been considered rather hackneyed by the 1890s. Earlier in the century, sculptural treatments of female bathers and young boys in particular could be found in the civilised settings of public exhibitions encountering all sorts of painful circumstances associated with wild and animalistic nature, including scorpion stings, wasp stings, and snake bites. They pricked and snagged and otherwise

²⁶⁸ Sharples, 2007, 838-9.

²⁶⁹ Sharples, 2007, 843.

inconvenienced themselves on thorns with great regularity, manifesting the consequences of their all-too-human vulnerability in contorted gesture and twisted face, suffering momentary shock or slow, painful deaths according to the severity of the situation and the spirit of endurance deemed appropriate by the sculptor, though the extent to which the representation of pain was admissible in the three-dimensional work of art was inevitably a controversial matter, not unlike the question of how much movement was desirable in sculpture. An exceedingly long list of examples could be drawn up encompassing a wide range of styles and fictive sources of injury, and it should be noted that it was partly to this class of subject that Leighton's *Needless Alarms* responded in 1886 with a degree of light-hearted and very mild subversion, though the allusion there was perhaps more obviously to the (sometimes closely related) surprised bather genre, that is to say, to a legacy associated with Praxiteles and with grace and sinuosity rather than any more distorted expression of physical or psychological suffering. For the most part, the bitten, stung, or merely surprised youths to be found in exhibitions of sculpture were studies in expression calculated to wring out as much inwardly felt emotion as necessary for the artist's purpose, albeit often with an attendant moral, myth, allegory, or other symbolic element implied.



Fig. 44. Alfred Gilbert, *Comedy and Tragedy: 'Sic Vita'*, 1892, Bronze, 34.9×15.2×14cm (reduction), Tate Britain, London.

When Gilbert was in Paris during the late 1870s, Ernest Christophe's monumental marble *La comédie humaine* (1876) was acquired by the State and placed in the Jardin des Tuileries, where the young British sculptor might have encountered it regardless of whether or not he was able to scrape together the necessary funds to purchase a ticket for the Salon. With this vast figure, which was not vaguely Florentine in its point of reference so much as overtly Michelangelesque, especially in its thrown-back posture, moody disposition of shade, bulk, and long, weightily Mannerist upper limbs, the sculptor had exploited the multiplicity of possible viewpoints to trick the spectator with a memorable double image of smirk and sting representing the half-concealed suffering associated with the human condition. In fact, as the title itself suggests, the work was conceived around 1850 – it could be said in a spirit of optimism, as no such commission was ever made – as a potential monument to Balzac and a symbol of his *Comédie humaine* (1829-48). The figure seems to behold the observer who approaches its (proper) left side with a smile described by one José-Maria de Heredia as 'voluptueux et moqueur',²⁷⁰ but, as the viewer discovers upon advancing a few steps further, actually twists back away from the deceptively smiling face – which is only a mask – in a posture suggestive of pain and distress. The lightness of the *comédie* turns out to be illusive.

– Mais non! Ce n'est qu'un masque, un décor suborneur, / Ce visage éclair
d'une exquise grimace, / Et, regarde, voice, crispée atrocement, / La véritable
tête, et la sincère face / Renversée à l'abri de la face qui ment.

²⁷⁰ de Heredia, 1886, 202.

So wrote Baudelaire in 'Le masque', a poem that was explicitly dedicated to Christophe, having been inspired by an earlier and slightly less Michelangelesque version of the statue (these lines were published in 1861, in the second edition of *Les fleurs du mal*). There is a certain contrast to be made with Baudelaire's earlier and better known opinion (expressed in his famous review of the Salon of 1846, in a section entitled 'Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse') that sculpture might be considered inferior to painting, among other factors, precisely because 'elle montre trop de face à la fois'; there, the plurality of available viewpoints had been seen as leading necessarily to an attendant diminution of the strength of the artist's expression; in painting, Baudelaire had argued, an art more 'exclusive et despotique', the 'expression du peintre est-elle plus forte'.²⁷¹ Here in 'Le masque', this complicating characteristic of the work in the round is seen decidedly as an advantage for the sculptor. The anguished *grimace* lurking behind mask and veil, and the symbolic cause of the woman's distress – a serpent – are revealed as the observer moves around the work. The poet did not mention the snake – 'pourquoi pleure-t-elle?' he asks – though it was very much present (and significantly more obvious) on the model he knew from the Salon of 1859, preferring instead not to give too definite a shape to the cause of the figure's distress, even allowing for the fact that a figurative rather than a literal interpretation of the serpent's bite had evidently been intended by the sculptor. Christophe probably took some inspiration from representations of the snake-induced death of Cleopatra, such as the famous and widely reproduced reclining statue in the Vatican, known as *Cleopatra* during the Renaissance on account of the serpent bracelet on one arm (now regarded as an

²⁷¹ Baudelaire, 1846, 116.

Ariadne or a sleeping nymph); on Christophe's first model, the serpent had twined around the woman's forearm as, indeed, it had (again, in bracelet form) on Clésinger's *Femme piquée par un serpent* of 1847.



Fig. 45. Ernest Christophe, *La comédie humaine*, 1876, Marble, 245×85cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

The cumbrous style and treatment given to the allegory by Christophe are not especially near to the qualities explored in Gilbert's light and boyish *Comedy and Tragedy*, except in the simple fact that a twisting impulse is shared by both works along with an uneasy marriage of internally coherent cause and effect and theatrical outward appeal. The one is monumental, the other of more domestic dimensions. They have, all the same, much in common, and Gilbert's sculpture ought really to be seen as a reimagining of the famous but flawed earlier work. Neither sculptor opts for a Janus-faced arrangement, as in Michel Colombe's celebrated figure of Prudence on the tomb of François II, Duke of Brittany, in Nantes (1507), but both depend for their meaning upon a roughly comparable trick of perspective and a similar contrast between a false and a genuine expression, and the subject remains essentially the same. A much closer visual echo of Christophe's sculpture may be found in Alfred Drury's swooning and suggestive *Evening* (c. 1898), employed as a light standard in Leeds' City Square; again this has a certain Michelangelian resonance, though it has not the specificity of such an allegory as Christophe or Gilbert had explored in their respective 'comedies', or, indeed, the explicitly theatrical point of reference which those works share; perhaps fittingly, a 1905 reprise of an early study for the head of Drury's *Evening*, known as *Spirit of the Night* but published by Alfred Lys Baldry as a 'Study for Eve', remains one of the few 'New Sculpture' works in the collection of the Musée d'Orsay, where Christophe's *Comédie humaine* also resides.

In reality, detached as they are from any commanding architectural arrangement which points the viewer one way or another, or limits available approaches, there is no guarantee that the viewer will receive first and second

impressions from the points of view preferred by either sculptor: Christophe's statue has moved indoors, while casts of Gilbert's *Comedy and Tragedy* can almost be guaranteed, in most settings – including museum settings – to be found in a corner, severely limiting the ways in which the viewer can engage with it; that the primary viewpoint is through the distorted (and, in a sense, distorting) frame formed by the grinning mouth of the mask is not immediately obvious, and it is not always possible to examine the other side of the figure and see the bee that has landed on the boy's leg, meaning that the subject can prove wholly mystifying to those not already in the know about the artist's intention. In a sense, Baudelaire's observation in 1846 that with sculpture 'le spectateur qui tourne autour de la figure peut choisir cent points de vue différents, excepté le bon' holds true of both works,²⁷² where *le bon point de vue* is more than a purely aesthetic matter, but something vital in each case for the complete apprehension – not to say correct reading – of the composition.

Gilbert's *Comedy and Tragedy* was conceived around the same time that the artist was working on the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, and the boy with the mask was closely related to the god of requited love both conceptually and physically, as both were studied from the same fifteen-year-old model, Angelo Colarossi (or Colorossi), whose well known father, also Angelo, had modelled both for Watts' *Clytie* and, during the 1870s, for Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*. A signed and dated (3 December 1890) pen and ink sketch in the van Caloen Album, inscribed "'Comedy and Tragedy' (first idea)" shows a plump Eros-like winged putto on one leg, holding aloft a comic mask and looking down at the narrow

²⁷² Baudelaire, 1846, 116.

socle, where an arrow – shot by *Anteros*? – has landed: a near miss. The resultant statuette is rather different, though infant-and-mask imagery closer to that implied by the sketch does appear within an ornamental and symbolic scheme that the sculptor was working on at the same time (1890-4); this is the richly worked fountain that forms part of the base for the statue of John Howard in Bedford (unveiled 1894), a work that is again reminiscent of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain: with what might well be seen as a degree of contrivance Gilbert claimed that the strange, stretchy masks on that monument, and the shaded faces hidden beneath them, were supposed to symbolise something of the commemorated man's interest in prison reform,²⁷³ though the reason for their presence there was evidently also, straightforwardly, the sculptor's then-current preoccupation with this kind of theatrical imagery in other, quite different contexts, a preoccupation which bled from one type of work to another almost regardless of its suitability.

That Gilbert was working during the early 1890s as a stuccoist in two London theatres, Daly's Theatre, on Cranbourne Street off Leicester Square (1891-3), and the Gaiety (*c.* 1892), is easily and indeed frequently forgotten because the ornamental schemes that he carried out or contributed to in these locations have not survived, though the results must presumably have amounted in a sense to his most sustained and significant forays into architectural decoration, a field of practice which Gilbert has sometimes been seen as having neglected altogether;²⁷⁴ naturally,

²⁷³ See Dorment, 1985, 128.

²⁷⁴ Beattie notes that Gilbert 'was never to embark upon a work of comparable type' to Benjamin Creswick's terracotta frieze on Cutlers' Hall (*c.* 1886), and does not address his contribution to interior decoration elsewhere: Beattie, 1983, 49. The significance of Gilbert's work as a stuccoist is briefly acknowledged by Dorment (1986, 15), who sees this as a major factor in the development of the sculptor's modelling during the last decade of the nineteenth century despite the scarcity of

architectural carving is dissimilar in many respects from the application of moulded stucco ornament indoors, but it is a great pity that this aspect of Gilbert's work should remain as obscure as it does, known only from a few descriptions and photographs, which, however, would seem to indicate that it was consistent in many respects with the kind of work he was producing for other ends around this time. The nature of Gilbert's involvement in the first case is not altogether clear: the architect was Spencer Chadwick, and the interior was by most accounts the responsibility of the cabinetmakers and 'artistic furnishers' Collinson and Lock; the *Westminster Budget* reported that this was 'one of those rare instances in which the whole decorative scheme has been imagined and carried out by one man', namely George Lock, though the execution actually involved a workforce of approximately two-hundred men, with some additional involvement by 'non-Union men' that was controversial with the firm.²⁷⁵ An 1893 report in the *Times* mentions the 'exquisitely modelled cupids and nude figures in relief' in the vestibule of Daly's Theatre and dwells at greater length upon the auditorium 'rich in blendings of silver and gold and in fine inlaid woodwork.' Especial attention is given to the circle balconies, where there are 'upon a silver ground a variety of figures in relief which are lacquered, not gilt,²⁷⁶ a pretty detail being that one of the cupids, who act as sailors in boats of gold,

available evidence. His earlier biography of Gilbert (1985, 94) only notes, perhaps a little too pessimistically, that '[w]e do not know [...] what his designs for the decoration of Daly's Theatre [...] looked like.' Dorment is undoubtedly right to stress this, though a proper demonstration has been made impossible by the destruction of the relevant sites during the twentieth century. Edwards (2006, 133-58) writes at length about Gilbert's interest in the theatre but does not mention that he actually worked in such settings.

²⁷⁵ Edwards, 2022, 249-50.

²⁷⁶ The implication here would seem to be that the gold effect was achieved through the use of metallic powders, as in Japanese lacquer decoration, rather than by the application of gold leaf, with a suggestion also, perhaps, that a less precious metal or other metallic substance had been substituted to obtain the desired appearance; a clearer description of the process employed was, however, given by

blows upon a reed pipe bubbles which are lit with electric light [...] A striking feature of the decoration is the number and variety of the figures shown in relief, in the moulding of which the plastic hand of Mr. Alfred Gilbert, R.A., is felt; another is the curious metallic effect of the gold and silver decoration.’²⁷⁷ *The Era* reported that ‘[t]here is fine freedom in the modelling of the Cupids in boats which adorn each of the circles; and the nobility of aim is well sustained in the dome, with its severe scroll around the sunlight, and its immense winged figures of Fame.’²⁷⁸ Horace Townsend (brother of the architect Charles Harrison Townsend, who would work with Frampton and Robert Anning Bell on the Horniman Museum a few years later) observed in *The Studio* that the visual evidence of Gilbert’s involvement was ‘not intrinsic’,²⁷⁹ and Gilbert’s student F. W. Henry Ganz would later remember that there were ‘large masks up with ceiling mermaids (gold and blue) plaster by whom I

George Lock to *The Builder* – see *The Builder*, 8 July 1893, 29 – and this specifies that ‘the metallic enrichment [was] carried out in silver leaf covered with variously tinted lacquers, by which greater depth, warmth, and variety is obtained than by gilding in the ordinary way.’ Whether the figures stood out in gold on a silver ground is not easy to judge. Nor is it possible to ascertain how far Gilbert’s ‘plastic hand’ might have been implicated in the obtaining of such surface effects – the *Times* refers only to his role in the moulding of the reliefs. No other evidence of Gilbert dabbling in the production of lacquerware is known, although he told Hatton in 1903 (31) that the colouring of the figures intended for the Clarence Memorial had been achieved with a medium ‘composed of oxides and certain liquids of natural but imperishable lacquers’ that could be classed as neither paint nor enamel, sometimes vitreous but ‘not in the sense that they have been treated with heat’; a curious comment this, since it is precisely the firing that gives the rich colours to many of the oxides typically used in enamelling. In the case of Daley’s theatre, the coatings were probably shellac-based (or similar) rather than an employment of true lacquer, especially considering the scale and extent of its application in the theatre’s interior ornamental scheme, where effects usually seen in miniature were playfully enlarged. Still, this is a significant piece of information, especially in the light of Gilbert’s recognised interest in the technical achievements of Japanese metalwork during this period. It is perhaps no coincidence that in 1894 Gosse (282) likened the ornamental parts of the sculptor’s earlier *Enchanted Chair* to ‘a richly lacquered jewel-box [in which] a diamond is enshrined’.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁷ *The Times*, 28 June 1893, quoted in Forbes-Winslow, 1944, 16-17.

²⁷⁸ *The Era*, 1 July 1893, quoted in Mander and Mitchenson, 1968, 53-4.

²⁷⁹ Townsend, 1893, 161.

don't know',²⁸⁰ but from descriptions alone one might readily suspect that the sculptor had been given free rein as far as concerned subject, rather than ordered to carry out to the letter another's scheme. The praise was not, however, unanimous: Townsend, who judged the decoration 'flamboyant in the extreme, but none the less theatrically effective on that account' recorded that some had found 'the rococo note [...] somewhat too strenuous'; within a few years the architect Edwin Otho Sachs had pronounced the execution of the theatre's decoration 'almost [...] a failure' precisely on account of 'the detail having been left to the so-called "plastic decorator"'.²⁸¹ Could he have taken issue with the roughness of the modelling, which, claimed *The Builder*, 'preserve[d] more of clay technique than is usually seen in plaster decorations'?²⁸² This feature may indicate the presence behind the scenes of a sculptor used to working in other materials than stucco and comparatively careless of the smoothness of finish typically required of the interior decorator. It is a photograph reproduced in Sachs and Woodrow's *Modern Opera Houses and Theatres* (Volume 1, 1896) that gives us the best view of the silvered and lacquered stuccowork. This, though offering a limited view of the richly figural ornament of the balconies, splendidly confirms the *Times*' allusion to the impression of variety obtained in at least this segment of the theatre's decoration, since there is here little if any sign of repetition. The infant producing multicoloured illuminated bubbles appears on the left of the Dress Circle or lowest tier; this *vanitas* motif, traditionally

²⁸⁰ Ganz, in a 1937 letter to Francis Gilbert (Gilbert Family Papers), quoted by Dorment, 1985, 337 n. 29.

²⁸¹ Sachs – Woodrow, 1896, 39.

²⁸² *The Builder*, 8 July 1893, 29.

symbolic of fast-fading glory, the transience of life, and foolish, fruitless ambition,²⁸³ presumably recurred at more or less regular intervals throughout the scheme. While the waving ribbons and sprightly slenderness of much of the ornament may be typical of designs by Collinson and Lock, there are numerous features – including the sweeping curves of the vessels carrying the infants, the wriggling fish, and the roundel-forming wings of the middle tier – that are distinctly Gilbertian, to be compared almost less with any of the sculptor’s finished works than with surviving sketch models like the ‘Kneeling figure on the back of a mermaid’ in the Victoria and Albert Museum (c. 1892) or many of the fragments in plaster held in Leeds. The sailing imagery, too, was entirely in keeping with Gilbert’s predilection for the sea; his Jubilee medal of 1887 had shown, on the reverse, a ship with a putto at its prow along with the legend ‘Art Saileth though Life Faileth’; whether in the early 1890s the sculptor had already seen it is uncertain, but more than forty years

²⁸³ Millais’ infamous *Bubbles* had been exhibited in 1886, an image strongly influenced by more or less moralising examples of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Thomas Couture had treated the subject in a similar spirit in two well known canvases of about 1859 (Metropolitan Museum, New York, and Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; the latter is dated), harking back in his case to Chardin; these pictures, often known respectively as *Soap Bubbles* and *Daydreams* (from *Jour de rêverie*) almost as if to highlight and heighten the perceived sentimentality of the treatment, might more properly be referred to as *L’Écolier* or even *L’Écolier paresseux*. If the motif in Daly’s Theatre was due in any way to Gilbert’s involvement it was perhaps also derived from one of the figures in Watts’ *Life’s Illusions* (1849), who does not play with soap and water but ‘pricks on his horse in quick pursuit of the rainbow-tinted bubble of glory’. Watts’ later preoccupation with circles and spheres is discussed elsewhere, but *Life’s Illusions* was surely influenced by the floating ‘visionary spheres’ that are such a prominent feature of Turner’s *Vision of Medea* (1828, Tate Britain). On the other hand, when the Grosvenor Gallery had opened in 1877, the interior decoration had included ‘Japanese China and the latest “Minton,” globes of “rainbow glass” like large soap-bubbles, and in fine, everything in decoration that is lovely to look on, and in harmony with the surrounding works of art’, according to Oscar Wilde’s review of the first exhibition, published in *The Dublin University Magazine* (July 1877, 118); in that setting the effect achieved with the assistance of Japanese porcelain and iridescent glass lanterns had surely been less motivated by symbolic than strictly aesthetic considerations and the associated requirements of contemporary fashion. It would seem that the theatre’s moulded ornament, however, with its infants sailing and seeking ephemeral amusement on the sea of life, overhung by mermaids and vast winged representations of Fame, presented a coherent programme of iconography capable of sustaining symbolic readings, even if there was no obvious moralising element here comparable with those present in earlier pictorial renderings of bubble-producing or pursuing infants.

later the sculptor would, in conversation with Isabel McAllister, express his admiration for what he called ‘the beautiful work on the frieze around the Bourse in Brussels’, which, among other light-hearted imagery of child labour, prominently features a group of infant representatives of the fishing industry managing their vessels and and glorying in the abundance of their catch.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Gilbert attributes this work to Rodin, and strongly implies that he prefers it to the ‘Master impressionist’ side of that sculptor’s persona best exemplified by the *Balzac*. Gilbert is, however, paying a rather back-handed compliment to the French sculptor, since Rodin’s involvement in the carving of the frieze, which was designed by Carrier-Belleuse and carried out by a team of assistants during the early 1870s, is thought to have been fairly minimal. Did Gilbert know this? His other recorded comments about Rodin are similarly ambivalent, praising the man and his talents while accusing him of cynicism in relation to ‘momentary public crazes’ and ‘the power of contemporary current taste’; he also emphasises what good fortune it was that, when first meeting Rodin a some point during the 1890s, he had hitherto ‘always refrained from expressing [his] opinion on the subject’ of the sculptor’s work: McAllister, 1929, 142-4.

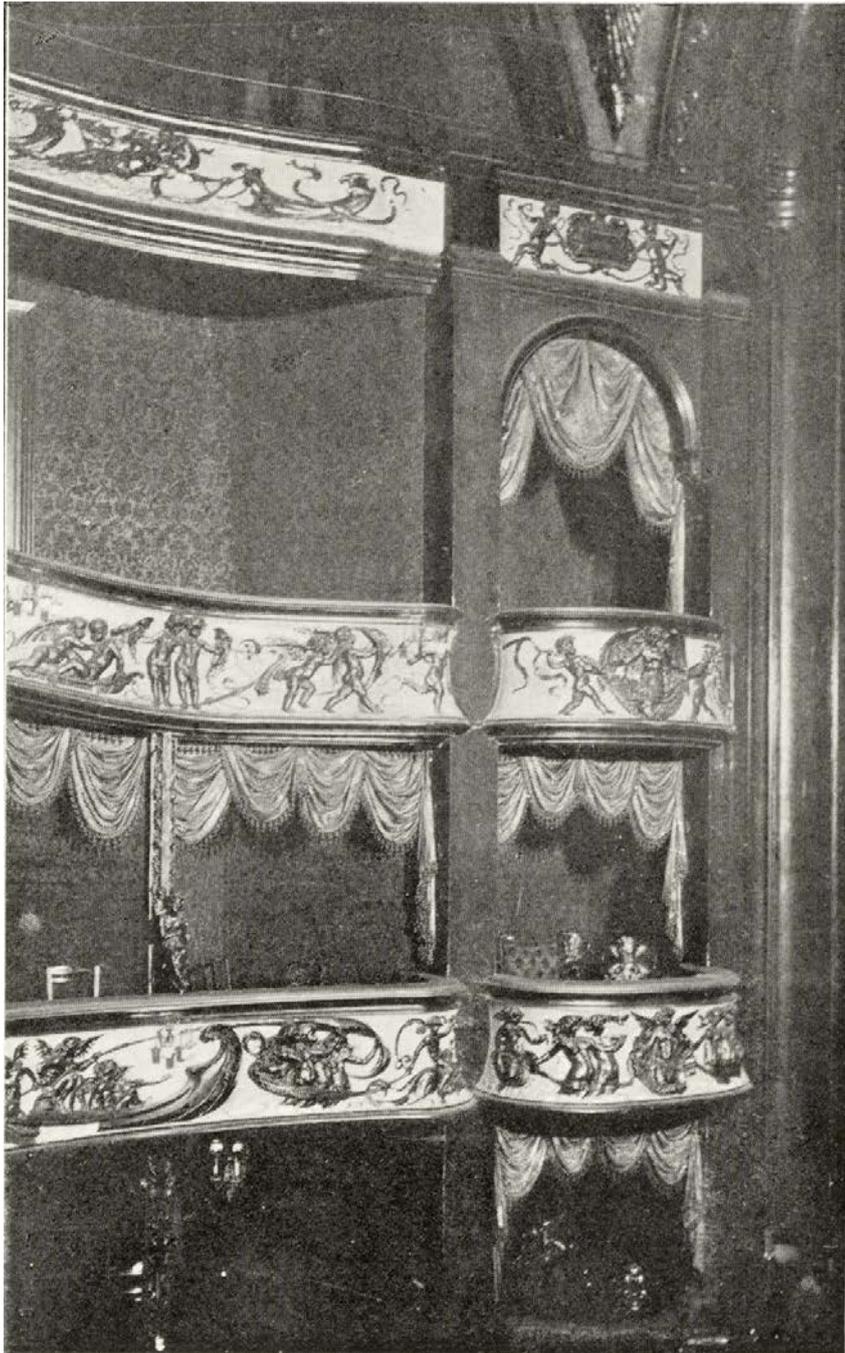


Fig. 46. Daly's Theatre. View of Proscenium, from Sachs – Woodrow, 1896, 38.

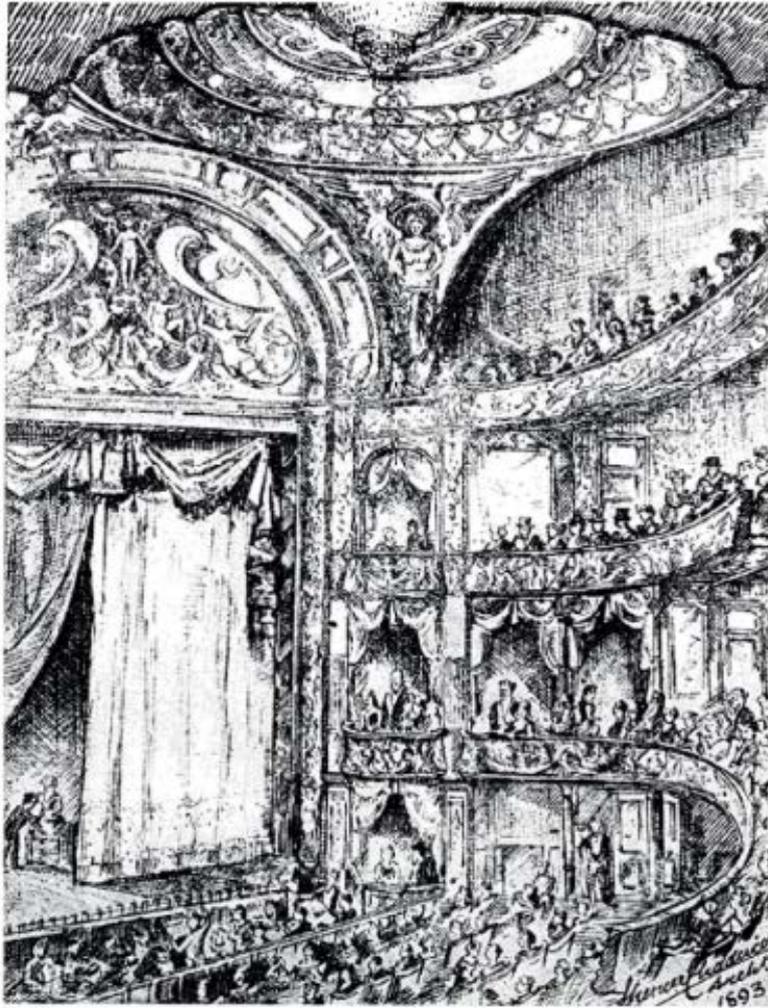


Fig. 47. Spencer Chadwick, Interior of Daly's Theatre in 1893, from *The Sketch*, 20 September 1893, 388, reproduced in Sheppard, 1966, Pl. 40(b).

Even supposing the design to have been, as claimed by the *Westminster Budget*, Lock's alone, Gilbert's having had any hand in the execution would remain a matter of some significance. It may be assumed that, granted the opportunity of experimenting with explicitly theatrical imagery in locations for which it was entirely apposite, and of doing so, moreover, in a relatively humble, inexpensive material that allowed a degree of liberty not given to the worker in bronze or marble, the sculptor could not help but return to the other branches of his work with a certain

‘boldness and freedom’ in his modelling, as Dormant has suggested, and a renewed interest in the various accoutrements there employed, including masks, putti, fish, mermaids, frames, stages, and so on – an ornamental vocabulary that Dormant characterises as belonging to ‘the Adam-revival repertoire of the stuccoist’ – though it is also apparent that his enthusiasm for the theatre was at this point no *new* obsession, but one of long standing now reaching a kind of culmination. As we have seen, masks in particular had already been employed in French monumental sculpture during the 1870s, and had already had an illustrious and in a sense unavoidable presence in Hellenistic art. As it happens, only the year before Gilbert made his first sketch for *Comedy and Tragedy*, in a paper on ‘The Picturesque in Sculpture’, given at the second Congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry (October to November 1889), D. W. Stevenson had shown an image of an antique statue of ‘a boy with a mask, the original of which’ he said ‘is even above the size of life’; addressing the question of how far comedic qualities might be acceptable in marble, Stevenson had observed that ‘although the subject might be termed humorous, the treatment is so large and the modelling so full as not only to justify the artist, but to render his work worthy of our praise.’²⁸⁵ If Gilbert had been present (he had been President of the Sculpture Section at the inaugural Congress the previous year, but no record exists of his having attended the 1889 meeting), and assuming he had not previously come across the sculpture in question, he must surely have been struck by the photograph and perhaps also Stevenson’s comments about it in relation to the fitness or otherwise of the inclusion in sculpture of a humorous element. The sculpture to which Stevenson

²⁸⁵ Stevenson, 1890, 133.

alluded was presumably the *Fanciullo con maschera* of the Capitoline Museums, a Roman work of the first century BC or AD, which had been copied in marble by Antonin Mercié during his first year at the Villa Medici (1869-70; this survives in a much mutilated form at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts), and which would (with some minor adaptation) be given a very prominent position in Alma-Tadema's *Unconscious Rivals* of 1893,²⁸⁶ though there are other examples of the infant with mask motif in ancient art, mainly appearing in relief form on Roman sarcophagi:²⁸⁷ a first-century figure in the round of a young faun wearing an oversized mask of Silenus, once in the Ludovisi collection and currently on loan to the Art Institute of Chicago, was drawn (*Erote con Maschera*, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, Roma, inv. D-FC126042) and etched by Stefano della Bella during the seventeenth century, and it is possible that Gilbert might have encountered a copy of the latter even if he had no knowledge of the sculpture itself. There are, however, many other sources from which the sculptor might have been able to derive such imagery. By coincidence a late fifteenth-century Florentine bronze plaquette that features the motif was acquired by the South Kensington Museum in 1891 at the same time that Gilbert was working on *Comedy and Tragedy* (inv. 81-1891); similar iconography is relatively widespread in the drawings of sixteenth-century Renaissance artists like Girolamo Mocetto and Amico Aspertini (see, respectively, inv. 5072r – also attributed to Mantegna – and inv. 4335 in the Louvre), and would retain a certain popularity throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

²⁸⁶ The painter would include the same sculpture in 1897's *Watching*, smaller in scale and apparently of silver or silvered bronze: see Prettejohn, 2017, 107.

²⁸⁷ These are present in major Roman collections (Albani, Mattei, Capitoline). A certain amount of scholarship has been devoted to the child-with-comic-mask motif, including Deonna, 1916, 74-97; Hadermann-Misguisch, 1982, 513-23; Dempsey, 2001, 99, 256 n. 44.

thanks to the Flemish sculptor François Duquesnoy's much copied *Bacchanale d'enfants avec une chèvre* (1626, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome) and Poussin's directly contemporary *Bacchanale d'enfants à la chèvre* (1626, Palazzo Barberini, Rome), derived apparently from a sarcophagus in the Giustiniani collection. In most of these examples, the infant uses the comic mask itself to frighten his companions, meaning that a sort of irony or double intention is already present in the conventionally imagined scenario, which is perhaps only half humorous even without the additional element signifying a 'tragic' reality behind the façade.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ In Duquesnoy's hands, the mask is itself explicitly goatlike, and the target of the prank seems to be rather the he-goat than the putti clustered round him. This portion of the marble is unfortunately damaged, but the action is clear enough and even more so in the many later copies or reworkings of the subject.



Fig. 48. *Fanciullo con maschera*, Roman, First-century BC or AD, Marble, Musei Capitolini, Rome.



Fig. 49. Stefano della Bella, A child playing with a comic mask, c. 1660, Etching, Metropolitan Museum, New York.



Fig. 50. Young Satyr Wearing a Theatrical Mask of Silenos, Roman, *c.* First century, 584cm, Private collection, currently on loan to the Art Institute of Chicago.

In the event, Gilbert opted with *Comedy and Tragedy* to substitute the milder bee-sting for the arrow wound, which might have spelled tragedy indeed, though the change by no means diminished the implied association with the god of love: Gilbert was clear in conversation with Joseph Hatton that the bee was intended as ‘the symbol of Love’, emphasising at once the personal character of the experience embodied in the statuette and suggesting for it a broader application as a ‘a symbol of our lives’. ‘I was stung by that bee,’ he said, ‘typified by my love for my art, a

consciousness of its incompleteness'.²⁸⁹ Earlier, in the *Fawcett Memorial*, Gilbert had used the beehive as a symbol of industry, in accordance with tradition, but the association of the single bee especially with love, or rather the god of love, also has a certain pedigree. The motif was, again, a familiar part of the symbolic vocabulary used in contemporary French sculpture, and Gilbert must certainly have known Jean-Antoine-Marie Idrac's delicate *Amour piqué* (1876), first shown at the Salon of 1877, while Gilbert was in Paris (the 1882 marble version would subsequently be purchased for the Luxembourg Museum in 1883): in this, the young god of love raises his right leg in shock at the sudden pain caused by a bee on his foot, but, distracted, steps with his left on a rose, and receives another prick from its thorns. The motif of Eros experiencing such an approximation of the stinging pain he is accustomed to inflict on others is authentically antique, derived ultimately from the *Anacreontea* (Fragment 35), where the god refers to the creature as a 'winged snake', and from Theocritus (*Idyll* 19), and it remained popular in both literary and visual forms during the Renaissance; the best known treatments of the subject now are those of Lucas Cranach, painted from 1525 onwards. It is most likely, however, that Gilbert first came across the story, along with the association between the bee and the god of love, via Idrac's statue.

²⁸⁹ Hatton, 1903, 11-12.



Fig. 51. Jean-Antoine-Marie Idrac, *Amour piqué*, 1876, Bronze, Life-size, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille.

More immediate still was the impact on Gilbert of an ambitious sculptural group that appeared at the Salon of 1878, the work of the great engraver-illustrator Gustave Doré and one of the most important explorations of the winged-Victory-supporting-a-dying-man theme after Mercié's sensationally successful *Gloria Victis* of 1874. Gilbert later claimed that at the time of modelling the first version of his *Kiss of Victory* in 1878 he had not yet seen Doré's *Gloire étouffant le Génie*, but freely admitted that he had heard and been inspired by the title, reported to him (as he recounted) as *Le Baiser de la Gloire*; lending some appearance of truth to this retrospective account is the fact that Gilbert seems originally to have called his own group *The Kiss of Glory* rather than of *Victory*, though in describing the work he referred to the winged figure interchangeably as *Glory* and *Victory* at this early stage. Gilbert told Joseph Hatton that upon seeing Doré's group *after the event* he was satisfied regarding the independence of his own conception:

On the next day I went to the Salon and saw the actual thing, which was so different from my sketch that I determined to carry out my idea, so enamoured was I of the subject. I may remark that Doré's chief figure was the familiar one of the French soldier of the period, with his chassepot.²⁹⁰

Perhaps Gilbert's memory simply failed him here. The swooning *génie* of Gustave Doré's model was not a soldier but a poet wrapped in laurel as well as the arms of *la Gloire*, with a lyre and a wreath at his feet; there was no rifle, and no kiss, though, incidentally, Doré's group seems also to have influenced Christophe's rather eccentric *Baiser suprême* of 1891; in these three works, glory comes at a price,

²⁹⁰ Hatton, 1903, 9.

bringing death to the young man as well as everlasting fame: as Richard Dorment has pointed out, in Doré's group the figure of *la Gloire* is actually 'plunging a sword into the youth's side',²⁹¹ but in both later works the embrace itself brings death. Gilbert's inaccurate description of Doré's *Gloire* conflates elements from numerous other works of the period but fundamentally misrepresents the character of the named sculpture, presenting it as a work of national rather than private symbolism. The 'familiar' soldier with his chassepot would be represented memorably in Mercié's *Quand Même!* of 1882, and had been treated earlier in Falguière's *La Suisse accueille l'armée française* (1874, Salon 1875),²⁹² where his pose exactly mirrors that of Gilbert's expiring youth, including the expressively limp wrist and weakened legs – elements at once Michelangelesque and Christlike – that have been the subject of such extravagant speculation in relation to the *Kiss of Victory* and *Perseus Arming*.²⁹³ In both cases, and in keeping with the uniformed aspect of the victim of war, the place of the figure of Glory or Victory is given to a wholly benign representative of a nation or a region in traditional dress: Alsace in the former; Switzerland in the latter. Gilbert's youth, on the other hand, is not a poet, since he still holds, albeit slackly, the circular shield of vaguely Flaxmannian neoclassicism that had been carried with greater assurance by Thornycroft's prizewinning *Warrior* a few years earlier, but neither is this boyish hero an up to date representation of anything so national as, say, the collective fatalities of the British army. Gilbert's

²⁹¹ Dorment, 1985, 32.

²⁹² The bronze was commissioned by the city of Toulouse as a diplomatic gift to acknowledge Swiss support during the Franco-Prussian War. Models in terracotta and plaster are in Toulouse.

²⁹³ This limpness forms the basis of a chapter in Edwards, 2006, 19-55, but has no adequately demonstrated connection with satirical 'Aesthetic Teapots' by James Hadley, as there argued.

personal memorial to his brother Gordon – for this is what the *Kiss of Victory* was – was nevertheless strongly influenced by the varying treatments of the theme he had encountered in Paris.



Fig. 52. Alfred Gilbert, *The Kiss of Victory*, 1878-81, Marble, 147.3cm, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



Fig. 53. Gustave Doré, *La Gloire étouffant le Génie*, 1878, Plaster, 255cm, Musée Henri-Boez, Maubeuge.



Fig. 54. Alexandre Falguière, *La Suisse accueille l'armée française*, 1875, Bronze, Federal Art Collection of Switzerland, Bern.

Gilbert was not tremendously eager to overstate the importance for his own practice of the example set by French sculpture, and he had his own reasons for attempting to emphasise his own independence, but if an effort is made to combat a perceived Francocentric bias in art history by looking to diminish the pre-eminence of French sculptural output or to downplay its great and demonstrable influence,

there is an increased danger of obscuring many of the rich mythological and symbolic connotations that might have been taken for granted by someone like Gilbert. The symbolic elements that appeared in British sculpture during the late nineteenth century are always best read with an awareness of French prototypes, including from sculptors whose critical fortunes during the twentieth century have not been the same as Rodin's.

2.3. Gilbert, Nature and the Antique

Let us put mythology to one side – though not too far away – and turn to the controversial question of naturalism and the New Sculpture. In Beattie's view, the movement was gaining momentum in 1894, at precisely the point at which Gosse sensed rather a slowing down and the first signs of decadence. In a key passage, Beattie attacks Gosse's view of the movement, already dismissed as a 'fundamental misinterpretation of its character', by presenting a powerful but noticeably unequal contrast between his voice and her own description of Alfred Gilbert's Tomb of the Duke of Clarence (1892-1928):

In 1894 Gilbert exhibited another sketch model at the Academy, his first design for the Clarence Tomb at Windsor Castle [...]. No work produced at the end of the nineteenth-century defies more arrogantly than this extraordinary monument Gosse's statement, in the same year, that the first concern of the new generation was 'a reverent observation of nature'. The bronze effigy of the Duke of Clarence, unearthly with its ashen face and hands of marble, lies deeply embedded in a thicket of tortured bronze ornament, peopled by tiny,

vividly polychromed saints. There was little that the sculptor could have done to further remove the monument from ‘nature’ as the Victorians understood it.²⁹⁴

This is not so. Some distinction should, firstly, be made between the sketch model exhibited at the Academy in 1894 and the finished memorial itself – finished, in fact, only in the 1920s – though Claude Phillips’ description in 1894 of the grille surrounding the former as showing a licence ‘in the direction of only half-conventionalised natural forms’ might just as well be applied to the no less organic ‘tortured bronze ornament’ of the latter.²⁹⁵ Beattie recognises that the Clarence Memorial is, in a sense, exceptional – ‘[n]o work produced at the end of the nineteenth century defies more arrogantly [...] Gosse’s statement [...]’ – and this observation ought to bring the suitability of its appearance as a work representative of a movement into some question, but even here the argument is founded on a dubious assumption that observers during the 1890s would have been unable to see evidence of ‘nature’ or its study either in this work or its setting. More unfounded still is the assumption that the sculptor had been happy to leave nature behind in the search for his ideal. Reviewing the sculpture of the year for the *Magazine of Art*, Phillips described the grille, again, as showing ‘an approach in some instances to natural rather than genuinely architectural forms’, implying, like a modern Vitruvius, that the ornamentation was not, for his taste, solid and ‘conventionalised’ enough.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Beattie, 1983, 6.

²⁹⁵ Phillips, 1894, 482.

²⁹⁶ Phillips, 1895, 68.

Beattie uses the word ‘thicket’ metaphorically, yet the word is apposite in a more literal sense: Gilbert told Joseph Hatton in 1903 that the grille was inspired by ‘the traditional tree of Jesse—a kind of heraldic allusion to the ancestry and patron saints of the Prince and his house.’²⁹⁷ The saints themselves are founded, furthermore, on careful portrait studies of living models, that is to say, on precisely the ‘reverent observation of nature’ that Gosse had identified as an essential element in the New Sculpture, and one by no means irreconcilable with a subsequent process of reconfiguration and invention.

Benedict Read observes, while discussing Thornycroft’s *Mower*, that the ‘process of idealising the observation of nature’ exemplified by that work (as much as by Gilbert’s) was ‘a regular feature of formal art and comparable in principle with the practice of such arch neo-classicists of a previous generation as John Gibson.’²⁹⁸ In 1982’s *Victorian Sculpture*, Read had already shown that even Gibson’s extremely neoclassical and overtly Spinario-esque *Narcissus* (1838) had been inspired, in the first instance, by the sight of a real boy looking into a fountain near the Villa Medici in Rome, encountered while the sculptor was taking his usual morning walk on the Pincian Hill. ‘The action was perfect for a statue of Narcissus’, Gibson realised, ‘I looked well at him and impressed him upon my memory, immediately went to my studio and modelled a small sketch in clay of the action which I admired. Afterwards I modelled the figure life-size.’²⁹⁹ At about the same

²⁹⁷ Hatton, 1903, 27.

²⁹⁸ Read, 1992, 6.

²⁹⁹ Quoted in Read, 1982, 201.

time a similar Italian street-observed incident is said to have inspired the same sculptor's *Hunter and his Dog*,³⁰⁰ from which it is possible to draw a line of descent directly down to Thornycroft's *Artemis* and Bates' *Hounds in Leash*, however modified the treatment of the motif might be in these later groups. Gibson is quoted as having said that '[b]esides the study of the human form the true and diligent artist must carefully watch the movements of nature. These are of the greatest importance. By such observation he becomes original, and acquires simple, graceful, and natural action.' This is comparable with Brock's observation that '[m]en and women should be studied as they move about naturally. Gestures and actions should be observed and committed to memory.'³⁰¹ The same process was followed by Thornycroft, but also by Gilbert, who told Isabel McAllister many years later that as a young man travelling alone in Italy he had witnessed a scene similar to that described by Gibson:

Coming to a clear stream [McAllister paraphrases] he paused to regard a youth leaning over and very earnestly beholding his reflection as in a mirror. Here was Narcissus to the life, falling in love with his own image; mistaking it for that of a being surpassing all he could imagine of his own beauty.³⁰²

Gilbert did not, in the event, treat the subject, but his early mythological statuettes would certainly be infused with the kind of self-regarding mood and naturalism of pose and incident which can only come from such first-hand observation. Of the *Perseus*, Cosmo Monkhouse observed that '[e]verybody has seen other people hold

³⁰⁰ Eastlake, 1870, 79.

³⁰¹ See Sankey, 2012, 44.

³⁰² McAllister, 1929, 81.

themselves so, and bend the knee so, looking sidelong down at one foot, the whole body curved aside and balanced on the other.’ *Icarus* he found ‘not less easy and natural’, though possessing ‘deeper spiritual significance’ than the *Perseus*.³⁰³ The gesture given to the *Perseus* would certainly have been recognisable to Gibson, who had ‘frequently noticed women and girls in the streets stopping suddenly and turning round, looking backward over their shoulder at their heel—at the same time drawing their dress a little up.’ This ‘always very graceful’ action had formed the basis for his *Wounded Amazon* (conceived 1836),³⁰⁴ though in the final expression of the theme (finished 1853, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff) the element of torsion so strongly emphasised in the description and presumably explored in the original sketch in clay had been almost entirely slackened by the sculptor’s decision to lift the point of vulnerability and focus of attention from the back of the foot to the upper outer thigh, both to make the imagined scenario more legible from the front and to give the figure an impression of greater quietude and composure.

One point of difference between Gilbert’s approach and that of Gibson or Thornycroft was, initially, the extent to which idealisation of nature was to be admitted. Whereas Thornycroft’s *Mower* was modelled after more than one individual, Gilbert seems during the early 1880s to have regarded the amalgamation of numerous particularised traits drawn from diverse sources as an approach that could lead only to a false and conventional result, though he certainly freed himself

³⁰³ Monkhouse, 1889, 38.

³⁰⁴ Eastlake, 1870, 81.

from this notion in practice if not in theory as the years drew on. In 1901, during one of his Royal Academy lectures, Gilbert rounded on Gibson. It is recorded that:

Mr. Gilbert told the curious story of the way in which Gibson executed his well-known “Tinted Venus.” [1851-6] It was modelled in Rome, and the artist when at work had arranged on one side of him six of the most perfect models that could be found in the city, and on the other side casts of all the portions of antique Venuses that he had been able to discover. It is easy, knowing this, to understand why the appearance of the statue is somewhat conventional. Yet there are beauties in it, coupled, however, with many things that students should avoid.³⁰⁵

The story, adapted freely from the familiar tale of Zeuxis selecting the most beautiful features from the five most beautiful girls of Croton (Cicero, *De inventione* 2.1.1) suggests that Gilbert was more struck by the ‘conventional’ aspects of the sculpture’s form than the novel tinting of its surface; while he drew students’ attention to what he evidently regarded as a false form of idealism, he seems to have found it easy to overlook Gibson’s employment of a restrained process of polychromy altogether. This had been revolutionary in the 1850s and 60s, but would have seemed very moderate by the turn of the century. Gilbert’s attitude to idealism was at odds with the approach he attributed to Gibson: his own *Icarus* had apparently been produced from a single (Roman) model, as were the closely related figures of the early 1890s, *Anteros* and *Comedy and Tragedy*, discussed above.

³⁰⁵ Whitley, 1903, 544.

There was during the nineteenth century, among artists who had spent time in Italy, and especially in Rome, a firmly established association between ‘nature’ and the condition of the more or less rural Italian peasantry. The tourist and art student’s idea that Italian life – including Italian ‘street-life’ – was more natural than that in London or Paris has been seen as ‘slightly problematic’,³⁰⁶ but it was by no means uncomplimentary, and involved, furthermore, an escape from the artificiality and professionalism of the studio setting, conditions which can easily be thought of as unnatural; then again, an apparent closeness to nature may be as much a point of pride as a source of controversy. For Gibson, the streets of Rome were ‘a real academy’, at least in part because ‘[t]he inhabitants of warm climates are more free in their movements than those of cold countries.’ There it was ‘that the sculptor of the Dying Gladiator, and of the boy taking the thorn out of his foot, found these statues. It was there Praxiteles saw his young faun leaning against the trunk of a tree, and [Lysippus?] the Cupid bending his bow.’³⁰⁷ Gilbert described Italy as ‘enchanted to the painter’ on account of ‘the extreme luminosity of the atmosphere and sky, the peculiar colouring of the landscape, of soft madders and greys, rose and lilac,’ but also regarded the people nurtured in this environment, as Charles Le Brun and Winckelmann had the Greeks, as accordingly ‘magnificent’, perfectly corresponding with the great beauty of their surroundings.³⁰⁸ Nor was the reputation for higher beauty and ease of pose and gesture any the less noticeable in a less natural environment. Thornycroft told Harry How in 1893 about the settlements of

³⁰⁶ Wagner, 1986, 143.

³⁰⁷ Eastlake, 1870, 80.

³⁰⁸ McAllister, 1929, 82. On Le Brun, see Lichtenstein, 2008, 37.

Italian models in London: '[t]hey are unquestionably the best models', he insisted, patriotically (or perhaps diplomatically) adding, however, that he 'would not say one word against your English model.'³⁰⁹ If Thornycroft would not, others would; Spielmann observed rather bluntly in 1901 that 'the English peasantry, the men and women of the fields, have little of the sculpturesqueness of others, such as those of Brittany. Still less does the dress of society lend itself to the needs of the sculptor'.³¹⁰

Gilbert told McAllister of another encounter or visual impression of 'nature', thus conceived, again dating to his time in Italy, that would subsequently become associated in his mind with an existing artwork. Again, water is involved, and again this element duplicates and poeticises the ostensibly mundane goings on occurring above and in its midst:

The prosaic task of washing his clothes led him to another stream, crystal clear, where he saw a group of young girls with skirts tucked up, wading in the stream, that might have inspired most fascinating fantasies. In later years Burne-Jones painted the "Mirror of Venus", which reminded Gilbert very strongly of this very same scene.³¹¹

This anecdote, though a mere fragment, inevitably recalls the fabulistic accounts current in the early to mid-century in which Poussin, the great hero of French

³⁰⁹ How, 1893, 279.

³¹⁰ Spielmann, 1901, 2.

³¹¹ The first and second (principal) versions of *The Mirror of Venus* had in fact been carried out in oils, respectively, between 1866 and 1877 (Private Collection), and between 1873 and 1877 (Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon). The latter was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, before Gilbert had been to Italy, but it may be the case that sculptor only saw the picture later.

classical painting prior to Ingres, observes nature on the desolate banks of the Tiber, not only studying the stones and vegetation discoverable there, but also finding the human material for his composed Biblical subjects in the real groupings and gestures of everyday life. Many French painters, from Corot to Gustave Moreau, had been attracted to the so-called *promenade du Poussin*; Léon Benouville had composed *Le Poussin sur les Bords du Tibre, trouvant la composition de son Moïse sauvé des eaux* (1855) and planned a picture of *Poussin concevant son Eliezer et Rebecca* (c. 1855). What comparable opportunities could London offer? Phil May, a prolific sketcher, once announced in conversation with Brock – who alone of his peers seems to have known Italy only second-hand – that ‘[t]here is no studio to equal a railway station’.³¹² Less evocative, maybe, than the banks of the Tiber, and imbued in all probability with something more of the hurry and bustle of rush hour, the principle remains essentially the same as far as naturalism of movement, action, gesture, and grouping – that is to say, truth in the *ensemble* with or without truth in smaller particulars – can be considered an important province of artistic study. As for those details pertaining to the ‘selection of type’, the preference for Italian models – even including in some cases an element of Italian costume³¹³ – was common to all associated with the new movement.

³¹² See Brock, 2012, 44.

³¹³ As in Gilbert’s *Study of a Head* (1883), where the headscarf that covers the hair is perhaps rather observed from life and unomitted than affected – as the conventional explanation runs – solely for the sake of Michelangelian grandeur. This directness and simplicity is generally not present in the same degree in the more overtly English subjects treated by the sculptors of this generation; it is quite at odds, for instance, with the comparatively contrived headgear invented by Gilbert to cover the head of the otherwise simply attired and disposed child mourner of the memorial to Randolph Caldecott in St Paul’s a few years later (1887-95, modified 1900).

What is clear is that Gosse's recognition of nature as the principal objective of the movement offered an interpretation of the dominant trends in recent sculptural practice that was comprehensible and acceptable to his peers, one with roots firmly established in nineteenth-century writing on art, and in 'classical' precedent, and therefore all the more persuasive. It does not follow, however, that his interpretation was, for this reason, necessarily wrong. That it was enveloped in terminology familiar to the sculptors themselves and drawing on the theoretical background in which they had been trained is, rather, a strength, and one that is not shared with later, revisionist approaches to the New Sculpture that seek, however valiantly, to integrate the study of late nineteenth-century art with later work produced in opposition to it by applying to the 1880s and 1890s forced parallels or anachronistic terminology.

No comprehensive definition of nature 'as the Victorians understood it' can be given here, since the term had then, as now, no single meaning or implication, but it must be stressed that throughout her account of the New Sculpture, Beattie applies excessively tight constraints upon not only the terms 'naturalism' and 'nature', but also 'realism', forcing these to express something considerably narrower than what was really understood by their usage in France and Britain during the late nineteenth century. Harry Quilter warned that 'these words Realism and Idealism have got mixed up in a good many people's minds with imagination and the lack thereof; till, perhaps, most people who use them in art, give to every work which is at all poetical or imaginative the name of ideal, and to every literal copy of Nature the name of

real.’³¹⁴ To French critics, there was not necessarily a distinction to be made at all between the physical and what might be considered the metaphysical,³¹⁵ as far as concerned the question of giving the impression of animation to the inanimate, and of a living, pulsing, and thinking interior to an otherwise lifeless exterior. ‘Nous avons senti avec Rude, avec Carpeaux,’ wrote one of these critics, Jacques de Biez, ‘que le Beau moderne est d’essence mouvante. Les gestes des statues, figés jadis, racontent le mouvement; leurs yeux parlent au nom d’une âme éclairée, leurs muscles jouent normalement sous le marbre ou le bronze, et dans leurs membres, où rien ne semble plus rigide, un sang chaud paraît circuler.’³¹⁶ From this perspective, the mind, imagination, and spirit all belong, as much as the convincing delineation of muscle and bone, firmly within the province of naturalism. All these qualities of movement had already been detected by nineteenth-century critics in ancient sculpture, although a distinction had been drawn between the representation of human and animal form: Ernest Beulé had praised the signs of life visible in a fragment of a horse’s hind leg from the west pediment of the Parthenon, observing that ‘le jeu des muscles, les saillies des veines sont rendus avec une vérité et un fini incroyables’, but added that ‘les dieux et les héros divinisés n’avaient rien de la grossièreté des organes humains: l’immortalité les animait d’un soufflé subtil et éthéré.’³¹⁷ We might compare Watts’ similar observation that the Greeks ‘made

³¹⁴ Quilter, 1892, 205-6.

³¹⁵ Note, however, that Quilter differentiates the ‘artistical’ from the ‘metaphysical’ sense of these words: Quilter, 1892, 205.

³¹⁶ de Biez, 1889, 323.

³¹⁷ Beulé, 1853-4 II, 87.

much of the chamber of the heart, and little of the kitchen of the body',³¹⁸ though this was in reference rather to the muscles of the stomach than to the circulatory system. In fact, the distinction is not so clear in some of the pedimental fragments of the Parthenon; Helios in particular, rising from the sea in the leftmost angle of the east pediment, arms tautened by the horses pulling at the reins, is animated as much by muscle and vein as by unearthly waftings. What could provide a more succinct summary of the essential qualities and aims of the more dramatic productions of the New Sculpture than the fragment of this god in the British Museum? The basic motif of animal passion and restraint, at once physical and mental, recurs throughout the sculpture of the 1880s and 1890s and well into the twentieth century; the intensely expressive naturalism explored during the period, too, is largely foreshadowed here.

The establishment of a connection between the New Sculpture and International Symbolism matters because it allows for a paving of the way – whether in stone or palms – for triumphant modernist abstraction, dressing up what might otherwise have seemed to twentieth or twenty-first century eyes a backward-looking, revivalist movement responsible for nothing more than an unsuccessful vision of modernity as a more respectable forerunner for subsequent art-historical developments. The path between Symbolism and modernism is not in fact a smooth one, as might be gleaned from Roger Fry's criticism of the 'worn out symbolism and laboured allegory' in Brock's *Victoria Memorial*, precisely the aspects which Beattie would like to see as derived ultimately from Alfred Stevens.³¹⁹ To many observers

³¹⁸ Watts, 1912 III, 7.

³¹⁹ Quoted in Sankey, 2012, 112.

during the earlier part of the twentieth century, it was rather the unaffectedly direct and natural than the elaborately emblematic that seemed most modern in the sculpture leading up to and following the turn of the century; that is to say, the shifting and treacherous concept of modernity was often conceived rather as a triumph of the down-to-earth labourer in his clogs over the airy symbolic personages, unchained from material reality, than the opposite. Gilbert no less than Brock would come in for criticism: the American art historian, Chandler Rathfon Post, for instance, wrote in 1921 that '[t]he flatness of Gilbert's symbolism is well exemplified by the statue surmounting [the Shaftesbury Memorial], a blindfold Love who shoots his arrows indiscriminately to signify the impartial kindness of the British peer.'³²⁰ Beattie's account of the New Sculpture was pitched for an audience more sympathetic to Symbolism as a kind of proto-modernism and sought to stress, therefore, the formal characteristics of Gilbert's sculpture in particular which seemed most consistent with twentieth-century abstraction; she has since found a degree of support for this approach in contributions from other scholars working in the field, especially David Getsy,³²¹ even if the focus has in general shifted gradually away from a Symbolist context towards a more native Aesthetic one where, it may be, the idea of the purely formal triumphing over precise meanings may seem to make more sense. Still, the temptation to discard too-solid 'naturalism' as a pursuit at odds with the forward-looking and suggestive indistinctness of later abstraction is one of which we should be wary, since the division between one camp and another was not necessarily so stark as has often been suggested. Some of the most lucid scholarship

³²⁰ Post II, 214.

³²¹ See especially Getsy, 2004, *passim*, esp. 87-117.

on the subject has appeared, perhaps unsurprisingly, in relation to nineteenth-century landscape painting, and it is worth repeating Pierre Miquel's observation, made in 1976 about the work of such figures as Gustave Moreau and Puvis de Chavannes (Symbolist heroes), that 'à tort ou à raison, la critique considère ces nouvelles formes d'expression comme plus ou moins en opposition avec le Naturalisme, augmentant donc par rétroaction son potentiel. Nous nous étonnons moins à present du *potentiel* conquérant du naturalisme.' In a footnote, Miquel clarified his own view that the supposed opposition was exaggerated 'car elles contiennent bien les deux éléments de base du Naturalisme, le parti pris au banal, la recherché du caractère par le style et l'idéalisme.'³²²

Beattie recognises in the base of Gilbert's Shaftesbury Memorial (1886-93) 'an attempt to convey pure feeling in sculptural terms', and makes the claim that the upper basin reaches 'towards abstraction' and 'absolute expressive form'.³²³ Now, this is vague – perhaps suitably so, considering the specific example invoked, where recognisable forms emerge and recede, now clear, now indistinct in the projecting masses and shady recesses alike, and it is difficult to obtain intellectual purchase on the signification of this curved lip, that helmeted putto, amid the brazen twilight of more or less indeterminate yet familiar organic form. In fact, the result might reasonably be thought of as too accidental to allow any serious conclusions to be drawn from it: Gilbert's own feeling that the completed memorial as a whole represented 'the utter failure of [his] intention and design' is well known, though it

³²² Miquel, 1976, 111.

³²³ Beattie, 1983, 218; see also 143, 180.

has not been sufficiently well understood that the enlarged and empty cartouches on the upper part of the fountain amount conspicuously to one of the ways in which the monument falls short of what had been proposed, and indeed, commissioned;³²⁴ that the sculptor had intended to place on each face of the octagonal cistern – Beattie’s ‘upper basin’ – a bas-relief relating some scene or aspect of the life of the Earl of Shaftesbury, and, moreover, had actually got as far as modelling and abandoning the planned panels, has been quietly and conveniently brushed under the carpet. Spielmann, who came close to mourning their loss openly, wrote that these panels were ‘beautiful’.³²⁵ They certainly cannot have added up to a merely prosaic affair of the ‘frock-coat and trousers’ order, but might plausibly have made a veritable pulpit of the monument as a whole. The actual result – a *reduction* of the true expressive potential of the cistern’s eight faces to a repetitive collection of vacant frames – is surely to be counted as one of many regrettable steps in the evolution of this monument.

³²⁴ Gilbert, quoted in Dormont, 1986, 137.

³²⁵ See Spielmann, 1893, 138; Spielmann, 1901, 82; Dormont, 1986, 138.



Fig. 55. Alfred Gilbert, Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, 1886-93, Bronze and aluminium, Picadilly Circus, London.

In nineteenth-century art-criticism, definite ‘expression’ is sometimes opposed to looser ‘suggestion’, and there can be little doubt that Gilbert’s work moved in the direction of the latter; still, the sculptor certainly would not have used the term ‘abstract’ to describe his own work, but, like most of his contemporaries, would rather have referred to the ‘conventionalisation of nature’, which Elizabeth Rycroft has roundly dismissed as ‘that rather tedious theme so beloved by 19th

century design educationalists'.³²⁶ We have already seen that the grille surrounding the *Clarence Memorial* was described by Claude Phillips as insufficiently conventionalised – novel, that is to say, in its adherence to rather than its departure from the organic.

Gilbert told Joseph Hatton in 1903 that he had been looking during the 1880s to break away from 'mere material and matter-of-fact expression' in his art. For Beattie and others, Gilbert's meaning here, and in other comments concerning his ornamental experiments, is uncommonly transparent. He *must* be talking about abstraction, or if not abstraction, at very least 'the possibility of taking sculpture beyond the figurative towards pure expressive form.'³²⁷ Yet the sculptor explained that this was 'an attempt to incorporate life with realistic representation and the romantic side, which in painting always holds good, and in sculpture is too often conspicuous by its absence.'³²⁸ For Read, the 'liberation of sculpture from material convention' was to be effected rather through the polychrome and mixed-media productions of the 1890s than through the abandonment of natural form, implying a rather drastically different interpretation of what it was that Gilbert, Bates, Frampton, and younger associates felt to be the most restrictive aspect of their craft, though even the focus on *couleur* among these sculptors can be understood as involving a kind of emancipation from the matter-of-fact, in so far as the term implies an increased sensitivity to and preoccupation with the tonal values of merely suggested

³²⁶ Rycroft, 1989, 19.

³²⁷ Beattie, 1983, 143.

³²⁸ Hatton, 1903, 11.

colours, together with a more interpretative and painterly attitude towards the literal form of represented objects.

It is worth bearing in mind that Gilbert, consummate workman as he was, nevertheless became all too aware of his shortcomings during his days in Paris – as a student at the *École des Beaux-Arts* he found himself no longer, as it were, top of the class, and a number of years would pass before he would be able to feel himself beginning to obtain any eminence of the kind for which his ambition had shaped him. Yet Gilbert remained, by all accounts, ever his own harshest critic, and at the height of his powers remained frustrated by the limitations to his technical abilities that he alone could judge best. When, in 1886, Gilbert was introduced for the first time to Burne-Jones at the Grosvenor Gallery (a chance encounter), Coutts Lindsay, in doing the introducing, told the latter to ‘[m]ake allowance for his [Gilbert’s] French training, and if you find its influence excessive, remember it, like all preliminary instruction, is only a means to an end.’ Gilbert recalled many years later that ‘Burne-Jones, so far from objecting to French training, was quite envious of the advantages I had profited by my study at the Beaux Arts. He deplored the fact that he had never enjoyed any initiatory teaching—to which Coutts Lindsay replied, ‘Your strength lies in what you call lack of such training. If you had been highly trained, technically, you might not have proved your right to your personal achievements.’³²⁹ Later, when visiting Burne-Jones’ studio, Gilbert saw the *Briar Rose* cycle and found in it ‘a revelation of the power of human genius to assert itself as a teaching

³²⁹ McAllister, 1929, 145.

factor of the potentiality of imagination over material effort.³³⁰ In 1888 he wrote that:

Now and again we are struck by some work which, though lacking in the ordinary qualities of execution and expression to be found in the average student's work, contents us, and we are at a loss to understand where the charm lies. This peculiar quality must be then that subtle and discriminating power indispensable for the production of a perfect work of art, the assertion of superiority of mind over matter, and its presence in a work, however lacking in technical excellence, holds us, and asserts the individuality of the artist.³³¹

By 'mere material', then, Gilbert meant little more than technical dexterity, a quality with which he was not entirely happy to be associated too closely because of its negative connotations of trickery and superficiality. Gilbert's comments on the subject recall Ruskin's observation, made in 1876, that 'all Giotto's 'weaknesses' (so-called,) were merely absences of material science', and that 'he was in the make of him, and contents, a very much stronger and greater man than Titian'.³³² There is reason to believe that Gilbert perceived in certain circles a slight stigma attached to the Beaux-Arts training he had received and felt the necessity of proving, like Burne-Jones, his right to his personal achievements. To external observers (as well as a few internal ones), technical dexterity was rarely judged to be an attribute of the British School. In 1893, the American critic William Walton identified in the work of all the

³³⁰ McAllister, 1929, 147.

³³¹ Gilbert, 1888, 527.

³³² Ruskin, *Works* XXIX, 91.

leading figures of the movement that would soon be named the New Sculpture – Ford, Thornycroft, Gilbert, Pegram, Brock, and Bates – ‘that sort of awkwardness, that striving to break the fetters of the commonplace and not knowing how, that stumbling over your own insufficient artistic equipment, which might be said broadly to be the main, leading characteristic of all British art.’³³³ This kind of criticism must have stung, but the sculptor also would have agreed to a considerable degree with such an assessment, as he would echo Walton’s phrasing a decade later in conversation with Hatton, when remembering the conception of his *Perseus Arming*: ‘[a]s at that time my whole thoughts were of my artistic equipment for the future,’ he said, ‘I conceived the idea that Perseus before becoming a hero was a mere mortal, and that he had to look to his equipment.’ The sculptor was, however, at pains to make clear that he was still, in 1903, having to look to his equipment, continuing that ‘[t]hat is a presage of my life and work at that time. And I think the wing still ill-fits me, the sword is blunt, and the armour dull as my own brain’.³³⁴

‘As he grows older,’ wrote Spielmann and Layard some years later in a different context, ‘even the artist who is primarily technician and purist is apt to ask, ‘What does technical excellence matter so long as the gist of the thing is there? Is not that a finer thing which convinces us from the instinct of the painter than that which satisfies us from his knowledge of it?’³³⁵ Gilbert was already thinking this way in the mid 1880s, though McAllister would later portray him as a master of his materials;

³³³ Walton, 1893 III, 18.

³³⁴ Hatton, 1903, 10.

³³⁵ Spielmann – Layard, 1905, 6-7.

in her view it was ‘this mastery over his materials that proclaims the master mind.’³³⁶ In his pursuit of absolute fidelity to nature and technical excellence, Gilbert had begun to see in Watts and Burne-Jones imaginative qualities allied with *gaucherie* of expression – power of thought, poetry, and conception exceeding the technical abilities of these painters – and these qualities, restricted by necessity to those who might be described as naïve in technical matters, he now desired above all to attain in his own work, not by abandoning the observation of natural objects, or indeed, of matter itself, but by seeking laboriously to re-establish himself, like Watts, Burne-Jones or, indeed, his friend and collaborator, Ford, as a self-taught artist, not exactly naïve or abstract in the sense now commonly understood, but turning this study of nature to different ends. Chief among these was the invention of a new ornamental vocabulary in the spirit now of flamboyant Gothic, now of late Mannerist or Baroque architecture,³³⁷ sometimes drawing on oriental forms, but never inorganic. This is a cardinal point; that if Gilbert was reaching towards abstraction, it was of an *organic* kind. Ruskin had argued in *The Two Paths* that:

[i]f the designer of furniture, of cups and vases, of dress patterns, and the like, exercises himself continually in the imitation of natural form in some leading division of his work; then, holding by this stem of life, he may pass down into all kinds of merely geometrical or formal design with perfect safety, and with noble results. [...] But once quit hold of this living stem, and set yourself to the

³³⁶ McAllister, 1929, 169.

³³⁷ The armour of Gilbert’s *St George* was described by Claude Phillips as having ‘a luxuriance of *contourné* design suggesting now the extravagance of the fifteenth century gothic, now that of the rococo’: Phillips, 1896, 533.

designing of ornamentation, either in the ignorant play of your own heartless fancy, as the Indian does, or according to received application of heartless laws, as the modern European does, and there is but one word for you—Death:—death of every healthy faculty, and of every noble intelligence, incapacity of understanding one great work that man has ever done, or of doing anything that it shall be helpful for him to behold.³³⁸

Leighton, in whose lectures Ruskin remains always a conspicuous unnamed presence, and often a foil, sounded a sceptical note in his address before the first Congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry, in Liverpool, in 1888: ‘I say, then,’ he announced, ‘that in a work of art the elements of emotion based on human sympathies are not of a loftier order than those arising out of abstract sublimity or loveliness of form, but that the presence of these elements in such a work, while not raising it as an artistic creation, does impart to it an added power of appeal, and that, therefore, a work in which these elements are combined will be with the great majority of mankind a more potent engine of delight than one which should rest exclusively on abstract qualities.’³³⁹ This is at once a more nuanced and a more convoluted argument than that concerning the place of the human figure in art given in the first of Leighton’s addresses to the students of the Royal Academy nine years earlier (1879), and in some respects it may even seem a repudiation of the point of view then put forward in such decisive terms: in that address, Leighton had expressed admiration for

³³⁸ Ruskin, *The Two Paths*.

³³⁹ Barrington II, 356.

abstract qualities in ‘Arab and Persian decoration’ and ‘Architecture’ more broadly, but firmly asserted in relation to sculpture specifically that ‘[Man] is and must be, the end and the means of whatever is greatest in the plastic Arts—as in every Art that tells of him; in the Art of Phidias, in the Art of Leonardo, in the Art of Homer, in the Art of Shakespeare’.³⁴⁰ The earlier view had not been so very far from Ruskin, yet allowing for the fact that the point would be couched in more cautious – even defensive – rhetoric in the 1888 speech, Leighton was in reality quite consistent in advocating the employment of the human figure. As for ‘mere material’ and ‘materialism’, Leighton probably believed himself an advocate too of these if he still maintained the views he had stated in a highly rhetorical early letter to his former master, Steinle:

one all too easily loses sight of the infinite importance of a complete material representation, which is always the special mark of the *artist*; I often see with amazement how even quite clever people behave in this respect. It has quite a plausible sound if one says [...] “Away with materialism! Pfui! The great artist is he who has the most ideas!” Stop, my little man! Do you not feel what a store of artistic cowardice lies behind your words? Ah, behind so broad a shield you can elude all the difficulties of your work! He who has the most *ideas* is first only as the greatest *poet* or even *philosopher*! He only is an *artist* who can *set* his ideas *forth*. *Art* means the power to do.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Leighton, 1906, 16-17.

³⁴¹ Barrington I, 238

With some shrewdness here Leighton had envisioned the rhetorical pose of anti-materialism as a kind of prop in itself, behind which all kinds of technical deficiencies could be covered or evaded. His own insistence upon the material aspect of the artist's work, on the other hand, can be seen as involving a certain protective reticence on the subject of the theoretical implications of his own work, not to say reserve, since Leighton was, as we have seen, very much concerned with 'human sympathies', although the artist and his work have so frequently been caricatured as detached and emotionless. Gilbert's similarly figurative talk in 1903 of 'equipment', especially in relation to *Perseus Arming*, suggests that the artist had at one time, at least, been keen to confront certain material realities head on, alongside 'human sympathies' and without the advantage of any such shield as that which Leighton had recognised and sought to assail in the passage above; it is noticeable that Gilbert's one-sandaled and apparently underprepared Perseus – a symbol of the nascent artist – had himself, quite against convention, gone without one of these.

Even at its most eccentric or unfamiliar, the root of Gilbert's ornamental work remained always in natural observation. Adrian Bury echoed Ruskin in claiming that his uncle 'could never have handled decorative form and made it so lively and interesting without complete knowledge of human form.'³⁴² The claim made in recent scholarship that the human figure, and especially the nude, disappeared from Gilbert's work is greatly exaggerated, though its function changed and it became at times less recognisable in the midst of a flowing, eclectic ensemble, where its forms were partially hidden or rendered chimerical, but it remained often the jewel at the

³⁴² Bury, 1952, 42.

centre of the elaborate settings which increasingly consumed the artist's attention. Even as a student, apparently, Gilbert had viewed the figure as 'the brightening of a composition, a note of exclamation, nothing more',³⁴³ but in late 1892, on the other hand, in the context of snowballing criticism of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, he wrote to Spielmann to defend himself with the following forthright declaration: 'I understand Mr Williams' [either H. R. Williams, Honorary Secretary of the Shaftesbury Memorial Committee, previously a defender and promoter of the work, at least publicly, or more likely J. C. Williams, who would later purchase from the sculptor replicas of some of the (decorously clad) figures on the Tomb of the Duke of Clarence] scruples about the nude, and respect them although I do not share them.'³⁴⁴

In the eyes of many admirers this was precisely where his sculpture excelled: it was, for instance, claimed of him that he was capable even of '[investing] the bare knee with expression and vital identity';³⁴⁵ at the Royal Academy almost a decade later Gilbert himself stressed to students that 'the hands, the feet—every adjunct—[should] help in the expression of sentiment.'³⁴⁶ We may judge for ourselves whether the webs of waving lines in which the figure was sometimes apparently lost, and in which symbolism was often actually less apparent than naturalism, are more or less emotionally affecting than the relatively simple but poignant studies of the

³⁴³ McAllister, 1929, 28.

³⁴⁴ Gilbert to Spielmann, 4th August, 1892: Royal Academy, SP/7/26. The identification of 'Mr Williams' as J. C. Williams is founded on the assumption that Gilbert's following remark – 'I must see then, if I can devise something clothed' – is not wholly sarcastic.

³⁴⁵ Beckles-Wilson, 1893, 119.

³⁴⁶ Whitley, 1903, 548.

human figure with which Gilbert had begun. No ‘geometrical nightmare’ occurred, and there was no absolute desolation to be found in Gilbert’s ornamental landscapes because he remained always concerned, as he told Hatton he had been at the outset of his career, echoing Leighton’s phrasing, with ‘human sympathies’, if not always with the human element.

Technique faltered from time to time, as in the St Albans Reredos, where mere material proved unyielding to the sculptor’s search for less matter-of-fact expression, or in the many works Gilbert destroyed throughout his career as not meeting his exacting standards; for despite technical failures which do not assist the imaginative triumph of such works, Gilbert remained for the greater part deeply committed to the idea of faultless execution, and to the realistic representation in some sense of nature, however rearranged or simplified. In response to questioning on the subject, Gilbert told Hatton in 1903 that ‘Art is not Nature; and Nature can never be Art,’ parroting a saying that was relatively commonplace around the turn of the century – exactly the same assertion was made, for instance, by Walter Crane³⁴⁷ – but in seeking (*ex tempore*) to elucidate his meaning further he still highlighted the essential importance of nature for the artist: ‘Art is merely a conventional means of transcribing and translating the effect and spirit of Nature upon its observer into conventional form, and which is surely the only means of transmitting its impression.’³⁴⁸ This is fully in line with the Romantic creed Gilbert might be expected, from his other statements, to expound, and compatible, too, with the views

³⁴⁷ Crane, 1911, 121.

³⁴⁸ Hatton, 1903, 24.

of Ruskin and the man Gilbert credited (somewhat mysteriously) as his own painting master, Giovanni Costa: the latter, also, was of the opinion that nature must be interpreted by the artist: 'il vero non dice nulla se non è veduto attraverso il sentimento de pensiero.'³⁴⁹

Bertram Mackennal, who has often been associated with the New Sculpture, would later offer a different version of the 'nature is not art' trope, declaring that Rodin's work had taught him that art is 'something grander and superimposed on nature',³⁵⁰ a viewpoint that has perhaps more rightly been described as Symbolist.³⁵¹ Gilbert, and, for that matter, Crane, had offered more nuanced theoretical statements on the subject, giving to nature a much more important and active role in the process of inspiring and developing a work of art. Gilbert's conceptualisation of the process as one of transcription, translation, and transmission of an effect, however off-the-cuff, is considerably more complex than Mackennal's talk of the superimposition of the artist's personality or idiosyncratic style on nature. Far from supporting the new movements that sprang up during the twentieth century, or seeing in the push for abstract sculpture any objectives that approached or extended his own aims of the early 1890s, the older Gilbert pronounced with firmness that such an idea could not be countenanced, and positioned himself, as he had done in 1888, on the side of 'tradition' and nature. In 1932, he lamented that tradition had been 'relegated to the dust-heap', adding also that '[t]o regard the modern movement as a regenerator must

³⁴⁹ Costa, 1927, 121, quoted in Newall, 1992, 59.

³⁵⁰ Mackennal, 1925, 30.

³⁵¹ Mimmocchi, 2012, 26.

be unthinkable, preposterous and unholy in the minds of all who venerate the traditions of Art.’³⁵² In 1934, a journalist for *The Times* heard Gilbert holding forth on the same subject: ‘Sir Alfred spoke of the importance of tradition in art. If he was called a “back number,” he gloried in it, because he belonged to a generation that saw no virtue in making a plum-pudding, tying it up, and calling it a statue.’³⁵³ This was not just a retrospective pose adopted in reaction to the work of modern sculptors – Gilbert had threatened to resign from the Royal Academy in 1933 over the proposed election of Eric Gill – but a stance quite consistent with his carefully worded statement at the first congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry that the ‘future [of art] is written in the magic word “tradition,” [...] and this word, with its mighty significance, will ever remain the “Sesame” of Art’s every onward movement.’³⁵⁴

2.4. Ruskinian Realism: Solid and Spectral

Naturalism in the late nineteenth century did not necessarily mean the literal recording, in ‘bronze photographs’ as Harriet Hosmer put it,³⁵⁵ or indeed in marble or terracotta ones, of what Beattie unjustly calls ‘the kind of workaday realism that [...] Ruskin saw as the salvation not only of sculpture, but of modern

³⁵² Quoted in Bury, 1952, 102.

³⁵³ *The Times*, 17 May 1934, 14, from a clipping included among correspondence with M. H. Spielmann, RA SP/7/129/2.

³⁵⁴ Gilbert, 1888, 101.

³⁵⁵ Hosmer, 1912, 332.

architecture.’³⁵⁶ Beattie’s curious use of the term ‘realism’ – elsewhere modified as ‘coarse’ or even ‘Ruskinian’ realism – which seems to imply second-rate treatment as well as humdrum or unimaginative subject-matter, and which she regards as a criterion for excluding or at least marginalising certain sculptors, including Conrad Dressler, from the New Sculpture movement as she defines it, has already been questioned by Charlotte Drew, who argues instead that ‘there was room for ‘coarse realism’ amongst its [the movement’s] experimental practitioners.’³⁵⁷ Few could disagree with this: Frederick Brock implied that his father sometimes saw signs of ‘ugliness and coarseness’ in even ‘the most delicately wrought pieces’ by his peers; a more flippant remark comes from D. S. MacColl, who reported in the *Saturday Review* in 1899 that ‘Mr. Onslow Ford has made a pleasing marble photograph of Her Majesty’.³⁵⁸

Beattie’s employment of the terms ‘naturalism’ and ‘realism’ is in need of some adjustment. The insistence, in particular, upon ‘Ruskinian realism’ as a justification for exclusion will not stand up to scrutiny as it seems to be based on a significant misunderstanding both of Ruskin’s ideas themselves and of the way in which these influenced those with whom he came into contact. Ruskin may easily be seen as the greatest promoter of naturalism during the Victorian age: as early as 1837 we find him using, as a pen-name, *Kata Phusin* (‘According to Nature’); naturalism is discussed at some length in *The Stones of Venice*, and nature is rarely, if ever,

³⁵⁶ Beattie, 1983, 49.

³⁵⁷ Drew, 2014, 313.

³⁵⁸ MacColl, 6 May 1899, 557.

absent in his other written works. Far, however, from advocating only the kind of matter-of-fact expression that Beattie accuses him of promoting, Ruskin had hardly been willing to sacrifice imaginative or emotional qualities for the end of restoring sculpture or architecture, and can be found in many places arguing for just the characteristics which she places foremost in her account of the New Sculpture. True, he suggested to the people of Bradford in 1859 that they ‘try to conventionalize a butcher’s or a greengrocer’s, with Saturday night customers buying cabbage and beef’, adding that ‘[t]hat will tell you if you can design or not’, but this was largely tongue-in-cheek, and a proposition coloured, furthermore, by the implication, more fully developed elsewhere, that the health of the nation’s artistic productivity was dependent on the beauty, health, and happiness encountered in daily life; the capability of designing figurative ornament founded on trade and commerce, would in short only be possible when trade and commerce were made worthy of artistic representation. Ruskin himself admits that his audience will think he is ‘teach[ing] them how to caricature.’³⁵⁹ Beattie’s interpretation of Ruskinian naturalism, or Ruskinian realism, appears to miss the satirical edge of his rhetoric.

Ruskin has sometimes even been credited erroneously with the coinage of the term ‘realism’ in relation to representational art,³⁶⁰ but as is the case with many other nineteenth-century terms imperfectly descriptive of trends or styles, the word had long been bandied about in French art criticism and had gained popularity in Britain by other channels too. ‘Clearly, in the 1870s, Ruskin was being seen as the

³⁵⁹ Ruskin, *The Two Paths* III, §§ 82-3.

³⁶⁰ For a discussion of this see Levine, 2003, 204 n. 12.

father of realism’, writes Caroline Levine. This is based, however, on Ruskin’s eagerness to disclaim any such responsibility.³⁶¹ ‘We have seen that sculpture is to be a true representation of true external form’, Ruskin told his Oxford students in 1870, ‘[m]uch more is it to be a representation of true internal emotion.’³⁶² Later, in 1878, while making his last observations about Pre-Raphaelitism, and an attempt at once to reconcile and to identify the most important differences between the work of Millais, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones, he would introduce a distinction between ‘the solid’ or ‘substantial’ and ‘the spectral’, classing both as legitimate aspects of reality, and, furthermore, placing the latter higher as the goal of ‘the greatest masters of *all* ages’:³⁶³

the most curious, yet the most common, deficiency in the modern contemplative mind, is its inability to comprehend that these phenomena of true imagination are yet no less real, and often more vivid, than phenomena of matter.³⁶⁴

The phrasing is cautious enough here not to indicate an absolute endorsement of common-garden spiritualism, about which Ruskin was at best on the fence, but he, who by 1878 knew well the vividness of false as well as true imagination,³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Levine, 2003, 204 n. 12.

³⁶² Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici* IV, § 135.

³⁶³ Ruskin, 1878, 1079.

³⁶⁴ Ruskin, 1878, 1076.

³⁶⁵ A period of severe mental illness interrupted Ruskin’s work between February and April of 1878. The articles were published in November and December, and discussed a stay with William Graham that had taken place in January.

nonetheless stresses the intensity of the dream vision and sees it, moreover as an indispensable aim for the truly great painter or sculptor. Burne-Jones, therefore, gains a higher position than Millais in this assessment, who was by this point well out of the ‘early salad days’ of his youthful Pre-Raphaelitism, and developing a reputation as ‘a handsome, hard-riding, beef eating country squire’, as the *Journal of Decorative Arts* would put it some years later.³⁶⁶ With such pronouncements as the above, and especially in his Slade lectures, Ruskin took on during the 1870s the role of an advocate not for the straightforwardly realist or matter-of-fact, but for the spiritual in art. Succeeding to the chair of Slade Professor approximately seventy years later, Kenneth Clark would claim that Ruskin became in the position ‘the symbolic figure of resistance to materialism’. If there is a degree of exaggeration in Clark’s suggestion that Ruskin was ‘almost entirely alone’ in looking to combat ‘the denial of the spirit’ embodied by late nineteenth-century economic and scientific ideas³⁶⁷ – Ruskin was not entirely alone in rejecting certain kinds of materialism – it is still true that he was isolated in the means by which he expressed this resistance, firmly and perhaps even sometimes relishing the idea of constituting a Carlylean ‘minority of one’ in the face of immense opposition.

Does this represent a great shift from his earlier stance on spiritualism in art? It should be remembered that during the early 1850s, Ruskin had, for a time, exercised great hopes that Millais – still young and idealistic – would turn his talents seriously towards architecture, and the designs produced or planned during this all too brief

³⁶⁶ See *Supplement to the Journal of Decorative Art*, July 1890, unpag.

³⁶⁷ Clark, 1947, 22.

period – involving angels, vices, virtues, ‘eternal happiness and the struggle for life’ – ought to complicate any simplistic ideas about the reasons for and results of Ruskin’s insistence on direct observation, and perhaps also about the source of the symbolic, visionary side of the New Sculpture decades later. ‘He is quite astonished and delighted at my designs’, wrote Millais to Holman Hunt in 1853, ‘he thought that we were simply capable of copying nature, and that we had no invention. Now he admits that he was awfully mistaken. [...] He draws the arches and frames the mouldings for me to fill up. [...] Ruskin believes now that I have almost mistaken my vocation and that I was born to restore Architecture.’³⁶⁸ Alack, the fleetingly heralded architectural renewal did not, in the end, come to fruition, but the design for a window that survives from the two men’s collaboration shows that an imaginative and symbolic approach to architectural – and indeed sculptural design – was by no means incompatible with natural observation. More than half a century later, and after Ruskin’s death, Conrad Dressler would fill the spandrels of the porch of the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle with emblematic figures directly related to the more figurative elements in Ruskin’s writing – the ‘spiritual teaching’ rather than the ‘art teaching’ (as Dressler might have put it, setting aside the question of whether the two are distinguishable): when the models for these spandrels were exhibited in plaster at the 1906 Arts and Crafts Exhibition held at the Grafton Gallery, *The Studio* reported that

[t]hey are very dignified in design, and the care of the modelling carries it to a high point of perfection. The designer has taken its symbolism from Ruskin’s

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Mordaunt Crook, 1982, 70.

“Crown of Wild Olives,” [this is the actual title under which it appears in the catalogue]³⁶⁹ in which the author shows that certain deeds of nobility can gain only an immaterial reward. This design of Mr. Dressler’s is singularly appropriate, in spirit, for the free service which is so nobly given by the medical profession to the hospitals in this country. In the other spandrels [*sic*] *Hygiene* is represented by water flowing from a shell and a gourd.³⁷⁰

The architectural framework and sculptural idiom are entirely different from those in Millais’ design, but the front of Dressler’s porch is, nevertheless, curiously reminiscent of the earlier work in symbolic terms: a pair of winged personages extend together a garland of wild olive over the arch, much like the ring or chaplet that unites the embracing angels in Millais’ drawing, and with it figuratively crown those who pass beneath the arch with the emblem of Athena, Ruskin’s ‘type of grey honour and sweet rest.’³⁷¹

At the time of the collaboration with Millais, Ruskin had been working on his Edinburgh lectures, to be delivered in November of 1853; in these he spoke of Christian art from the eighth to the twelfth centuries as ‘the new art’, and identified its special characteristics as ‘a peculiar spirituality in its conception of the human form’ and ‘an intense fondness for natural objects – animals, leaves, and flowers’.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1906, 50, cat. 190.

³⁷⁰ Anon., 1906, 59.

³⁷¹ Ruskin provides an explanatory, or rather, justificatory footnote simply reading *μελιτόεσσα, ἀέθλων γ’ ἔνεκεν*. The phrase is derived from Pindar, *O.* 1.98-9.

³⁷² Ruskin, 1854, 148-9.

Naturalism, then, could involve a sympathy with non-human life as well as a concern with the human figure, whose rendering might not necessarily insist on physical perfection or result in representations of heroic cast. In fact Ruskinian naturalism was often understood by contemporaries, despite the critic's many statements qualifying or otherwise modifying the views expressed on the subject which produced the greatest controversy, as placing the study of 'natural objects' above that of the human form. We have observed that Leighton's addresses to the students of the Royal Academy, delivered from 1879 onwards, often make oblique allusions to Ruskin's arguments. In 1875 the less restrained Edward Poynter, then Slade professor, had accused Ruskin, in a petulant lecture entitled 'Professor Ruskin on Michelangelo', of supplanting 'by a canting affection of nature-worship, the direct and healthy study which the nobler forms require from a young student' – these nobler forms being human ones. Adopting the critic's voice in mocking tone, Poynter says 'when I speak of the glory of nature and of God's works, I exclude the human figure both male and female, and refer you to mossy rocks and birds-nests, sunset skies, red herrings, by Hunt, robin redbreasts, anything you like, in fact, but the figure for its beauty.'³⁷³ Harry Quilter, soon to become one of Gilbert's earliest supporters in print, referred to Poynter's lecture as an 'unhappy outbreak', finding its language 'almost ludicrous in its exaggeration of abuse'.³⁷⁴

Thornycroft, who had been raised on a farm, felt keenly the beauties of the country: in 1883 Helen Zimmern presented the sculptor not only as a picture of

³⁷³ Poynter, 1879, 234-5. Ruskin's lectures on birds (including one on the robin, delivered in 1873) would be published in 1881 as *Love's Meinie*.

³⁷⁴ Quilter, 1880, 579.

health but as one who made particular use of his well-maintained garden at ‘that green retreat, the Melbury Road’:

Large doors open out from the studio towards the garden, and lead on to a paved platform that juts right out into the greenery. On to this platform Mr. Thornycroft loves to bring his work, and even in the garden itself many of his statues are first made. This is another evidence of his healthful mind. Probably there is no other sculptor in London who has the same true instinct to work out of doors. [...] By taking his work out into the open, Mr. Thornycroft confronts it with the full light of day. He knows well that sculpture is essentially an outdoor art—that only our English climatic conditions have forced it to seek shelter under roofs; and by taking his work into the open he fictitiously creates for himself a sort of Greek feeling. [...] Mr Thornycroft loves the open air, as he loves sports and athletic exercises. He knows that to keep his nature in balance, and preserve his strength, he must remain in contact with his mother earth.

According to Harry How, writing a decade later, Thornycroft was diligent about feeding the birds in the area (despite his enjoyment of shooting when away from home), and kept a close eye on his mulberries and pears. At least one book that belonged to the sculptor still contains a pressed flower, and it is even said that during the later 1890s, when Thornycroft was commuting to his studio on the North London Railway, ‘he would take packets of flower seeds and scatter them out of the window along the more dreary stretches of line through Kensal Rise and Willesden.’³⁷⁵ All

³⁷⁵ Rosalind Thornycroft, quoted in Dakers, 1999, 249.

this may seem to take us away from the subject at hand, but the unusual characterisation of Thornycroft – that is, unusual for a sculptor – as a *plein-airist* represents one aspect of Thornycroft’s naturalism, one that governed the creative process even if it was not entirely recognisable in the exhibited result. Zimmern claimed that the ‘luscious background of greenery’ in the sculptor’s garden combined ‘very gratefully with the white of the sculptures, making them look less *dénaturées* than at the best they are apt to do in London.’³⁷⁶ The sculptures were placed on a purpose-built hydraulic turn-table that would run out from the studio on metal lines, and they could be lifted fourteen feet so that the sculptor could “consider” them under various atmospheric conditions.’³⁷⁷ Yet Zimmern’s remark about the *dénaturées* appearance of Thornycroft’s sculpture in the artificial (and artificially lit) exhibition setting – electrical lighting had recently been introduced at both the Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery – leads us also to the fact that, on the whole, and with few exceptions, the human figure remained at the core of all to which Thornycroft turned his hands.³⁷⁸ Animals are sensitively treated, most notably

³⁷⁶ Zimmern, 1883, 516-17.

³⁷⁷ How, 1893, 271-2.

³⁷⁸ The Royal Academy employed electrical lighting from 1881 onwards, the Grosvenor Gallery from 1883. Both were following the example of the Paris Salon, which had installed electrical lighting in 1879. For contrasting critical attitudes towards this development in Paris see Clayson, 2019, esp. 67-78. There can be little doubt that it was not an entirely positive one for sculpture, involving as it did the unflattering inconvenience of hard cast shadows, though there does not appear to have been a great deal of opposition in London. Numerous artists were, however, asked by the editor of *Lightning: The Popular and Business Review of Electricity* to contribute their thoughts on the subject early in 1892. Leighton was encouraging about experiments with electrical lighting, even as he cautioned that ‘nothing but a broad and diffused light from *without* could render the effect of daylight’ and made clear that he ‘never work[ed] by artificial light at all’: See *Lightning*, 7 Jan 1892, 268. Leighton’s complaints about ‘hideous fogs’ were frequent in the late 1880s: Gould, 2004, 233, 411 n. 68. Thornycroft expressed similar views on the subject, opining that ‘the coal smoke demon shuts out so frequently the light of day’ and suggesting that electricians should seek to ‘reproduce the sort of light which, reflected from some great white mountain of cloud in the Northern sky, pours into the high windows, on occasions only now too rare, at an angle of about 40 degrees, illuminating and showing the just proportions of all objects on which it falls, and also the colour and harmonies thereof if these

the greyhound that accompanies *Artemis* but also on a smaller scale for domestic settings, as in the sculptor's charming and spontaneous records in bronze of the varied attitudes into which his cats, Corky and Hermes, disposed themselves; Thornycroft included some landscape elements in a limited way in works like *Stepping Stones* and in his small reliefs, where he evidently felt greater freedom to experiment with picturesque accessories, but in general, save for a pair of wings here and a chipped stone or patch of turf there, vegetal and animal forms remain very much subservient to the human figure.

Seen in relation to this disagreement between Ruskin and Poynter, Gilbert's sculpture – even the more ornamental branches of his production which have been seen as pointing the way towards abstraction – may be understood as expressing a kind of naturalism less easily found in Thornycroft's oeuvre, although for Gilbert it was perhaps less the verdant countryside or the Surrey lanes and woods, for which he expressed great fondness, than the desolate sea and its shell-fringed shores that proved most affecting. Gilbert told Joseph Hatton that he 'owed the development of [his] love for natural forms and the development of [his] desire to make use of them' to his study of the butterfly and insect collection of a Gomshall naturalist, Dr. Capern, whom he had befriended around 1888. Insect collecting was a fashionable pursuit during the late nineteenth century, and one that was shared by Gilbert's friends, the painter Matthew Ridley Corbet,³⁷⁹ and his sculptor colleague Ford, who

exist': See *Lightning*, 28 Jan 1892, 328. Electric lighting had been introduced into the Royal Academy Schools, including lecture and class rooms, by 1894: *Electrical Review*, 5 Oct 1894, 414.

³⁷⁹ Gilbert told McAllister that he had once played a prank on Corbet by giving a cabbage butterfly some new colours, thus producing an unidentifiable specimen. The trick was apparently revealed only after letters and drawings had been sent to experts: McAllister, 1929, 19-60.

was described in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as an ‘ardent entomologist’, ‘even fonder of butterflies than Mr. Whistler.’ Ford was spotted in 1890 pursuing a specimen with his umbrella down the Avenue de l’Opéra, having left his net at home.³⁸⁰

2.5. The Graham Memorial: Naturalism and Storiatio

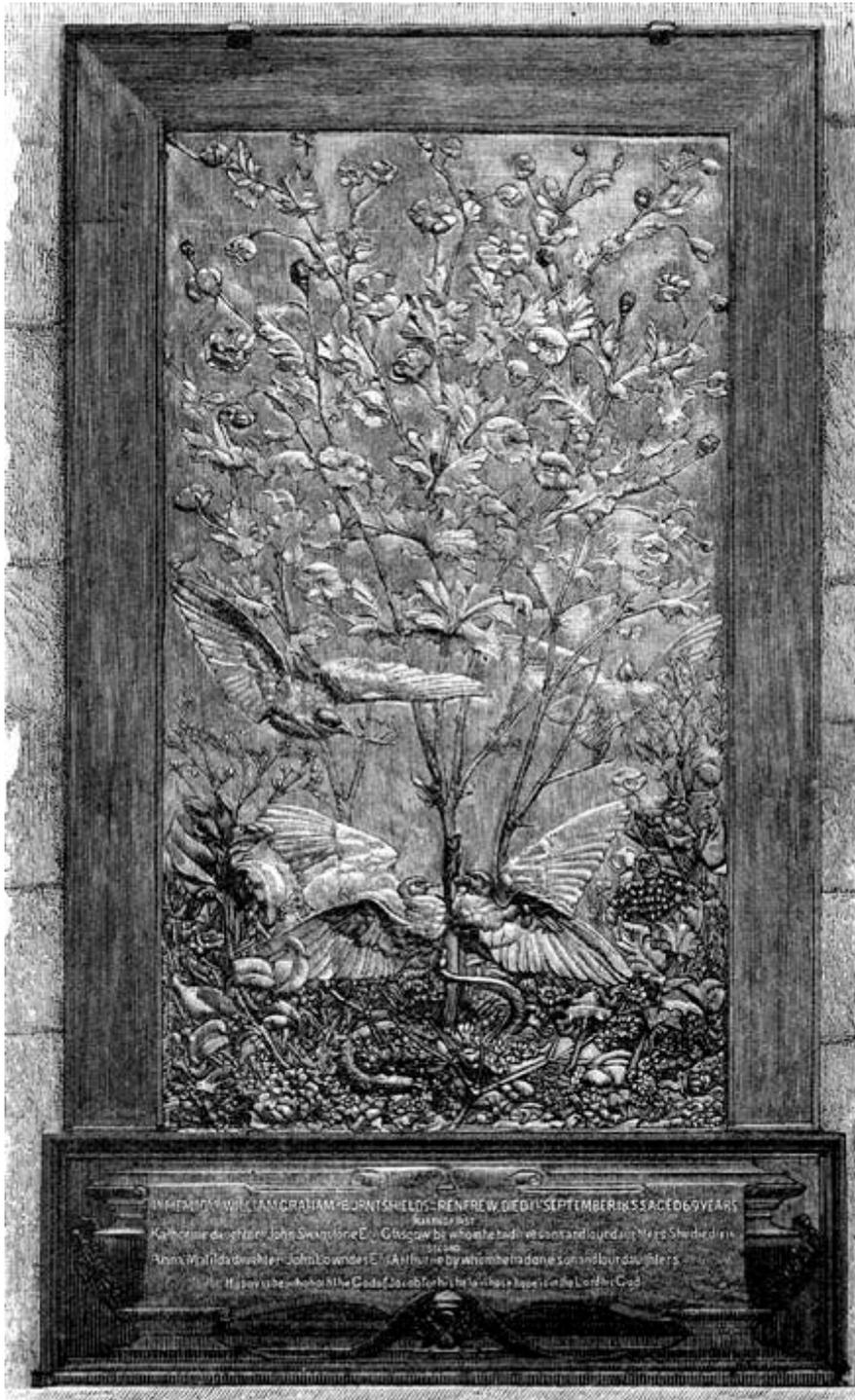
The most direct and obvious example of this kind of naturalism within Gilbert’s work, and one, furthermore, in which butterflies play a part, is the bronze relief (1886-91) dedicated by the Liberal MP and (liberal in another sense) patron of Burne-Jones and Rossetti, William Graham, to his father, also William Graham, in St Mungo’s Cathedral, Glasgow, where a faithful but overtly orientalisising study of springtime flora and fauna is presented overlaid with overt symbolic connotations developed from those explored on the base of *Icarus* a few years earlier, and also that of *The Enchanted Chair*. Here, around an abundant cluster of poppies, symbolising both eternal rest and seasonal rebirth,³⁸¹ growing from a slight tumulus amid the humbler vegetation – twigs, stalks, daisies, and fertile disorder of the undergrowth – circle four doves: the lower two, more or less earth-bound but with wings extended, court each other as a threatening serpent – a representative of the constraining earth itself – watches on, while the upper two chase butterflies, signifying the soul, around the poppies of oblivion and among the pliant panicles and

³⁸⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 June 1890. See also the story told about Ford and the ‘prophetic butterfly’ in McLure Hamilton, 1921, 48-52.

³⁸¹ Note the presence of poppies on the so-called Tellus relief from the *Ara pacis*, both the flower and the seed capsule, together with lilies and ears of wheat, signifying abundance first, sleep or death only afterwards. Poppies and wheat also appear frequently in connection with Ceres.

sturdier umbelliferous stems around them, all showing signs of inflorescence. The doves themselves, which James Graham elected to see as ‘the bringers of glad tidings, symbols of purity and love’,³⁸² seem to mark the distinction between profane and celestial love, the earth and the air, alluding all at once to the holy spirit and to Aphrodite, this life and the promise of another. Yet, for all this symbolic wealth, and this saturation with biblical and mythological undertones, the representation is in many respects quite literal: loving attention is given to the branching of the three poppy stems, of which the central in particular stands clearly defined by the tidying away from this part of the composition of any other fussy foreground or background matter; the doves’ wings are modelled more or less as a thirteenth-century sculptor treated foliage – to all appearances by laying the model flat on a board – yet Gilbert has also sought to re-impart some life and movement to these doves, and in this endeavour has looked to Japanese representations in relief of birds in motion, especially cranes, for the convention of the sharply turned head and exaggeratedly disjunctive wings of the upper left bird. The dynamic pose is not, perhaps, entirely dovelike, and a Japanese designer might have softened the consequent awkwardness through greater stylisation, by giving less prominence to the joints, and by avoiding any impression that the bird is tumbling forwards out of the relief, but the contortion also makes legible in an expressive way the swiftness of the pursuit, emphasising the changing direction of the bird’s flight, and its interaction with the butterfly, and implying a pictorial space both before and beyond the depicted scene.

³⁸² Graham, 1890, 115. Compare the words used to describe the doves in the Glasgow Cathedral guidebook, quoted and described by Dorment (1985, 88) as sounding ‘suspiciously like those of Gilbert himself’: there the doves are characterised as ‘messengers of joy, tokens of purity and love’.



IN MEMORIAM WILLIAM GRAHAM BURNISHIELDS - RENFREW DIED 11 SEPTEMBER 1855 Aged 69 YEARS
MARRIED 1817
Katherine daughter John Swanson Esq. Glasgow by whom he had 4 sons and 4 daughters Mrs. Sheppard
Ann, Maria, Elizabeth, John Lowndes Esq. (All the 4 by whom he had one son and 4 daughters)
He was buried in the Church of St. Andrew in Glasgow on the 13th of September 1855



Fig. 56. Alfred Gilbert, *Memorial to William Graham of Burntshields*, and detail of the same, 1886-91, Bronze, 144.7×80cm, St Mungo's Cathedral, Glasgow.

It has been claimed that 'despite the direct technical links' – the reference is to the sculptor's great interest during this period in Japanese metallurgical achievements, including advanced methods of patination involving coloured metals (*irogane*) – 'there is not the slightest hint of the orient in Gilbert's work, as exemplified by pieces such as the polychrome bronzes he made for the Graham memorial in Glasgow cathedral, or the Versey [*sic*] memorial at the Abbey Leix in

Ireland',³⁸³ but this is in fact questionable. In the Graham Memorial there was an early attempt on the sculptor's part to utilise a kind of *shakudo*, which would surely have heightened the pictorialism of the relief by accentuating certain passages in the modelling, lifting and knocking back elements of the design for more than purely sculptural emphasis and perhaps introducing a greater imitative quality to the whole, though the effect has been regrettably impermanent and is now difficult to judge. It may be that the variegated patina would have served a merely practical function, assisting in the necessary detachment of the flora and fauna from the ground, though the outlines are crisply defined enough that the whole remains legible despite great elaboration. Still, however, in the design itself, it is possible to detect a fusion of Japanese and classical motifs that is really remarkable, appearing as it does in a work charged with Gothic feeling (in sympathy with its immediate surroundings); the relief is at once loftily symbolic and humble in its materials, for it remains in a sense only a floridly herbaceous patch of soil, treated with Pre-Raphaelite care and free of human footstep, but is loaded with implications not distant from those explored in Bates' later *Mors Janua Vitae*. In Liverpool in 1888, Gilbert spoke directly about Japanese art, stressing that this new influence on Europe 'teaches us the most valuable lesson which could possibly come to us at our present time, inasmuch as it corroborates all we learn from our medieval masters, and emphasises the fact, by the living evidence of its examples, that those branches of art which we are accustomed to look upon as independent arts are so inseparable from one another, that in order to practise any one of them we are compelled, unconsciously, to borrow from another.' Gilbert was thinking here about

³⁸³ Craddock – Giumlia-Mair, 1993, 125.

collaboration between architect and sculptor, and likely about what borrowings from the goldsmith and the painter might be possible within his own practice, but he evidently believed that there were other lessons to discover in the side-by-side evaluation of European and Japanese decorative art. 'It is strange that the Italians in their two periods,' he said, 'known respectively as the Graeco-Roman and the Renaissance [*sic*], should have in their art so much in common with the Japanese, in whose art, so old in its traditions, we are unable to trace corresponding changes.'³⁸⁴ It is noticeable that the sculptor here grouped Greek and Roman art together under the 'Italian' umbrella. Could the reason be partly that he associated Italian art more closely with vegetal forms and perhaps even animal life than he did Greek art, with its central preoccupation with the human figure? Gilbert had evidently noticed and taken the time to appreciate the natural observation of flora and fauna that is such an important feature of Japanese art.³⁸⁵ One of the papers that followed Gilbert's introductory preamble was delivered by the metallurgist William Chandler Roberts-Austen, from whom the sculptor received a good deal of information on Japanese techniques; the paper was entitled 'On certain Applications of Gold and Silver in Art Metal Work' and was aided by diagrams and specimens both from Roberts-Austen's personal collection and prepared specially for the occasion; looking to distil the main message to be taken from such study, the speaker observed that 'in Japanese art

³⁸⁴ This view of Japanese art as something not yet properly understood, very current during the 1870s, had begun to change with the publication of Louis Gonse's *l'Art japonaise* in 1883, though it is conceivable that Gilbert had not read this.

³⁸⁵ Gilbert, 1888, 101.

metal-work there is one principle of extreme simplicity and absolute fidelity to nature.³⁸⁶

In general, little attention has been given to the Graham Memorial, though Dorment describes the commission as ‘one of the great puzzles of Gilbert’s oeuvre’,³⁸⁷ with responsibility for the conception (but not the execution) uncertainly balanced between Gilbert and Burne-Jones, who had originally been asked to furnish the design, with the intention that the sculptor should carry it out in its finished form.³⁸⁸ Burne-Jones made, in 1892, two decorative drawings – frontispiece and title-page – for the publication of the Earl of Lytton’s *King Poppy* that bear a superficial resemblance to the Graham Memorial, though these designs, as might be expected, are drastically simplified; yet in their extreme stylisation they suggest how the ‘scribbles’ the painter promised to show Gilbert in 1886 might have developed had Burne-Jones supervised the completion of the monument – assuming that the poppies were his contribution, which is not certain. The result is remarkably different from the Graham Memorial as executed. Certain elements of the design, moreover, including the doves and the serpent, had already been used by the sculptor in the earlier 1880s, and point to his own imaginative input.³⁸⁹

Other possible sources are multifarious. It is plausible that Gilbert was familiar from his time in Paris with the beautiful and richly carved niche of the

³⁸⁶ Roberts-Austen, 1888, 121.

³⁸⁷ Dorment, 1985, 88.

³⁸⁸ See also Garnett, 2000, 172, 280 (B56).

³⁸⁹ Cf. Dorment, 1985, 88.

Fontaine de Joyeuse at 41, Rue de Turenne, the work of Isidore Romain Boitel (1847); the vault is ornamented with vegetation evocative of a riverbank animated by appropriately aquatic wildlife interacting in a believable manner: two territorial herons antagonise their inferiors, which include ducks and other birds, frogs, and in the centre, twining around a bunch of bulrushes, an aggressive snake that hisses at the first heron. The subject relates to the function of the site, intended to provide potable water to pedestrians, but it anticipates the kinds of subjects that would over the following decades become most closely associated with *ukiyo-e* prints and other Japanese artistic productions, much admired but imperfectly understood in France and Britain. There is no such fountain element with the Graham Memorial, which focuses on a small mound rather than the edge of a stream or river, but the way the various elements are arranged within the frame and relate to one another is curiously similar. As for the doves, Gilbert was probably aware of Watts' striking and simple pictures associated with the story of Noah, *The Return of the Dove* (RA 1869) and what might almost be considered its pendant – though different in format and apparently conceived later – *The Dove* (or *The Dove that Returned not Again*, RA 1877).³⁹⁰ In these the dove's function as a messenger is clearer.



³⁹⁰ The painter attempted to interest Charles Rickards (the owner of the first) in the latter, albeit to no avail.

Fig. 57. George Frederic Watts, *The Return of the Dove*, 1869, Oil on panel, 58.4×185.4cm, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park.

It may be possible to view the Graham Memorial as a minor or experimental work, whose modest naturalism, however fused with elevated symbolism, would not be repeated in the following years, but it is not to be dismissed as an aberration. Gilbert's inclusion, in 1884, of a subordinate *animalier* group on the base of his *Icarus* – a tussle between a serpent and a dove – has been interpreted as a statement on the sculptor's part of his blossoming commitment to an emancipation of the art from restrictive faithfulness to anatomical structure in favour of 'free play with the fluid qualities of molten metal'.³⁹¹ Getsy sees the struggle between the two animals as a 'subtle reply' to Leighton's *Athlete* that contradicts the President's muscular vision for modern sculpture by 'indicating that there were radically different ways of approaching sculpture's materiality and three-dimensionality.' As Getsy recognises, it 'is the snake who wins Gilbert's battle', and this victory demonstrates, we are told, 'the superiority of malleability over solid structure'.³⁹² This is a clever reading, but it is also a trifle too pat to be accepted without caution. It is unclear that Gilbert intended the bestial combat as so aggressive a declaration of theoretical principles, or a coded statement on the perceived limitations of Leighton's own severely structural essays in sculpture. Unavoidable, too, is the fact that in the early 1900s Gilbert was still stressing the importance to the modeller of attending carefully to the requirements of interior structure; students at the Royal Academy were told to think

³⁹¹ Getsy, 2004, 88.

³⁹² Getsy, 2004, 92.

of the figure in architectural terms, leading with the balcony-like *piano nobile* of the pelvis, supported on its femur struts and descending to the relatively inconsequential feet: '[t]he construction of a figure begins at the pelvis, the feet are only like the footings of a wall. If the modeller but establishes the pelvis he can establish the rest.'³⁹³ Even when Gilbert opted to abandon the feet altogether in favour of, say, mermaid tails, this constructive principle was followed. His well known fascination with the *skeletal structure* of the fish asserted itself even over any preoccupation with the sleekness of its movement or the glamour of its scales.

³⁹³ Paraphrased by Whitley, 1903, 547.





Fig. 58. Alfred Gilbert, *Icarus*, and detail of base, 1884, Bronze, 107cm, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

An alternative interpretation of the symbolic value of the group at Icarus' feet seems possible. In the context of both works, the *Icarus* and the Graham Memorial, it is certainly the *dove* that represents the freedom of the air and the imagination, while the serpent – literally a constricting and constraining presence in the former – remains rooted to the earth and, by extension, to matter over mind rather than mind over matter. That the dove's wings were connected by Gilbert – as they were by his

peers – with freedom and fancy is easily seen, whether attached to human figures, sandals, headdresses, or birds. In the last of his 1901 lectures Gilbert implied a visual correlation between the wings of the statuette at the centre of his constantly evolving demonstration piece and the two halves of the broken pediment that also formed part of the design, serving as Michelangelesque pedestals for reclining personages to left and right, but he breezily left off, on the other hand, any sign of a foundation corresponding with these elevated forms on the unassailably practical grounds that ‘the sculptor-goldsmith, whose work was on such a small scale that he can hold it in his hands while engaged upon it, has no need for a foundation on which to support it during construction, although in the finished work an appearance of stability is essential.’³⁹⁴

A pair of wings were spotted by Harry How in Thornycroft’s studio in 1893: ‘[t]he association between pigeons’ wings and those of angels is very, very distant,’ he observed, ‘but those lying on a slab played a useful part in realizing the wings of two angels which form part of a very elaborate monument just completed.’³⁹⁵ In Ford’s figures of *Dancing* and *Music*, commissioned by the Maharajah of Darbhanga and exhibited in 1890, the eccentric bird headdresses apparently constitute little more, symbolically, than a joke founded on modern scientific naturalism, and a rationalisation of the Egyptian fashion for more stylised winged headgear: ‘in regard to the birds placed on the heads of figures which have puzzled some people Mr. Ford tells us that the cockatoo was used for the dancing figure because it is a dancing

³⁹⁴ Paraphrased by Whitley, 1903, 548.

³⁹⁵ How, 1893, 272-3.

bird', reported the *Builder*, adding that 'Mr. Ford suggests that a bird head-dress may have been worn by some remote people from which the metal bird headdress worn by Egyptian ladies may have had its origin.'³⁹⁶ The choice of an owl for *Music* remains less clear; did the sculptor consider its hoot particularly tuneful? Gilbert, conversely, used the owl in an idiosyncratic but traditional manner on his little-known bust study of *Athena*, of which an exceptionally fine lost-wax (and surely unique) cast appeared at Bonhams in 2011.³⁹⁷ The helmet would be approached more formally on the bust of Athena that would form part of the monument to the classicist Harry Chester Goodhart at Trinity College, Cambridge (1897-1900), but here on the study, which must date to the 1880s – well before that commission – a naturalistically rendered owl crests the helmet of the goddess, its wings hanging over the sides. The superposition of the owl on the helmet, combined with the thoughtful expression of its wearer, makes clear that the bird signifies the abstract mental qualities associated with the goddess: wisdom, knowledge, foresight, and so on. The two elements bear a strikingly similar relation to each other as the dreamer and sinister eagle of *The Enchanted Chair* (exhibited 1886), derived, it is generally thought, from the more obviously benign, protective eagle-Jupiter of Carrier-Belleuse's *Hébé endormie* (1869), but perhaps also suggested by the famous *Pénélope* (Salon of 1849) of Gilbert's former master Jules Cavelier, which, without having given solid form to the dream vision experienced by the sleeping wife of Odysseus, could nevertheless be seen – at least by the spectator familiar with Book

³⁹⁶ *The Builder*, 21 June 1890, 453.

³⁹⁷ Bonhams, 22 June 2011, Lot 25.

19 of the *Odyssey* – as having implied the presence before her closed eyes of an eagle.³⁹⁸

By the end of the 1890s it could even be argued that the power of poetic flight, as implied by the bonily constructive but softly covered forms of the bird's wing, had come to stand for the New Sculpture as a whole. Pegasus in particular, equipped with the hoof as well as the wing, was used emblematically throughout the decade to symbolise the poetic ideals to which many individual sculptors aspired. He appears, rearing, at the centre of Thornycroft's representation of the 'Arts' in the frieze for the Institute of Chartered Accountants, commenced in June 1890. Pomeroy's boyishly triumphant reprise of Gilbert's *Perseus*, exhibited in 1898 as an overt tribute to the recently deceased Leighton, has the helmet of its healthy young hero – to all appearances modelled on the intensely Praxitelean youth of the painter's *Daedalus and Icarus* of 1869 – topped by Pegasus, alluding at once to the chimerical crest of Dubois' famous *Courage militaire* and to Leighton's then less publicly known sketch models. Again, Spielmann's *British Sculpture and Sculptors of To-Day* appeared in 1901 with an image (by Harold Nelson) on its cover of the same animal, stretching his great wings and bearing, on his back, an Apolline youth equipped with sandals, leafy crown, laurel-wrapped sceptre and orb. Pegasus stamps his hoof on a diminutive Wattsian globe. Pomeroy's wing-capped and wing-footed *Perseus* celebrates the reverse of the fate met by the dove at Icarus' feet, holding aloft as he does the more or less neutralised head of the Gorgon of Decadence, an insalubrious and vaguely Beardsleyesque snake-nest of malleable, suggestively

³⁹⁸ For Penelope's dream see *Od.* 19.509-81.

treated plastic forms – a creation, this, more of the late 1890s than the early 1880s – whose very destruction has allowed the birth of the mythical originator of the Hippocrene.

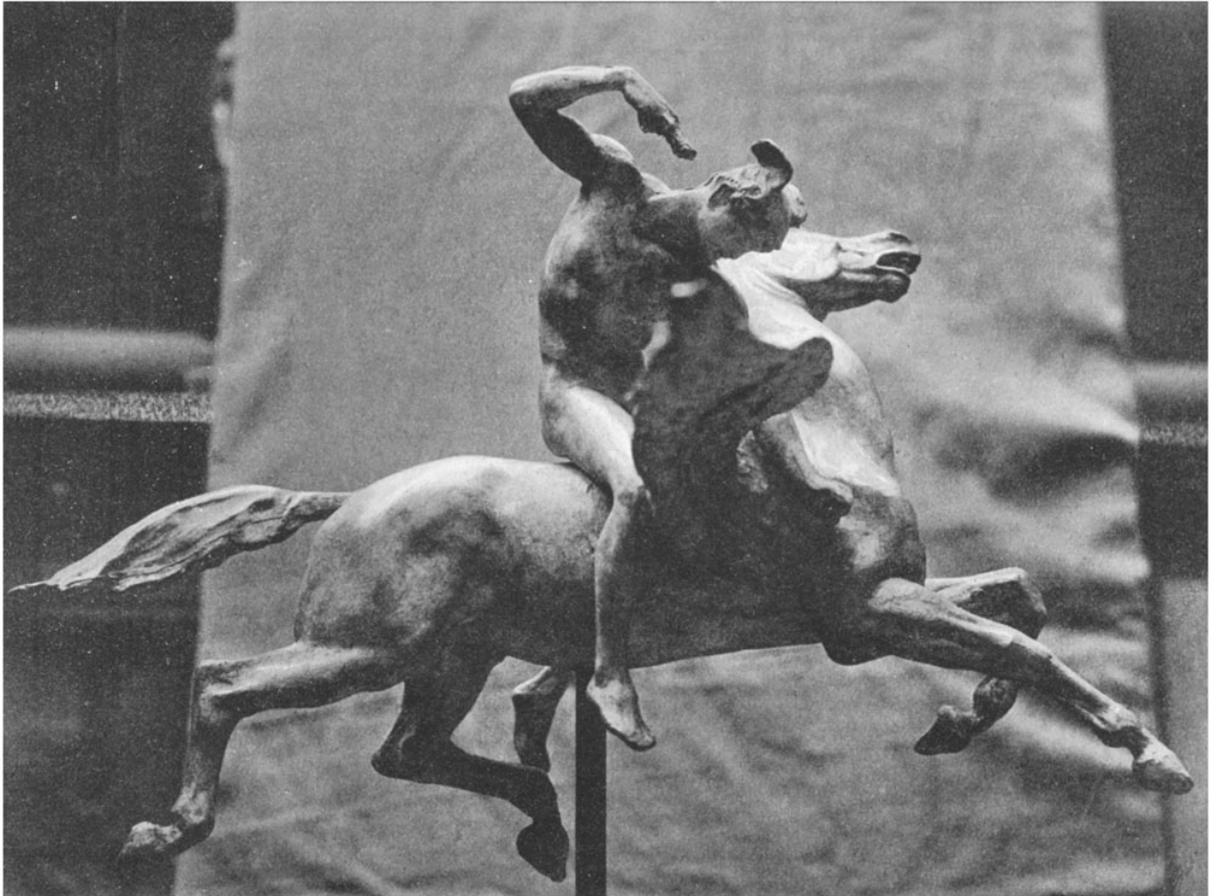


Fig. 59. Frederic Leighton, Clay sketch for Perseus in *Perseus and Andromeda* (1891).

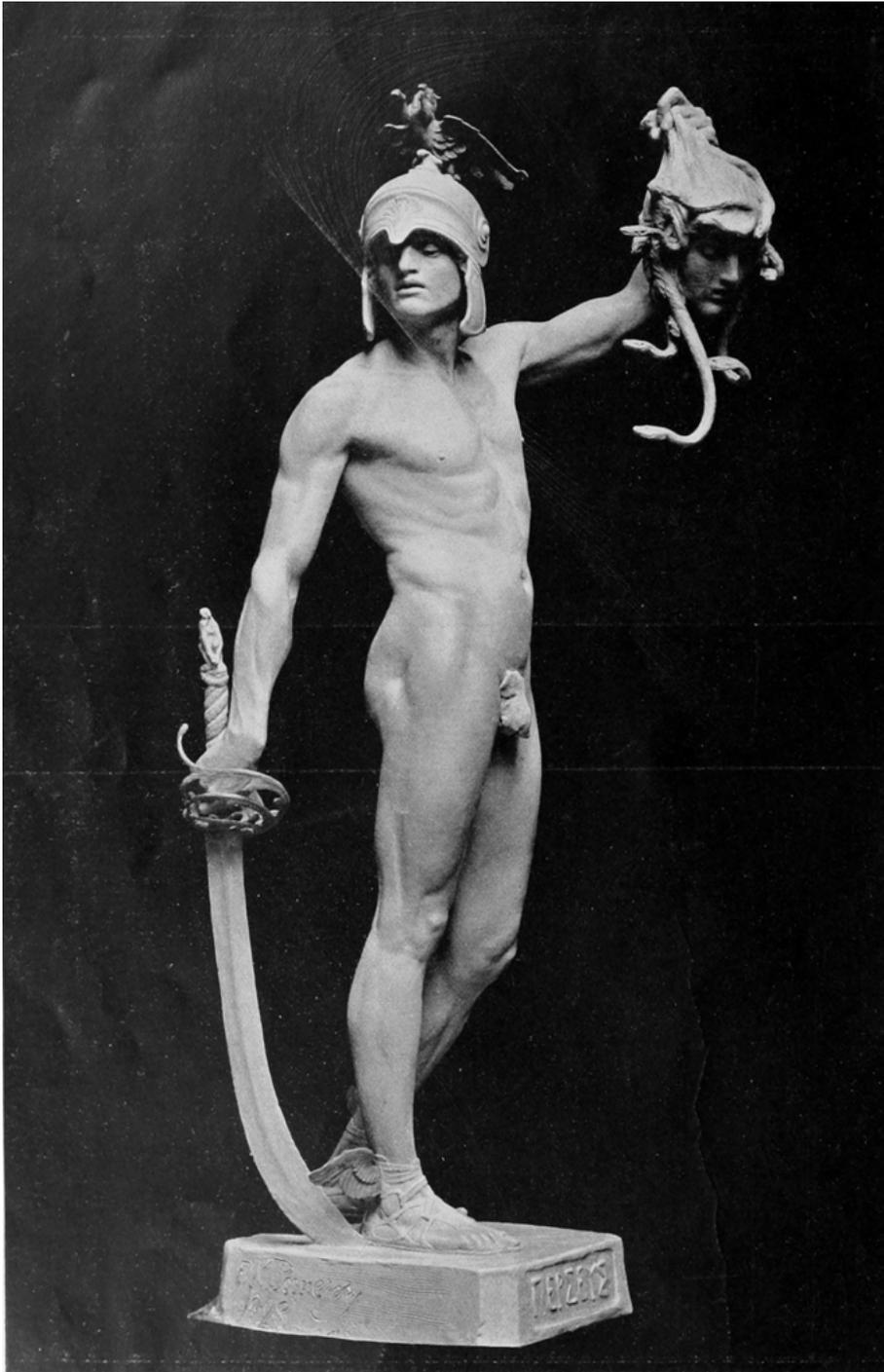


Fig. 60. Frederick William Pomeroy, *Perseus*, 1898, Bronze, 208cm, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

There are many precedents for Gilbert's symbolic use of the snake too, aside from the obvious connection with Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*. If Gilbert had not seen Prud'hon's *L'âme brisant les liens qui l'attachent à la terre* (1821-3), he is likely to have come across descriptions or even reproductions of it during his time in Paris, since two painted versions and numerous related studies had been included in an exhibition at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1874, and a lithograph by Jules Boilly had been published earlier in 1847. In this picture, the *liens qui attachent à la terre* are represented by a coiling earthbound serpent much like that at Icarus' feet.

In 1869 Ruskin had devoted a portion of *The Queen of the Air* to a discussion of the symbolic value in human mythology of the bird and the snake, two contrasting accessories of Athena. The discussion begins as follows:

The orders of animals are the serpent and the bird: the serpent, in which the breath or spirit is less than in any other creature, and the earth-power greatest; the bird, in which the breath or spirit is more full than in any other creature, and the earth-power least.³⁹⁹

Ruskin finds in the bird the 'voice of the air', the 'colours of the air', and 'Spirit of the Air'.⁴⁰⁰ In the serpent, however:

it is the strength of the base element that is so dreadful [...] it is the very omnipotence of the earth. [...] It is a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power

³⁹⁹ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 64.

⁴⁰⁰ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 65-6

of the earth, of the entire earthly nature. As the bird is the clothed power of the air, so this is the clothed power of the dust; as the bird is the symbol of the spirit of life, so this is the grasp and sting of death.⁴⁰¹

Quoting inaccurately from Richard Owen, Ruskin notes that the snake can ‘outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger.’ Surely Leighton, too, would have been struck by this passage if he read *The Queen of the Air* during the early to mid-1870s – a likelier possibility than that he went straight to Owen for the motif of his *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, though many other sources of inspiration fed into that group. Apart from the citation of Owen, the association established here and stressed repeatedly between the snake and the soil is one that Ruskin seems to have derived from ancient iconography and literature in equal measure, where autochthony is sometimes expressed through snake legs or dragon’s teeth, both symbolising the earthborn origin of a given personage. Ruskin allows, however, that the snake also has a secondary, purificatory function in Greek mythology, apparent in its status as an attribute of Aesculapius and Hygieia, but he looks rather to the earthworm as a snake *type* than to the cobra or python as a means of rationalising this aspect of the animal’s role.⁴⁰²

Ruskin, looking to contrast bird and snake, had actually excised Owen’s explicit pitting of the two against one another: the original passage had observed that ‘it is true that the serpent has no limbs, yet it can outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the jerboa, and, suddenly loosing the close coils of its crouching spiral,

⁴⁰¹ Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 68.

⁴⁰² Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 70.

it can spring into the air and seize the bird upon the wing: all these creatures have been observed to fall its prey. The serpent has neither hands nor talons, yet it can outwrestle the athlete and crush the tiger in the embrace of its ponderous overlapping folds.’⁴⁰³ Ruskin did not, however, wish to grant the serpent quite so much power over the air as might have seemed suitable in the light of Owen’s effusive picture of the animal’s natural aptitudes.

With *Icarus*, Gilbert is hardly optimistic about the struggle. The snake has wound itself around the dove and is crushing out its breath – the very voice and spirit of the air as Ruskin sees them – as well as constricting its wings. The group should be seen as presenting not the triumph of the fluid and flexible over the bony and muscular, or the purely decorative over the figurative – a reading which spoils the high seriousness of the work – but the violent reining in of aspiration by hard reality and the hostile forces of nature. The snake, which Gilbert referred to as ‘a crawling thing’, in contrast to the ‘bird with its natural means of flight’ appears again,⁴⁰⁴ then, in the Graham Memorial, as a symbol of the dangerous, suffocating forces of the earth – offering release only in the sense in which release is offered by death. There may be a suggestion here – though this is not to be found in *Icarus* – that renewal is possible, but the snake is present primarily as a destructive force.

Some, at least, of Gilbert’s contemporaries seem to have recognised the importance of the Graham Memorial and its ambitious programme of naturalistic symbolism. In 1892 Edwin Roscoe Mullins delivered a lecture to the Society of Arts

⁴⁰³ Owen, 1854, 89.

⁴⁰⁴ Hatton, 1903, 10.

on ‘The Decorative Uses of Sculpture’, which Gilbert chaired. According to the sketchily summarised minutes of the discussion that followed his paper, Mullins ‘could not help echoing the words of Mr. Stannus as applicable to the work of the Chairman representing death, the poppy, and the doves. That was the sort of thing they ought to seek for in sculpture.’⁴⁰⁵ It is not clear that (Hugh) Stannus *had* referred to the Graham Memorial specifically, or to any other of Gilbert’s works, but Reginald Blomfield had commended the ‘distinguished Chairman’ for his contributions in the field of architectural sculpture, perhaps thinking rather of the Fawcett Memorial in Westminster Abbey than the Graham Memorial;⁴⁰⁶ the former had been praised as an unusually successful and harmonious example of the agreement of sculpture and architectural setting. It may be that Mullins had meant to refer to Blomfield rather than Stannus, though the reference to the Graham Memorial does relate to Stannus’ reported comments about the necessity of ‘Storiation’ in design work, as opposed to ‘merely aesthetic decoration’ or ‘the running up and down the scale of forms’ associated with ‘mere egg-and-tongue or Roman scroll repetition’. ‘Storiation’, a concept seemingly developed from Alberti’s *historia* and involving all aspects of subject, narrative, symbolism, moral, and meaning, was a favourite topic for Stannus but also one on which his stated views and consistent

⁴⁰⁵ *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 8 April 1892, 523.

⁴⁰⁶ Gilbert had already been collaborating with Arthur Blomfield (Reginald’s uncle, also an architect) on numerous works from 1889 onwards, including a bronze medallion commemorating former headmaster Christopher Wordsworth (nephew of the poet) for the north aisle of the George Gilbert Scott-designed school chapel at Harrow (1890-1). It was Arthur Blomfield who first approached Gilbert about the St Albans Reredos, though Gilbert would not actually commence work on this commission until 1896: Dormant, 1986, 19; Stocker, 1988, 192, 318.

advocacy of the didactic conspicuously owed something to Ruskin (he proceeded during the discussion to quote from Ruskin).⁴⁰⁷

Gilbert's *Icarus* has sometimes been viewed in modern scholarship as a late expression of ideals associated with the Aesthetic movement, especially those compatible with later art-historical developments: what Stannus calls 'merely aesthetic decoration' would, after all, be termed abstract by another generation. Robert Upstone cites *Icarus* as a work depicting a 'contemplative [state] which both reflect[s] and recreate[s] the action of abstract emotion on the senses, while any 'meaning' remains elusive and complex.'⁴⁰⁸ Elusive and complex maybe, but neither *Icarus* nor the Graham Memorial can be considered subjectless or even lacking in narrative any more than they can be regarded legitimately as having little to do with nature. The moment captured in the former – an entirely new scenario not found in any previous version of the myth, literary or otherwise, is explicitly one of interpretation: Icarus himself observes and reads nature – and does so correctly, to judge from his troubled expression – but will not quite learn the lesson implied by the omen. If the lesson drawn by Mullins from Gilbert's use of plant and animal forms is not entirely opposed to that which Getsy derives from them – Getsy *does* see the struggling creatures observed by Icarus as presenting a coherent theoretical message to the viewer, and not, therefore, as a purely aesthetic or abstract addition comparable to the egg-and-dart motif – it is nevertheless at odds with his idea that

⁴⁰⁷ Stannus had already given lectures on the subject, but would set out his 'theory of Storiation' in relation to applied art in detail at one of the meetings of the society the following January: *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 10 Feb 1893, 262-72. In this paper he stressed at the outset that '[t]he Meaning must be definite and intelligible', but also admitted that 'Storiation' was a 'mainly Literary' quality, distinct from 'the two great Artistic Virtues—Truth and Beauty.'

⁴⁰⁸ Upstone, 2011, 242.

the inevitable implication of this message was ‘an almost pure sculpture of form and play’.⁴⁰⁹ Getsy claims that ‘pure plasticity became [for Gilbert] the object of sculpture’;⁴¹⁰ for Mullins and Stannus both, this was not enough. A fundamentally aesthetic approach like this offered, in their view, only a thin and insubstantial basis for the future of the art and – which is more pertinent – this was also precisely the tendency in modern practice which they saw Gilbert’s work as contesting.

Yet by the time Gilbert made the move to Gomshall, he had already, when spending time at Birchington-on-Sea in the bungalow where Rossetti had died in 1882, been deeply impressed by the sea, and felt compelled when recalling the place years later to contrast it with the more artificial aspects of civilised human life: ‘[a]t fashionable watering-places,’ he later told his biographer, ‘where crowds of beautifully attired people parade, one has only to turn from them to the ocean, and they become eclipsed and extinguished by the majesty and power of a mighty and mysterious force of nature.’⁴¹¹ How closely this reflects what the sculptor, in recognisably Ruskinian temper, had told his Royal Academy students about Turner! In *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* (1829), Turner had, Gilbert claimed, ‘show[n] man in his miniature place among the elements’ and in general his ‘work was far greater in aim than classical or antique landscape had been, for Turner understood and loved nature, while the classical artist only showed man and nature under the fear of the

⁴⁰⁹ Getsy, 2004, 117.

⁴¹⁰ Getsy, 2004, 115.

⁴¹¹ McAllister, 1929, 85.

heathen god.’⁴¹² It was the sea itself rather than the Rossetti connection which had drawn the Gilberts to Birchington in the first place (they rented the property 1885-7/8),⁴¹³ a fashionable but desolate coastal location where, as it happens, the young George Frampton was around this very time contributing sgraffito panels for the decoration of the nearby Tower Bungalows. What Gilbert might have made of these – he certainly would have seen them – has gone unrecorded, but his thoughts about the natural landscape and the sea have been better preserved. The house, now demolished, was described by Hall Caine, Rossetti’s secretary, as standing ‘alone on the bare fields to the seaward side. [...] The land around [...] flat and featureless, unbroken by a tree or a bush, and one felt as if the great sea in front, rising up to the horizon in a vast round hill, dominated and threatened to submerge it. The clouds were low, the sea was loud, the weather was chill.’⁴¹⁴ All this seems to have suited Gilbert well, and the sculptor never lost his enthusiasm either for the grand nature of

⁴¹² As reported by Ganz, 1908, xxi. Ganz, whose breadth of coverage often seems greater than his attention to detail, refers to the picture as *Polyphemus Deriding Ulysses*. By ‘classical or antique’ Gilbert must here mean the old masters whom Ruskin had given such a drubbing in *Modern Painters*. We may contrast with Gilbert’s Ruskin-influenced views on Turner – views that are likely to have been encouraged by Watts, another self-declared advocate of the painter – the utterly different and provocative estimation of that master put about by Aubrey Beardsley, representative-in-chief of the late-Aesthetic-early-Art-Nouveau moment with which the sculptor has sometimes been rather awkwardly associated: Beardsley reportedly pronounced Turner ‘only a rhetorician in paint’, and in print (albeit posthumously) referred to him as ‘the Wiertz of landscape painting’; Claude, by contrast, he designated ‘an adorable and impeccable master’ whose pictures ‘[recall] some noble eclogue glowing with rich concentrated thought’: Beardsley, 1904, 25-6, 64. Beardsley positions himself as an enemy of the didactic, theoretical art that Ruskin seemed, on the whole, to represent. Gilbert’s emphasis on Turner’s love of nature for its own sake, without a straightforwardly religious element, might perhaps allow an inference of some common ground, but there is certainly a moral implied in his insistence on the smallness of man.

⁴¹³ Dorment (1985, 58-9) shows that Alice Gilbert’s fragile health was the primary concern in moving to the coast rather than Edwards’ fanciful suggestion that the sculptor wished to signal his affiliation with Rossetti to the Academy: Edwards, 2006, 90. Edwards also claims that Gilbert *bought* the bungalow, but it was certainly rented. Rossetti had been offered it by the architect, J. P. Seddon, with the assent of its owner, a Mr A. B. Cobb.

⁴¹⁴ Hall Caine, quoted in Dorment, 1985, 59.

the landscape painter or the minuter material that lay within reach for him as a jeweller and ornamentalist. Adrian Bury remembered many years later that, as an older man, ‘the merest shell picked up on the seashore, an autumn leaf wind-blown along the garden path, the wings of a bird, the shape of a fish, the structure of a cloud, would shake him with such happy astonishment that tears would come into his eyes in studying them’.⁴¹⁵ Gilbert’s supposed proto-abstractionism becomes, from this perspective, really part and parcel of his naturalism, and by extension, of his Gothicism.

The matter of Gilbert’s Gothicism has attracted a degree of controversy, shaped in part by the reluctance of some to accept as Gothic in any meaningful sense forms which do not appear, as it were, in the text-book. Jason Edwards, for instance, in promoting an Aesthetic Gilbert, has intimated that previous attempts to find a place for his work in relation to ‘other art historical trends’ like the Gothic Revival or the Edwardian neo-Baroque have failed.⁴¹⁶ This is despite Gilbert’s own insistence that the Clarence Memorial, at least, was to be ‘in general appearance [...] Gothic, yet [...] absolutely devoid of the slightest evidence of imitation.’⁴¹⁷ Edwards describes Gilbert’s definition of the term ‘Gothic’ – for him simply ‘the best expression of a living artist’ – as ‘idiosyncratic’, which it may be, but it is one that was, at least in 1903, securely founded on the Ruskinian interpretation of the word, preserving the understanding as propounded in *The Stones of Venice* and other

⁴¹⁵ Bury, 1952, 52.

⁴¹⁶ Edwards, 2006, 7.

⁴¹⁷ Hatton, 1903, 26.

writings on the subject that the Gothic should be considered less a historical phenomenon with clearly defined temporal boundaries than a set of principles that might govern the operation of a living tradition as well. In Gilbert's very independence as a designer – independence made possible by first-hand observation rather than reliance on any text-book – can be found one of the most Gothic (taken in this sense) aspects of his practice.

It was actually in Ruskin that Gilbert found the readiest justification for his work as a goldsmith, as he made clear in an 1897 lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects: in the first of his 1901 Royal Academy lectures dealing with Donatello, Michelangelo, and Cellini, too, Gilbert reminded his audience that 'nearly all the earlier masters were trained in the first place as goldsmiths, and derived from this training much of their power.' Recounting his dream about a collaborative partnership between the three sculptors, he admitted that the whole was 'possibly founded on the recollection of a remark of Ruskin's that the best training for an artist was that of a goldsmith.'⁴¹⁸

If Gilbert's work at this point was shaped by an 'anxiety of influence' as far as plagiaristic 'imitation' was concerned, he had, on the other hand, no qualms about being seen as one who followed the great artists of the past 'in spirit'. Nor for the sake of mere novelty did he set himself entirely against the idea of 'text-book' study in principle: Gilbert devoted a significant part of a 1902 lecture to praise of the architectural drawings – largely studies of ornamental foliage – of James Kellaway

⁴¹⁸ Gilbert, 1897, 162-3; Whitley, 1903, 544. Gilbert had perhaps either not noticed or chosen to ignore some of Ruskin's sterner pronouncements about, for instance, Ghirlandaio's having remained 'to the end of his life a mere goldsmith'.

Colling, which had recently been donated (by their author, though Gilbert does not seem to have known this) to the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects at 9 Conduit Street. Referring to Colling, Gilbert told his students that he had found ‘a kindred spirit in his love of architecture and patient work in the original drawings of Gothic details’, and he urged them to make use of such collections in their own training.⁴¹⁹

2.6. Organic Ornament: Gilbert and Tradition

In the context of sculpture, ‘nature’ also generally denotes life study, as opposed to study from the antique, though sculptors all through the nineteenth century combined the two, and there was by no widely held belief on the part of sculptors that ancient sculpture was *not* naturalistic, let alone that study from nature should not be supplemented by an imaginative process of adaptation and reconstitution – design, in short, sometimes aided by the antique. Gilbert spoke to Hatton of the Shaftesbury Memorial as ‘a most uncompromisingly realistic piece of work, and my first effort in ornament.’⁴²⁰

In truth his study of ornament began much earlier, and the sculptor’s earliest essays in architectural form were very much aided by the antique. In his so-called *Mother Teaching Child* (1881), an early marble group commissioned by Henry Doulton, Gilbert made clear that he had been attending to his studies of Graeco-

⁴¹⁹ *Art Journal*, 1902, 126.

⁴²⁰ Hatton, 1903, 11.

Roman antiquity by including a Corinthian capital, which serves the maternal figure for a stool. It may be easy to dismiss this as an overzealous demonstration of the sculptor's having learned and assimilated the principal doctrines encountered during his training, and to see in it a confirmation merely that the work is a competent apprentice piece.⁴²¹ There may well be some truth in this: around the same time that Gilbert was working on the marble, he was engaged by a Mr Browne to execute six (now untraced) life-sized copies from the antique; '[i]t was a curious thing for a man with so many ideas of his own simmering in his brain to be called upon to make copies of others' works', comments McAllister, 'but Gilbert took a great interest in doing them'.⁴²² Which figures these were remains, unfortunately, a mystery, but these large marbles evidently formed an important and easily forgotten part of the background to Gilbert's celebrated early stand-alone nudes, though those were, in the event, generally small, bronze, and conceived partly in a spirit of opposition to

⁴²¹ Dorment (1985, 42) notes that *Mother Teaching Child* looks to 'such conventional precedents as Eugene [sic] Delaplanche's *L'Éducation Maternelle*' (plaster 1873, marble 1875: according to Gosse shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 but absent from the catalogue), but argues that the oversized scroll in particular lifts the group from the status of 'a simple genre group' to the higher rank of a subject symbolising 'the passing on of wisdom from parent to child.' The baldly literal title by which Gilbert's group is known should not obscure the allegorical character of the conception – beside *The Kiss of Victory* other works dating to his Roman period carried titles like *Love and Youth* and *Astronomy* (this last a seated marble figure shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882: see Dorment, 1985, 36) – but neither should we be tempted to exaggerate the genre element in French sculptural groups of the mid-1870s just because the costume and accoutrements are more recognisable or, it may be, suggestive of national or regional identity. The distinction is a little overstated; while the depicted personages making up Delaplanche's group had studied a modern codex rather than a timeless scroll *à la* Charles Degeorge's young *Aristote* (1875, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), the French sculptor had certainly shared the loftier aims attributed to Gilbert; for the marble versions (Paris and Copenhagen) and bronze reductions (sold by Barbedienne from 1874 onwards), Delaplanche had altered the position of the mother's proper right arm and placed in her hand a slender stick, serving as a simple pointer to the open page but also suggesting – in the bronzes at least – the inculcation of a reverence for nature in its humbler aspects, as it is treated emphatically as a found object rather than any manufactured and shop-bought piece of equipment (in the original plaster she had simply used her finger, but the subsequent change was certainly an improvement); the French group is emphatically allegorical, and draws, moreover, upon iconographical representations of Saint Anne and the Virgin just as Gilbert's portrait of his son Francis and his wet nurse Michalena would allude to images of the Virgin and child.

⁴²² McAllister, 1929, 82.

the perceived coldness of the ‘body first’ sculpture of the past. Really the sculptor was not in a position to decline such a commission at so formative and precarious a stage in his career, but he certainly had greater freedom with *Mother Teaching Child* (Doulton selected the group from among the existing models in the sculptor’s studio), and in a way Gilbert’s reliance on the Corinthian order in this instance is characteristic. The selection of the Corinthian – which was often considered during the nineteenth century a debased style of architecture – might be surprising for another sculptor, less inclined to opt for forms associated with periods of decline.⁴²³ Spielmann ventured to suggest in 1901 that, ‘[p]erhaps if Mr. Gilbert had to execute the group again, he would replace the Corinthian capital with another sort of seat.’⁴²⁴ Certainly the sculptor’s taste and manner had advanced into different territory over the last twenty years; it is probable that he might have changed more than just the capital if a commission for a replica had been forthcoming (and able to be fulfilled) at any point around the turn of the century, but the fact that Gilbert was drawn to the Corinthian order in the first instance must be indicative of something, if only that the young sculptor was aware of its prevalence in Rome, where the marble was carved.

⁴²³ An illustrative example of this, already mentioned above, is recorded in Whitley’s summary (1903, 547) of Gilbert’s 1901 Royal Academy lectures, which were originally accompanied by diagrams and drawings spontaneously laid down on a blackboard with coloured chalks. When Gilbert wished to employ the broken pediment within his design, he acknowledged that it was a form ‘much abused’, but proceeded anyway, citing Michelangelo’s example as sufficient justification for ignoring the dogmatic and often anti-Catholic purism that would have had him avoid baroque motifs altogether. In this connection it is worth noting that the explicitly baroque architectural setting of Ford’s Victoria Memorial for Manchester, which would be unveiled later in the year (1901), and which would also feature a theatrical broken pediment and, on the back, a pair of Corinthian columns, would be fiercely attacked in the press as incompetent and architecturally illiterate. It is tempting to suggest that Ford’s architectural scheme in that instance, two flat window or gable-like façades pasted back to back, with extravagant volutes at the sides (a characteristic touch, repeated elsewhere), was inspired by the kinds of wall-mounted marble tablets present in many churches throughout the country, including those, like St Mary-le-More in Wallingford, Oxfordshire (compare the memorial to Thomas Renda there, c. 1722), for which the sculptor had produced some of his lesser known works (in that case the marble pulpit inset with bronze reliefs of saints, carried out in 1888), although it may just as well preserve a memory of the sculptor’s trip to Naples too.

⁴²⁴ Spielmann, 1901, 76.





Fig. 61. Alfred Gilbert, *Mother Teaching Child*, 1881-3, Marble, 103.5cm, Tate Britain, London, with details of the seat.

Was Gilbert also attracted to the natural, foliate forms, elaborate cutting and slender proportions of the Corinthian in preference to the stately simplicity of the Doric or the elegant abstraction of the Ionic? It can easily be seen as the option most compatible with his later Gothic leanings, and it is probable that the sculptor had encountered the ‘Just So’ story recorded by Vitruvius (4.1) about the origin of the Corinthian capital: that a sculptor by the name of Callimachus had noticed at the grave of a young Corinthian girl how the leaves of an acanthus were pressed into volutes under the weight of a tile-topped basket left to commemorate the deceased. ‘Leighton’s architect’ George Aitchison, also Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, would later include the anecdote – a sort of parable about natural observation – in full in the appendix on architectural orders he attached to his edition of James Ward’s *Principles of Ornament*. The moral of this tale he made explicit: ‘[b]esides the prettiness of the story, it serves as an incitement to the reflection, that if those whose hand and eye are trained will only observe what they see, they may get notions for inventions’.⁴²⁵

In the later 1880s and 1890s, when framing his figurative work in architectural settings, Gilbert did indeed seek to design his own ornament without relying on pre-existing models taken straight from the pattern book, but the principles learned in his earlier study remain present in his later ornament, which is so often characterised, for instance, by an apparently un-Gothic preference for symmetry and occasionally by a highly pictorial twisting impulse that gives great dynamism and movement to his compositions in the round. A distant kinship may

⁴²⁵ Aitchison, 1896, 157.

even be detected between some of these later ornamental projects, with their repetition of sinuous, diagonally thrusting forms, and certain late-antique forms that he might have seen in Venice or learned about from his reading of Ruskin, such as the Byzantine capitals on St Mark's (or the Venetian imitation on the first-floor gallery of the Fondaco dei Turchi) in which the windswept acanthus leaves are playfully subjected to the elements and swept round the central bell from which they grow as though impelled by an external force; 'drifted', as Ruskin had put it in *The Stones of Venice*, 'by a whirlwind round the capital by which they rise'.⁴²⁶ A relatively advanced preliminary design for the Shaftesbury Memorial (made c. 1886) has the octagonal basin supported on an involved series of 'enveloping tendrils' that turn lithely about the concave substructure, providing an element that is only partially preserved in the recurring fish tails of the finished monument, which turn back on themselves in stout leitmotif-like loops that interrupt the one-way torsion of the earlier scheme.⁴²⁷ A fine little drum-like sketch-model (date uncertain, possibly c. 1890) in bronzed plaster in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which has been identified tentatively as a salt-cellar or possibly another early design for the cistern of the Shaftesbury Memorial, demonstrates precisely the same principle, though again the sweeping power may be rather that of the sea than the air, and the objects thus caught up in the eddying current are mermaids in *Fata Morgana*-esque flight with winged, helmeted males in pursuit; it seems likely that this brilliant sketch was intended to serve a more or less architectural function, albeit more plausibly forming

⁴²⁶ Ruskin, *Works* X, 161; see also Plate VIII, Fig. 14, and the illustration and description given in *Works* XI, 322-3, Plate 3.

⁴²⁷ This study, in the van Caloen Album, is reproduced and discussed in Dorment, 1986, 138-9, Cat. 43.

part of the base of a column than its capital.⁴²⁸ Gilbert was still resorting to a similar twisting formula many years later to make an appropriately vivacious, tortuous plinth for his lost *Circe*, to judge from a 1912 photograph of the unfinished clay model.



Fig. 62. John Ruskin, 'St. Mark's Venice, Capital of shaft of central porch', 1851, Pencil and watercolour on paper, 27.3×18.7cm, The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University.

⁴²⁸ A bell is perhaps just as likely.



Fig. 63. Alfred Gilbert, 'Water nymphs' salt-cellar, c.1890, Bronzed plaster, 13×21.5cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The richly moulded bronze columns on the Caldecott Memorial in St Paul's (1887-95, modified 1900) offer a rather different solution, retaining on their capitals both the acanthus and the volute and avoiding the twisted effect. Although both are modified, the new form has a resolutely Corinthian pedigree. If the young Gilbert was drawn to the leafy forms of the Corinthian capital the mature sculptor was too.

Spielmann's uneasiness about the seat in *Mother Teaching Child* was both justified by his familiarity with Gilbert's recent, restlessly inventive practice, and misplaced, because, as he himself recognised, the capital has an important symbolic function within that composition aside from its straightforward service as a prop, even allowing that the critic might have countered that another order more particularly associated with dignity and purity of style would have communicated the

intended message with greater force: Spielmann's interpretation of the group as an allegory of tradition and continuity – '[t]he mother,' he observes, '[...] is seated firmly on the symbol of man's noblest and most enduring work—typifying traditional beauty in art and love, while she teaches the child from the record scroll of the past'⁴²⁹ – is hardly open to question; the capital is emphatically not to be understood as a discarded fragment of neglected antiquity – as is the plaster cast of *Inopos* that had provided an expedient seat for Thomas Couture's blinkered *Réaliste* of 1865 (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) – but as an almost living link with and proof of the purest idealism of the ancient world, founded upon the study of nature; it is, in short, as much a teaching aid as the scroll, and it serves, just as during the medieval period the column had stood, synecdochally, for the Church, as a symbol of what ought to be nurtured and preserved for the future.

Gilbert did not receive any impetus to revisit the group belatedly, but it just happens that in the same year that Spielmann offered his criticism of it, the sculptor exhibited in London *The Broken Shrine*, which can certainly be seen as a reprise of the theme. In this beautiful and moving sketch study, modelled only on a small scale, the architectural element has risen up perpendicularly to provide a modicum of shelter for the mother at its foot, who, nestled in the ruins like a Virgin in a Neapolitan nativity scene, cradles and shields her naked infants as best she can from the elements; in one sense, the focus has moved away from the figurative here, though the point cannot be stressed too far, as the shattered, desecrated shrine expresses the reduced condition and crushed hopes of the human element still

⁴²⁹ Spielmann, 1901, 76.

clinging to it with what is left of its former faith, and this element can hardly be ignored. The architectural fragment, which consists of an incomplete and emptied niche with a small stoup on its base, overgrown with weeds, dominates the composition at once by its presence and its partial absence, but it exists only in relation to the children and their mother – whose former positive role as a representative of education and healthy tradition is replaced by a bitterer didacticism on the part of the now sagelike sculptor.⁴³⁰ Jaded Gilbert may appear in this work,⁴³¹ which grapples directly with the philistinism and iconoclasm he so despised, but the group remains, just as much as the earlier *Mother Teaching Child*, a statement of the artist's idealistic devotion to 'traditional beauty in art and love' even as it exploits the picturesque asymmetry of the subject's miserable circumstances to achieve its effect and to give the sting to its statement.

⁴³⁰ Sagelike in the sense in which the term is generally meant in relation to the writings of Carlyle, Arnold, and so on. It has been suggested (see Dorment, 1985, 215; Dorment, 1986, 184-5, Cat. 99) that the composition relates to Watts' *Peace and Goodwill*, begun in 1888, for which the painter had produced a preparatory model in wax. It is also worth noting that Burne-Jones was during the early 1890s working on the oil version (finished 1894) of his earlier (1873) watercolour *Love Among the Ruins*, long admired by Gilbert. The sculptor might also have known Léon Cogniet's 1824 *Scène du Massacre des Innocents* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes), which focuses on a fearful mother attempting to hide her child behind a ruined wall. It is likely that his inspiration did not come solely from previous pictorial renderings of huddled figures before backdrops of fractured architecture, but the relation of figure to setting was a problem that Gilbert was proud to approach in what seemed to be a 'picturesque' manner. Dorment sees *The Broken Shrine* as a descendant also of the personage representing Truth on Alfred Stevens' Wellington Monument, still in an unfinished state as of 1901, though the commission for its completion was that year awarded to John Tweed. The supposed resemblance, however, may be accidental. Ford's aforementioned Victoria Memorial in Manchester, also unveiled in 1901, features to the rear a standing representation of Maternity with two babes, intended as a tribute to the Queen's status as 'the Mother of her People' (Spielmann, 1901, 52). It is probable that Gilbert's message contained a similarly national element, though of quite another kind; *The Broken Shrine* is by no means a comment on Victoria's reign.

⁴³¹ Not so jaded, however, as Dorment has suggested, by describing mother represented in the work as an 'old hag', 'a grotesque parody of motherhood, and [...] of Charity', 'a very frightening creature', and 'a crone' (1985, 213; 1986, 184, Cat. 99), all terms which seem unjustified and inaccurate.



Fig. 64. Alfred Gilbert, *The Broken Shrine*, c. 1900, Bronze, 36cm, Tate Britain, London.

2.7. Unhealthy Naturalism?

No one could doubt that the base of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, quite as much as the figure which surmounts it, could not have been achieved without careful study of the living model. The upper basin, which Beattie sees as emotional and proto-abstract, is no more so than any seventeenth-century northern-European

auricular style cup or cartouche: the forms throughout, derived in no small measure from the dead model, that is to say, the dissected fish, are not entirely without precedent or parallel in earlier ornamental work. Basins, furthermore, are usually and even necessarily, if in any way intended to be functional, in some sense abstract, so it really is the organic character of the mouldings and modulations of the form that demands attention. Getsy's suggestion that the monument 'surprisingly' resembles 'the biomorphic abstraction of twentieth-century British sculptors' may approach closer to a just characterisation of its essential qualities, though he does not offer any specific examples to flesh out the bare bones of the claim.⁴³² Gilbert, who actually taught his students that '*organic growth*' was one of the fundamental principles to be remembered by the ornamental designer,⁴³³ would have been equally justified in citing tradition for the theoretical underpinnings of his practice, and for claiming, as he had in Liverpool in 1888, that in art 'every movement forward is a reflection sent back from the mirror of the past.'⁴³⁴

Gilbert told Joseph Hatton that during the 1880s and 1890s he 'more than ever made use of natural forms, not alone, of course, in the way of butterflies, beetles and moths, but in the treasures of the sea, fishes of all kinds and every class of molluscous and crustacean life—the crab, the lobster, and such like.' Concluding, the sculptor admitted that to these models he was 'indebted for many of [his] best

⁴³² Getsy, 2004, 116.

⁴³³ Ganz, 1908, xxii.

⁴³⁴ Gilbert, 1888, 101.

incidents of artistic design and construction.’⁴³⁵ Spielmann recorded in 1901 that ‘[a] fish’s skull [...] is to him one of the most beautiful things in nature,’ and asked, rhetorically ‘who can tell how many exquisite things he has given us—in his armour and his ornaments—which he has founded upon its forms and its scaly plates and curves? Bird, animal, and insect life, shells and vegetable growth, contain possibilities infinite for such as he.’⁴³⁶ Again, there is an argument to be made that in Gilbert’s intensive study of shells and the living creatures of the sea can be found a form of naturalism that was by no means necessarily unrecognisable to his contemporaries, even if it might have appeared, in its anatomical probings and reconstitutions, a naturalism of a sometimes relatively morbid kind.⁴³⁷ In fact, this type of inventive design and composition, founded on naturalistic study, is entirely in keeping with the principles Gilbert had inherited from an earlier generation of idealists, and can even be seen as a return to such principles, since the sculptor had during the earlier 1880s been more cautious about uniting elements drawn from disparate sources, especially when treating the human form, and this had certainly represented a departure from academic doctrine; Thornycroft, by contrast, had never had any qualms about placing the head of an Englishman on an Italian model’s body, or lengthening a limb to enhance the dignity of his subject. The development in Gilbert’s approach is, however, logical enough: it was precisely the accumulation of

⁴³⁵ Hatton, 1903, 21-2; see also McAllister, 1929, 86, 125.

⁴³⁶ Spielmann, 1901, 84.

⁴³⁷ Cf. Herbert Maryon in *Metalworking and Enamelling*: ‘If we look at Nature she will give us many hints as to design. We must look not only at plant forms, but also at butterflies, beetles, lobsters and crabs. At bones also—the forms at the underside of the human skull, for example. [...] The study of a sculptor like Alfred Gilbert is a true education. The details of his Piccadilly fountain, for example, will well repay a thorough consideration’: Maryon, 1959, 275.

natural studies from the figure and other sources that enabled Gilbert to invent with freedom in the ornamental branches of his sculptural practice later on.

If his tendencies could be deemed morbid – and certainly Gilbert’s work has been associated with sickness and disease, as, for example, by the American sculptor Lorado Taft, who wrote disparagingly in 1921 of the ‘malady’ that set into the sculptor’s works from the late 1880s onwards – then this could perhaps be seen as nothing more than another aspect of his romanticism;⁴³⁸ Goethe had famously expressed the difference between classicism and romanticism in terms of health and sickness, and we have seen how strenuously Thornycroft’s admirers sought to portray both the man and his sculptural productions as things at once supremely healthy and genuinely Greek in feeling; rarely, if ever, have such claims been made for Gilbert. Taft’s attempt to associate Gilbert with sickness seems to be modelled on earlier criticism of Ernest Hébert, the painter most strongly associated during the nineteenth century with a poeticised vision of illness, and one that was, likewise, developed in Italy, where so many others sought for their art the outward signs of health and vigour. Rhetorically, Taft’s condemnation of what he sees as the Gothic element in Gilbert’s art follows a similar pattern to many of these, judging a perceived mannerism as legitimate in its first appearance – in Hébert’s case, forming an essential part of *La Mal’aria* (1848-9) – but seeing subsequent explorations of similar subjects as a kind of infection. Beattie’s preference for the frailty of some of Gilbert’s figures and the apparent abstraction of his ornamental work over the vigorous physicality of Thornycroft’s or Leighton’s athletes can be seen in large

⁴³⁸ Taft, 1921, 76-7.

measure as a preference for the Gothic spirit with which the sculptor sometimes sought to imbue his productions; in other words, the divergent interpretations of the New Sculpture are not only dependent on a distinction between naturalism and Symbolism as separate objectives to be ranked according to partiality, but also between the Graecism of the one and the medievalism of the other sculptor.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Dual Natures

Marion Hepworth Dixon provided what Beattie judges one of the ‘more successful attempts to define its [the movement’s] identity’, in stressing the poetic achievements of the associated sculptors and recognising in Edward Onslow Ford’s *Study* (1886) ‘that evanescent and elusive thing, an idea carved in the sternest of materials [...] an ideal wrought in stone.’ Characteristically, Beattie omits the earlier critic’s observation, of the same work, the ‘[t]he head inspires one in a degree with the emotion which stirs in the Psyche fragment in Naples.’⁴³⁹ The reference is important because it points again to a myth that, for one thing, deals directly with the idea of the union of the physical with the spiritual, and for another, was of especial importance for many figures associated with the New Sculpture, including Watts, Gilbert, and Bates. The ‘Psyche fragment’ itself, to which Dixon had referred, had been preferred by Edward Bulwer-Lytton to all other extant examples of ancient sculpture, and he had done a certain amount to raise its standing in Britain; Ione, the heroine of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), had been physically modelled on the so-called *Psyche*; an explanatory footnote on a line in a later work (‘O sculptured Psyche of the soul-lit face, / Bending to earth resign’d the mournful eye’: *The New Timon* 3, 2) had described the sculpture, revealingly, as ‘the most intellectual and (so to speak) the most *Christian* of all the dreams of beauty which Grecian art has

⁴³⁹ Dixon, 1892 a, 326.

embodied in the marble.’⁴⁴⁰ On the perceived connection between Ford’s *Study* and the *Psyche*, Dixon’s observation received an echo from Spielmann in 1901, though it came in more restrained terms, with the critic simply pointing out that the bowed position of the head in Ford’s bust recalled the similar attitude of the *Psyche*,⁴⁴¹ yet he saw also an imprint of the sculptor’s growing interest in fifteenth-century Italian art in this very feature. The downcast eyes, too, which he saw as ‘a personal conception [on the part of the sculptor] of female charm and modesty’ and something ‘much affected by the artist in female heads’ is, of course, especially in tandem with the bound hair, a thoroughly Quattrocentist touch that recalls most of all representations of the Virgin.⁴⁴² By omitting Dixon’s reference to the *Psyche*, Beattie avoids the significant implications of the comparison between the ancient and modern works.

⁴⁴⁰ Bulwer-Lytton, 1846, 116. Ione, the heroine of *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) had been modelled physically on the *Psyche of Capua*: ‘Never, [...] have I seen mortal face more exquisitely moulded: a certain melancholy softened and yet elevated its expression; that unutterable something which springs from the soul, and which our sculptors have imparted to the aspect of Psyche, gave her beauty I know not what of divine and noble’; ‘features which but one image in the world can yet depicture and recall – that image is the mutilated but all wondrous statue in her native city – her own Neapolis; that Parian face, before which all the beauty of the Florentine Venus [meaning the *Medici Venus*] is poor and earthly – that aspect so full of harmony – of youth – of genius – of the soul – which modern speculators have supposed the representation of Psyche’; ‘Psyche-like expression of sweet intelligence’: Bulwer-Lytton, 1834, 16, 85, 211.

⁴⁴¹ Spielmann, 55, 1901.

⁴⁴² The bound hair in Ford’s *Study* seems more obviously chosen and arranged than the bound hair of Gilbert’s *Study* of 1883, the evocation of Quattrocento precedent more deliberate.



Fig. 65. Edward Onslow Ford, *A Study*, 1886, Bronze, 37×35cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery.



Fig. 66. Edward Onslow Ford, *A Study*, c. 1886-1891, Marble, 38.1cm, Pollok House, Glasgow.



Fig. 67. The 'Psyche' of Capua, Marble, Roman, First-century BC, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

Dixon had spent, however, the whole of the 1890s seeking with some difficulty to reconcile the imaginative side of the movement with the extreme mimetic refinement seen in the sculptor's works. In an 1892 article in the *Architectural Review* Dixon claims that 'in all Mr. Ford's realism—and he has been roundly accused of being an unbending realist—there is a charm which is largely a spiritual one.'⁴⁴³ The same year in the *Magazine of Art* – the article from which Beattie quotes – Dixon herself calls the sculptor 'an uncompromising Realist' in his imaginative work, but, as we have seen, finds him an Idealist in his portrait studies. The question of whether Ford belongs to one or the other camp is judged 'a moot

⁴⁴³ Dixon, 1892 b, 258.

point',⁴⁴⁴ and Dixon ultimately decides that the sculptor 'has something dual in his nature and in his gifts.'⁴⁴⁵ Again in 1898 we find the critic teasing at the same question and writing not now of plain old realism only but of 'nature's realities' and even 'the apotheosis of what we call naturalism' in Ford's sculpture.⁴⁴⁶

Duality of nature has been seen as a particular obsession of the time in which these sculptors lived. 'The climate of the age encouraged this split approach to life, and Victorian literature is full of it', reflects Peter Green, citing Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age* (1895) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) as representative examples within that sphere of creative production.⁴⁴⁷ Gilbert, we should note, was fond of the latter.⁴⁴⁸

The contradiction at the heart of the movement – the concomitant pull towards the material and the immaterial, the fully embodied and the incorporeal – could, however, be seen as one characteristic of the art of sculpture in general. D. W. Stevenson, in his lecture, already alluded to, on 'The Picturesque in Sculpture', delivered at the congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry in Edinburgh in 1889, recounted an anecdote from a member of the old guard of mid-Victorian sculptors that remains relevant for the work of the younger men:

⁴⁴⁴ Dixon, 1892 a, 325.

⁴⁴⁵ Dixon, 1892 a, 326.

⁴⁴⁶ Dixon, 1898, 295.

⁴⁴⁷ Green, 1982, 43-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Bury, 1952, 56.

Our veteran sculptor, Sir John Steell, Her Majesty's Sculptor for Scotland, repeated to me a remark which may aptly enough illustrate what should be the dominant idea of sculpture in contradistinction to painting; and curiously enough it comes not from an artist but a layman.

Dr. Chalmers on one occasion said to him, 'Your art appears to me the most contradictory of all the arts, in being, of all, the most solid and tangible, while at the same time the most spiritual'.⁴⁴⁹

If the New Sculpture was characterised by 'anti-materialist, innately symbolist ideals', as Beattie claims of works such as Gilbert's *Icarus* and Thornycroft's *Mower*,⁴⁵⁰ then its sometimes extreme realism, which must be considered either as an obstacle to or the very vehicle of its concern with inner life, with complex psychological states or *spirituality*, as nineteenth-century observers preferred, could still inspire vigorous denunciation. In fact, many of the claims Beattie makes about the character of the New Sculpture merely place a positive spin on the depreciatory remarks about British art generally sometimes found in the criticism of external observers. Not all of the criticism was negative: the French painter Fernand Cormon, for instance, wrote an appreciative open letter to Spielmann in 1893, in which the 'national qualities' of English painters were given as 'their power of subtle and searching analysis' and 'their sense of exquisite mystic poetry'. 'Let them not lose their hold, through contact with us,' he implored, 'of their English poetry—poetry so

⁴⁴⁹ Stevenson, 1890, 131-2.

⁴⁵⁰ Beattie, 1982, 150.

deep and so sweetly thrilling.’⁴⁵¹ For Cormon, both the naturalism and the mysticism associated with the New Sculpture likewise would have appeared native developments stemming in large part from a culture with a longstanding reputation for literary achievement, and not merely the external characteristics of an offshoot of International Symbolism.

To some observers, the ‘subtle and searching analysis’ – associated strongly with northern Europe and involving seemingly unidealised form and a preoccupation with mortality, as opposed to health and vitality – when paired with a pretence to higher poetic meaning or abstractions, was intolerable. To a British critic, too, like Claude Phillips, individualised treatment of the nude was incompatible with mystical subject matter. In connection with Gilbert’s *Enchanted Chair* (1886), in which he had recognised the boldness and lack of conventionality in the attitude of the sleeping figure, and the ‘uncompromisingly faithful’ modelling of the body, Phillips had expostulated in *The Academy* at some length about sculpture’s status as ‘an art of compromise’, arguing that ‘these same distinctive qualities—in their right place unquestionably excellencies—jar somewhat with a subject deliberately chosen from the realms of the fantastic and the ideal.’⁴⁵² Yet Phillips’ was rarely an entirely sympathetic voice and his less tactful reviews sometimes generated hostilities with the artists in question. Gilbert complained privately to Spielmann of ‘the utter rot and balderdash that I have read concerning art, and especially the Sculpture branch,

⁴⁵¹ Cormon, 1893, 11.

⁴⁵² Phillips, 1886, 385.

from the pen of M^r Phillips'.⁴⁵³ Not all Phillips' observations fall into this category, but he certainly was more than capable of allowing his lack of sympathy with an artist's aims to reveal his own ignorance, as in his comments, repeated in numerous publications shortly before Gilbert's complaint, on George Frampton's *The Children of the Wolf*, shown in plaster in 1892. Determined to see the group as a novel and fantastical flight-of-fancy in keeping with other works by Frampton, the critic grasped in vain at the intended meaning, and ultimately misidentified the subject: '[p]resumably, the artist means to show us the abandoned children of a were-wolf found in the forest—perhaps the earthly offspring of Wotan himself.'⁴⁵⁴ The motif is, of course, unmistakably classical; the group was recognised by others easily enough as a relatively straightforward treatment of a celebrated incident from Roman legend – that of Faustulus carrying the wolf-suckled infants, Romulus and Remus, home to his wife.⁴⁵⁵ Phillips' criticisms of Frampton, seen as one of Gilbert's most ardent admirers and therefore a member of his 'school', were persistent, and on what he believed to be the incompatibility of the real and the ideal in modern sculpture he was happy to repeat himself many times in many publications over the following decade. In Frampton's *My Thoughts are my Children* (1894),⁴⁵⁶ Phillips was puzzled

⁴⁵³ Gilbert, in a letter to M. H. Spielmann, June 25th 1892.

⁴⁵⁴ Phillips, 1892, 550 (*The Academy*).

⁴⁵⁵ The art critic for *The Builder* describes the subject as 'the rescuing of Romulus and Remus by a peasant of noble form and countenance': *The Builder*, 24 June 1893, 480. Walter Armstrong (1909, 305), names the man in Frampton's group as Faustulus. Compare also the 1896 sculpture group by the Danish sculptor Theobald Stein treating the same subject (*Hyrden Faustulus med Romulus of Remus*, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), which independently or not makes use of the same striding action but embellishes the group with the addition of the enthusiastic she-wolf herself.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. Shakespeare, Sonnet 77.11: 'Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain'. Frampton's intention in this work seems to be the expression of something like Montaigne's view that '[c]e que nous engendrons par l'ame, les enfantemens de notre esprit, de nostre courage et suffisance, son produits par une plus noble partie que la corporelle, et son plus nostres; nous sommes pere et mere

by the ‘attempt to give back what, if anything, is a dream-vision [...] in all too human shapes of a studied naturalism’;⁴⁵⁷ elsewhere he wrote of the same work that it was ‘a tribute to the fashionable pseudo-mysticism in art, which acquires a peculiar and rather sinister flavour in virtue of a treatment half realistic applied to visionary motives.’⁴⁵⁸

There is no doubt that Frampton’s productions in this line were more acceptable to those on the continent who were either sympathetic to or deeply involved in the exploration and expression of Symbolist ideals; seeing some of Frampton’s works in Brussels in 1894 at the first exhibition of *La Libre Esthétique* (the only contribution by a British sculptor),⁴⁵⁹ Fernand Khnopff found them ‘full of curious research, cleverly presented, and, above all, modelled in a scholarly and delicate fashion’; it was, in short, the careful and analytical modelling, especially in bas-relief, that was the principal object of the painter’s admiration. Khnopff made, on the other hand, no noteworthy comment about the ‘visionary motives’ as such.⁴⁶⁰

ensemble en cette generation’ (*Essais* II, 8). Frampton does not resort to Greek mythology here, though the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus might have been an obvious choice. The upper part of the relief is given to a relatively straightforward representation of maternity with numerous fleshy children at her breast; the lower – and nearer – figure holds a lily, which with its Marian associations especially must be symbolic of purity and chastity. How ‘sinister’ the work might be is open to debate, though it can certainly be seen as a ‘peculiar’ statement for the artist to make in 1894, coinciding with the birth of his only child, Meredith. It suggests a degree of ambivalence about the prospect of fatherhood.

⁴⁵⁷ Phillips, 1895, 69. (*Magazine of Art*)

⁴⁵⁸ Phillips, 1894, 482.

⁴⁵⁹ The extent of British involvement in subsequent *Libre Esthétique* exhibitions is discussed in detail by Jeppard, 1999, 23-32.

⁴⁶⁰ Khnopff, 1894, 32.

French critics were, however, often bolder about what they perceived as deficiencies in British sculpture. ‘La sculpture n’est pas leur fait’, wrote A. Paillier, of the English contribution to the Exposition universelle of 1889, ‘[i]ls ont une secrète répugnance pour le nu, et ne l’étudient pas volontiers.’ Paillier justified the claim with a lurid description of Thomas Stirling Lee’s *Dawn of Womanhood* – the only life-sized female nude sent from Britain to the exhibition.

On l’a reléguée et cachée dans une petite salle sombre, à l’abri des regards indiscrets. Cette statue, modelée par M. Lee, n’est pas séduisante. Elle personnifie la *Jeunesse*. Son principal défaut est de n’avoir rien de jeune. Les chaires sont molles et affaissées, les os du torse et du bassin apparaissent en saillies désagréables, la tête est vulgaire et sans physionomie. Les membres sont lourds, de formes peu distinguées. Le statuaire a du beaucoup s’aider de moulages sur nature qu’il a copiés avec trop de servilité.

La Jeunesse is, perhaps, a slightly more concrete title than the metaphorical *Dawn of Womanhood*, but a similar attitude prevails concerning the lack of selection involved in the illusionistic rendering of the nude. Not content merely to criticise, Paillier suggested a possible explanation for the sculpture’s faults:

Cette dureté que nous signalons et regrettons est peut-être le fait du manque de lumière dont souffrent ces artistes.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶¹ Paillier, 1889, 138.

Gosse later admitted, looking back, that the *Dawn of Womanhood* was ‘like an absolute cast from the flesh. There was no selection of type, no striving after beauty of line; the figure was a literal copy of an ugly naked woman.’⁴⁶²

A stereotype emerged during the nineteenth century of *les sculpteurs anglais*, as of *les anglais* more generally, as prudish and pedantic, obstinately literary rather than artistic, and studying the art in a stiffly academic way, working on statues from suboptimal models in full shadow amid soot, peasoupers, and excessively analytical museum visits. Dusty classicism and naturalism of a dry, undiscerning kind are, from this perspective, seen as perfectly compatible as both result from an inability to see or appreciate physical beauty and an obsession even in sculptural works with literary or intellectual qualities. With this crude exaggeration could be contrasted an equally overstated generalisation concerning the romanticism, blissful ignorance, immorality, and vitality of French productions. William Walton, wrote in 1893 of the ‘thirst for exactness of archaeological information which still sends the English painters [for the stereotype was not limited to sculptors] to the British Museum and South Kensington before they begin their erudite compositions’; ‘these Frenchmen’, on the other hand, ‘know it not, and they appreciate their classic themes so little that they represent the chaste Diana as eternally naked, and thereby insult her far more flagrantly than did the Boeotian hunter.’ Walton talks of painting, but the example cited brings to mind the controversy surrounding Falguière’s *Diane* (1882). The criticism is, of course, double-edged, and it is difficult to say who, of French and British artists, suffers the greater insult.

⁴⁶² Gosse, 1894, 277.

In 1899, the satirical illustrated journal *Le Rire* put out a special on 'les English' in which the painter-caricaturist Adolphe Willette took aim at English womanhood and artists together, mocking the perceived pretensions of the latter – now regarded as old-fashioned in Paris – to classical dignity married to painstaking observation of the sickly city-bred waif. The caption runs: 'Remarquez par cette étude faite sur nature que le corps de la femme anglaise est sérieux, qu'il est dépourvu des frivoles et indécents appas qui sont le triste apanage de la Française... Ah! si les Grecs avaient connu l'Anglaise!'



Fig. 68. Adolphe Willette, 'Académie', from *Le Rire*, 23 November, 1899, unpag.

Ironically, the 'statue' in Willette's cartoon seems to be derived from the *Greek Slave* of the American sculptor Hiram Powers rather than any English work of art,

though the clichéd pose and pseudo-classical column are only part of the joke. Neither British artists nor administrators felt that the stereotype required challenging. Only a few months later the decision must have been made to send Ford's *Echo* to the 1900 Exposition universelle. This statue, first exhibited in 1895, is really a *Psyche* called by another name, so closely related is it conceptually to a large picture – entitled *Psyche: "Farewell"* – that had caused a stir at the Royal Academy only the previous year, painted by the young, unknown George Harcourt, a student of Ford's friend Herkomer at Bushey. The picture had been accompanied by a quotation from Morris' *Earthly Paradise*, the passage in question forming the immediate prelude to Psyche's suicide attempt.

Farewell, / O fairest lord! and since I cannot dwell / With thee in heaven, let
me now hide my head / In whatever dark place dwell the dead!



Fig. 69. George Harcourt, *Psyche: "Farewell"*, 1894, Oil on canvas, Untraced.

It was, Spielmann noted, 'manifestly painted under the influence of Mr. Watts', and especially under the spell of one of the pictures that Burne-Jones' privately called the

‘3 whacking Eves which I can’t abide’:⁴⁶³ that is, the Milton-inspired *She Shall Be Called Woman* (also known as the *Creation of Eve*, c. 1875-92).⁴⁶⁴ Watts himself admired Harcourt’s work.⁴⁶⁵ Watts’ Phidianism has been replaced, however, in the case of both the picture and the related statue, by a slimmer ideal. Arthur Hacker, another friend of Ford’s, would later attempt to marry the daringly modern naturalism of his *Echo* with the antique, by quoting the bowed head of the so-called *Psyche* fragment in Naples in his own picture of *The Wandering Psyche*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1907.

⁴⁶³ Spielmann, 1897, 235; Lago, 1981, 130.

⁴⁶⁴ On the Miltonian inspiration, see Watts II, 141.

⁴⁶⁵ Lees, 1917, 167.

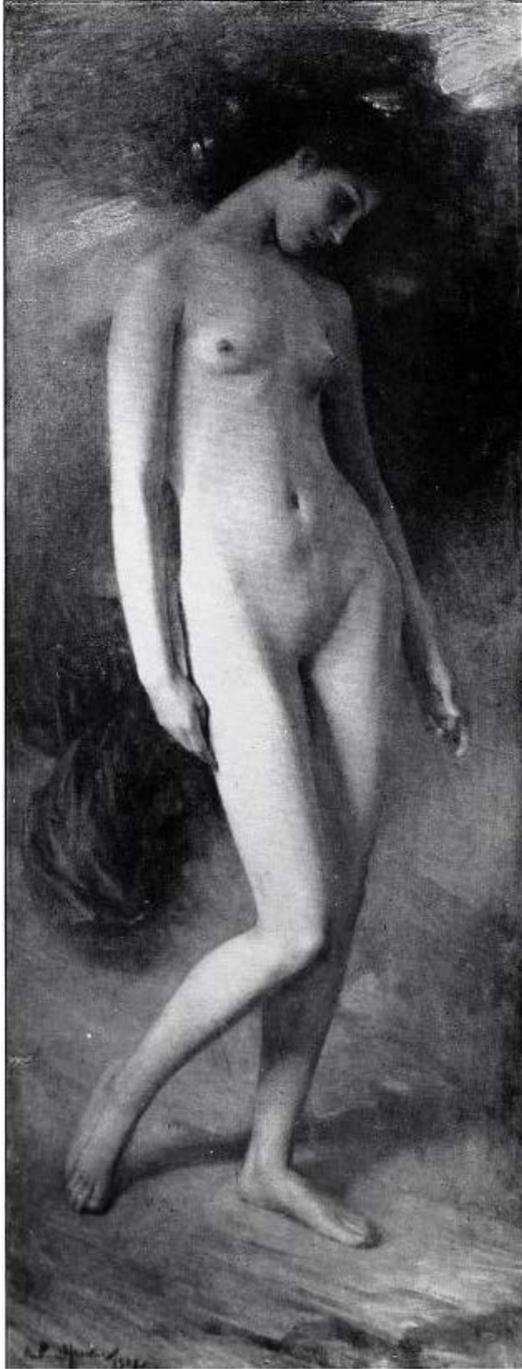


Fig. 70. Arthur Hacker, *The Wandering Psyche*, 1907, Oil on canvas, Untraced.

Ford's classicism was not here of the healthy kind associated with Leighton and Thornycroft. In numerous respects this bony, swooning girl, a representation of corporeal transience itself, ascetic, insubstantial, and recorded with what seems razor-sharp fidelity, was the sculptor's masterpiece, and yet one might easily

suppose that for French observers (and American ones too, if avid consumers of French criticism) it could only have confirmed existing suppositions about the moroseness and limited charms of *les femmes anglaises* and British artists in general.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Indecision in the Monumental Sphere: Sculpture, Architecture, and Thomas

Stirling Lee's Rejection of the Grand Manner

One of the most controversial works connected with the New Sculpture was unsurprisingly produced by a sculptor associated with the more 'aggressive' branch. This was Thomas Stirling Lee's aborted series of allegorical panels, illustrating the 'Administration or Course of Justice, and its Final Results',⁴⁶⁶ for Liverpool's vigorously classical St George's Hall, which has been described as 'perhaps the best secular building of its date in Europe' by one scholar who, however, does not even mention that sculpture forms a part of the scheme.⁴⁶⁷ These reliefs are overtly classical in conception if not obviously in subject or execution. The story has been told elsewhere, but may be sketched out here in the briefest terms: the designs for twenty-eight panels had been, after a competition, approved and commissioned in 1882, only to be rejected, tussled over, and finally approved (albeit only partially) in the following years, leaving the series twenty-two panels short of the original intention. At the inaugural meeting of the National Association for the Advancement for Art and its Application to Industry, held in Liverpool in December 1888, Gilbert veered off-topic mid-speech – 'in a particularly theatrical way'⁴⁶⁸ says Dorment – to demand justice (the very subject of Lee's work) and sympathy for his 'broken and discouraged' friend and collaborator, and to ask that 'a committee of competent

⁴⁶⁶ *The British Architect*, 22 Jan 1886, 53.

⁴⁶⁷ Jenkyns, 1991, 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Dorment, 1985, 96.

artists [...] be formed, before it is too late, to settle this painful question, and before the good name which Liverpool this week has justly earned, by inaugurating a movement like this one, be so stained as to qualify its right to the distinction.⁴⁶⁹

The chief objection, which seemed to the sculptor's supporters only provincial philistinism, had been to the chaste but alarmingly particularised nudity that Lee had included in the first two reliefs, entitled *Joy follows the growth of Justice, led by Conscience, directed by Wisdom*, and *Justice in her purity refuses to be diverted from the straight path by Wealth and Fame*. There was, however, another charge alongside that of indecency – an objection, as Dormont puts it, to the 'incompetence' of the work.⁴⁷⁰ In 1886, the council of the Liverpool Architectural Society had judged the first specimen panel to be 'out of harmony with and inferior to the high standard of the architecture',⁴⁷¹ and the dispute might have passed had James Picton not told the body that architects were not equipped to criticise sculpture, thereby drawing upon himself sundry denunciations and encouraging his opponents to dig in their heels.⁴⁷² The nudity is not of direct concern here, though it theoretically plays an important role in the narrative progression of the allegory over the course of the six panels, and is relevant to the present discussion in so far as it might seem to imply, by its prominence alone, that the human frame should be regarded as the principal vehicle of Stirling Lee's sculptural expression, as it was for

⁴⁶⁹ Gilbert, 1888, 106-7.

⁴⁷⁰ Dormont, 1985, 95.

⁴⁷¹ *The British Architect*, 22 Jan 1886, 76.

⁴⁷² *The British Architect*, 22 Jan 1886, 53; Anon., *The British Architect*, 22 Jan 1886, 76.

Gilbert, Ford, and Thornycroft. The controversy itself is of marginal importance, yet it is noteworthy that alongside the prudery and derisive tone that characterised the pronouncements of some detractors, concerns were raised that the abstract ideas represented in the reliefs were illegible; these concerns were reasonably well supported with incisive albeit sardonic observations about the iconographical fitness of the subject and its treatment.

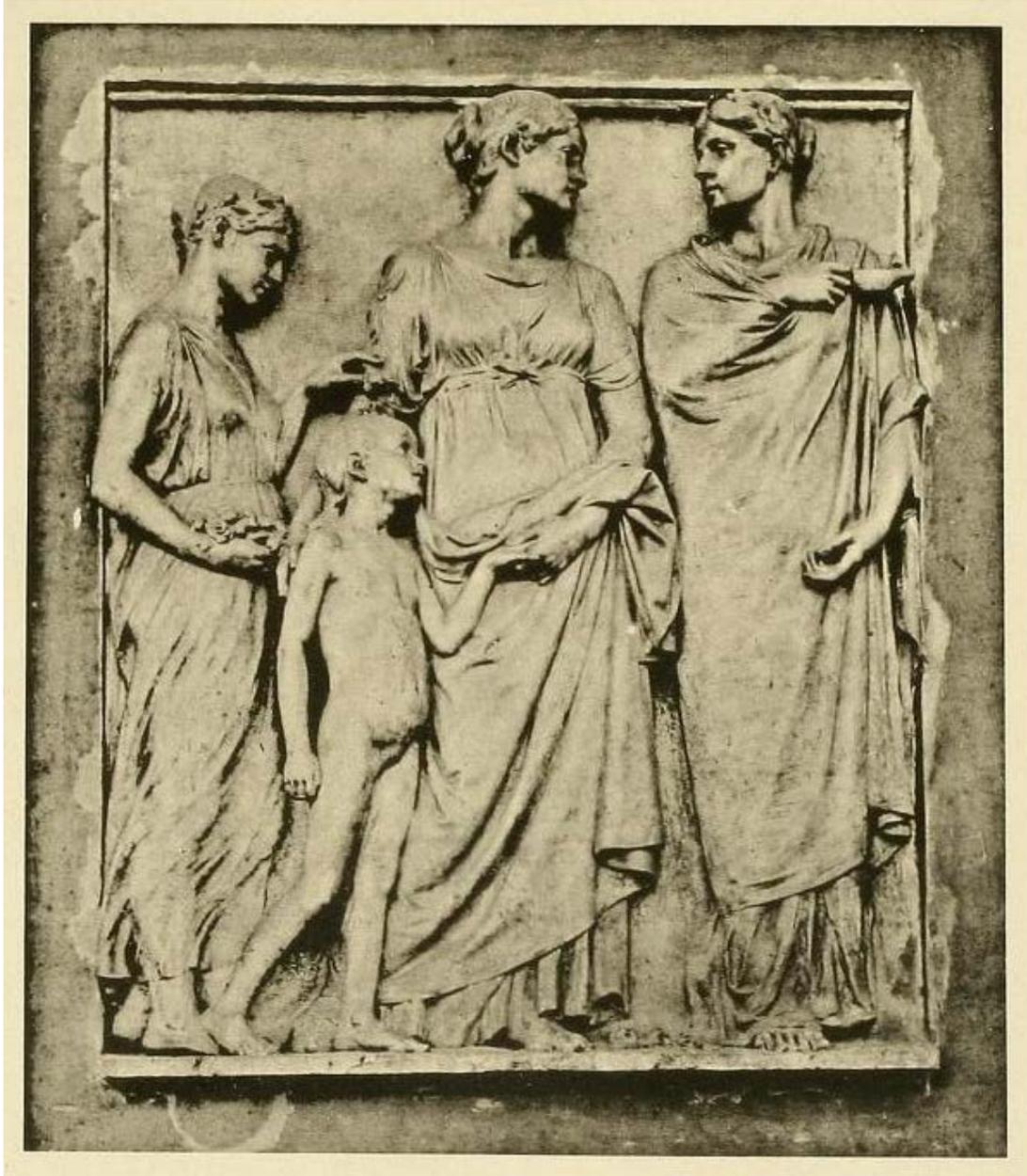
Gilbert implied that personal criticisms were the greatest injustice in the affair, protesting before his Liverpool audience that Lee was suffering ‘the double humiliation of seeing his work unfinished and his powers questioned.’ Undoubtedly Lee was mistreated, but there was also more than, as Beattie suggests, only ‘sniggering scorn’ in the architect Joseph Boulton’s criticisms of the figure types Lee had selected for the first relief. Boulton’s inability to see the personage representing Wisdom as ‘in any way [...] typical of wisdom’ – a statement that Beattie seems to imply is self-evidently absurd – is to some extent understandable in light of the relative inconspicuousness of the attributes – concessions to longstanding convention – that might have rendered her easily identifiable.⁴⁷³ Of the specimen panel, Boulton complained in the *The British Architect* that it ‘discards all symbols, and introduces a group of anonymous individuals of whose personality there is not the slightest indication, except the lamp of knowledge (?) carried by Wisdom (?), which may be the lamp of life for any sign to the contrary. [...] the means of identifying the personages are wholly absent.’⁴⁷⁴ It must be admitted that this is an exaggeration –

⁴⁷³ Beattie, 1983, 44.

⁴⁷⁴ Boulton, in Picton, Raffles Davison, and Boulton, 1886, 80.

Wisdom also wears a diminutive olive crown – but it is only a slight one, and Boulton's criticisms would themselves be caricatured unfairly by an opponent in the following issue as a straightforward objection 'that it [the sculpture] tells no tale and conveys no moral.'⁴⁷⁵ As we shall see, the sculptor's literalism contributes towards a surprisingly inexpressive result, and this is the case in part because Lee's impulse towards allusiveness and originality makes a tangle of what might easily have been greater narrative clarity.

⁴⁷⁵ *The British Architect*, 5 Feb 1886, 107.



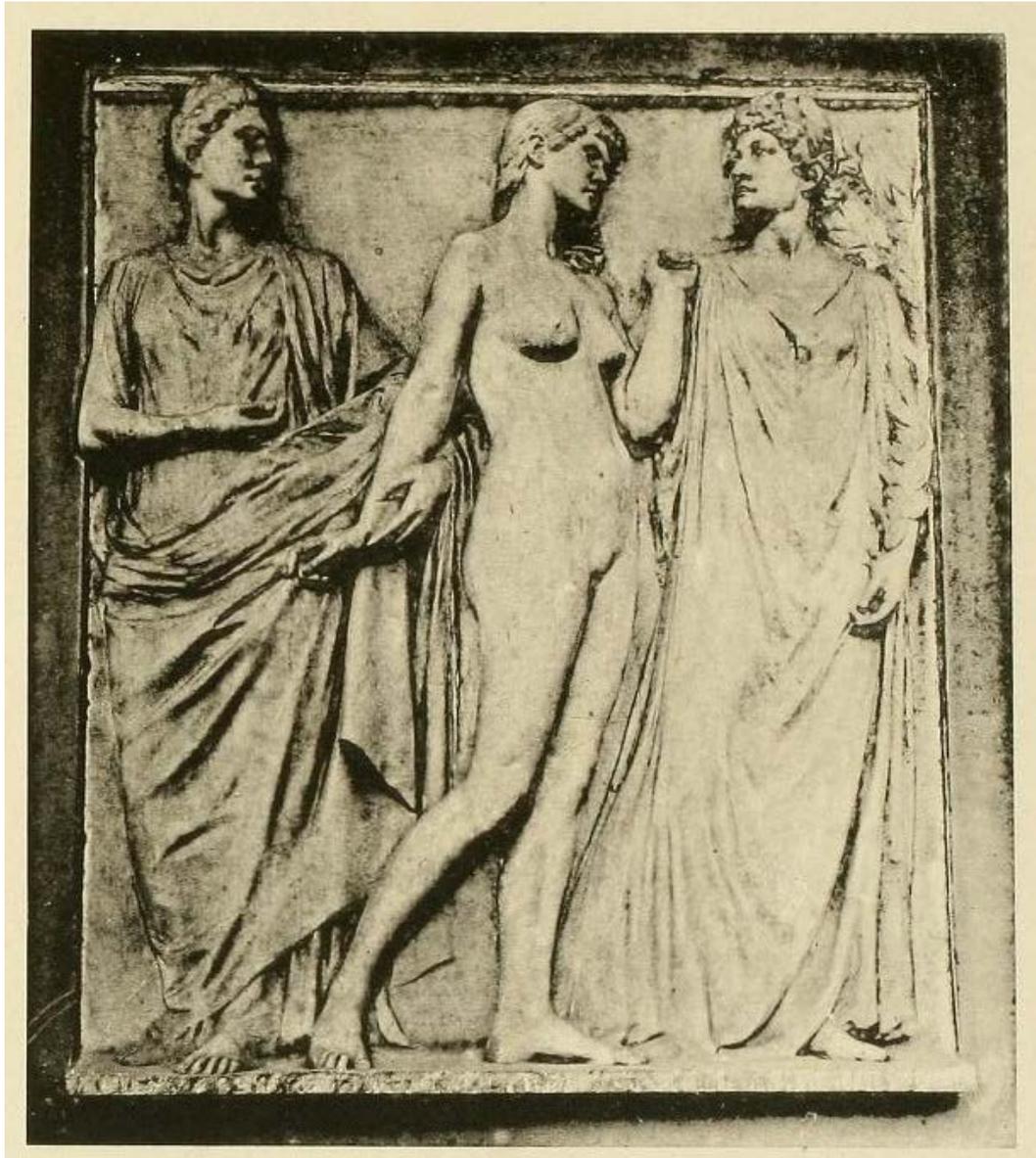


Fig. 71. Thomas Stirling Lee, *Panels for St George's Hall, Liverpool*, reproduced in *The Scottish Art Review*, August 1890, facing page 65.



Fig. 72. Thomas Stirling Lee, *Progress of Justice* panels *in situ*, 1885-94, Istrian stone, St George's Hall, Liverpool.



Fig. 73. A. D. MacCormick, 'Sterling [sic] Lee's Studio', published as an illustration to Roberts, 1889, 74.

The allegory is new, the modelling strikingly unidealised, but the arrangement is distinctly classical, even neo-Attic: *The British Architect* not only argued that the 'the treatment of the panels in a processional form of upright figures is in harmony with the colonnaded front of the hall',⁴⁷⁶ but also reported that Lee's original sketches had been filled with seated figures, which were changed upon further study of the building and consideration of the visual relation of the panels to

⁴⁷⁶ *The British Architect*, 22 Jan 1886, 53.

the surrounding architecture: ‘this [original arrangement], so soon as he came to study the building which he had to decorate, he evidently found inappropriate to the main lines and feeling of the architecture, and in the completed panel all the figures stand, thus echoing back from their folded draperies the vertical lines of the fluted columns.’⁴⁷⁷ At this point, Lee considered other important facets of the problem at hand, including ‘[t]he question of relief’ and ‘the proportion and placement of detail’. The building as surveyed by Lee was, of course, not quite the building with which we are now familiar, since the now vacant pediment on the southern elevation then bore an arresting cluster of allegorical personages, executed (1849-50) by William Grinsell Nichol but designed by Charles Robert Cockerell with some assistance from none other than Alfred Stevens, who is also credited with having contributed to the interior decoration the figurative borders in the tiled Minton floor of the Concert Hall (1853) that feature tritons, sea nymphs, and boys riding dolphins.⁴⁷⁸ A lithograph (produced about 1849-50) of the pediment as carried out gives an excellent idea of the arrangement, and although its drawing has been attributed to Stevens himself, a point which might induce scepticism about accuracy, it does, to all appearances, faithfully represent Cockerell’s style as well his own: unmistakably his are the energetic groups chunkily filling up the angles and doing battle with their assorted hefty merchandise.

⁴⁷⁷ Mackmurdo, 1886, 54.

⁴⁷⁸ The weathered but irreplaceable pedimental sculpture, in Caen limestone, was removed out of concern for public safety in 1950 and apparently broken up for road-fill.

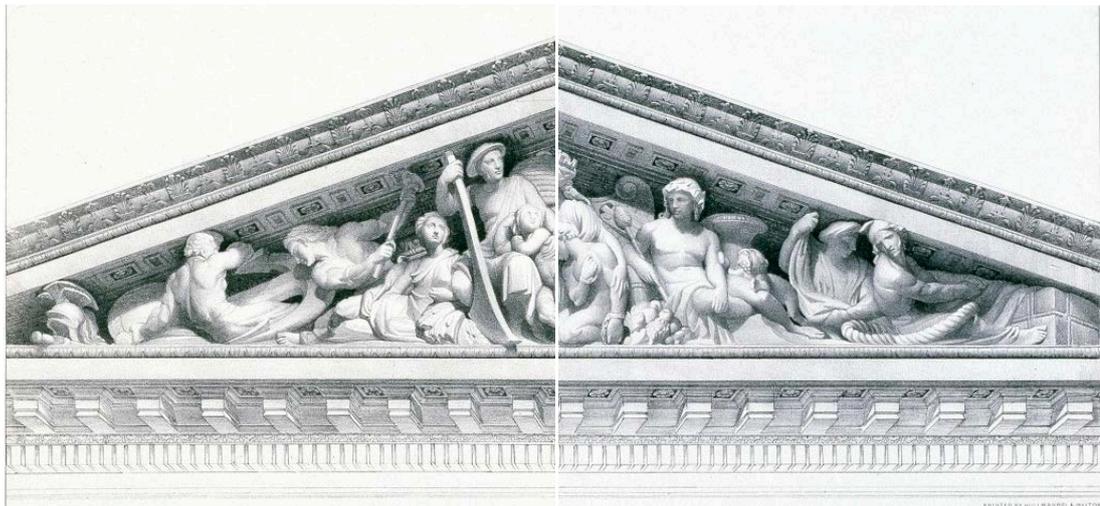
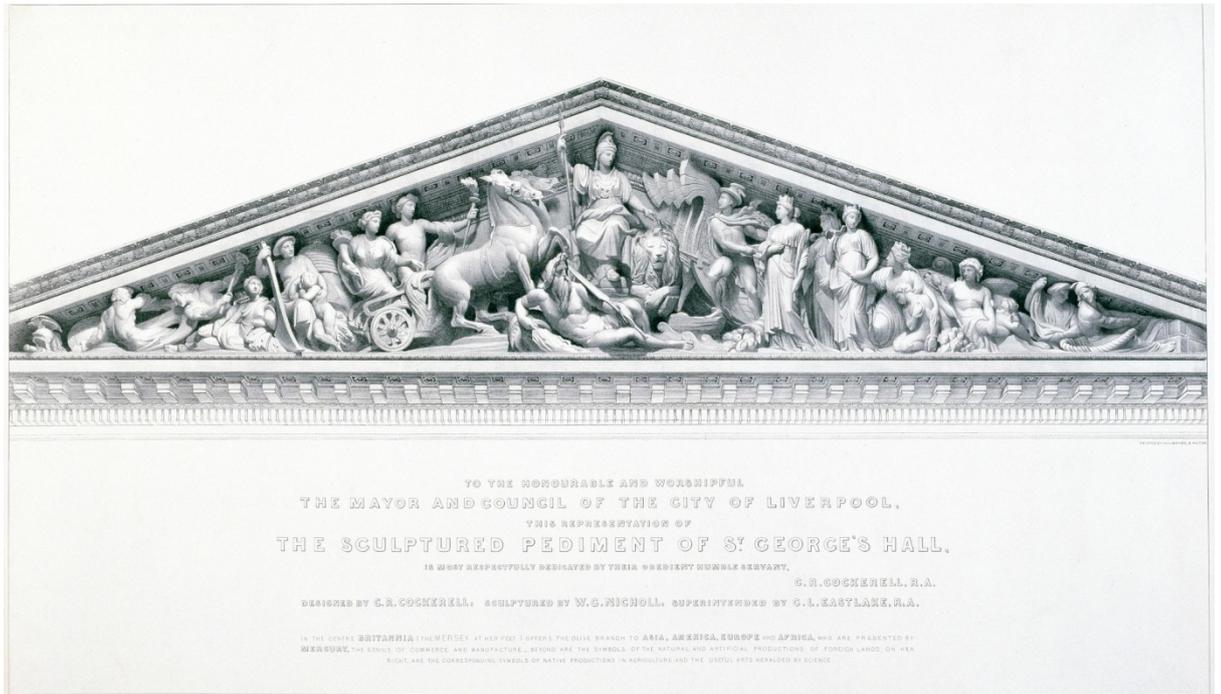


Fig. 74. Alfred Stevens (attributed to), after C. R. Cockerell, 'The Sculptured Pediment of St. George's Hall' and details, Lithograph, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The pedimental sculpture was, then, relatively eclectic, though the scheme as a whole was resoundingly neoclassical, and even within Cockerell's more tranquil, laid-back portions of the design there is an expressive squashiness that enlivens such relatively artificial pieces of paraphernalia as the ships' prows crammed in near the centre of the tympanum, which mirror the rearing horses occupying the corresponding position to the left of Britannia. We are told that Lee studied the architectural surroundings carefully, and that he aimed to match the 'main lines and feeling' of the building as a whole rather than to produce any jarring clash of detail with setting. Quite what, if anything, he took away from his inspection of the existing *sculpture* on the building is difficult to determine, unless a glance or two at the pediment, with its bombastic mingling of boldly simplified symbolic personages and bulky attributes, merely strengthened his resolve to provide something widely dissimilar; his own panels are conceived almost as if the intention were to contradict flatly the combined efforts of Cockerell, Stevens, and Nicholl.

We are told that Lee's designs originally included seated figures. How far the panels as first projected – separated one from another rather than set out in a continuous frieze – could really have been 'processional' is surely open to question, as is the claim about the verticality of the drapery on the figures as realised, where the kind of columnar perpendicular fluting familiar from, say, the Parthenon frieze, and strongly recommended within the Beaux-Arts tradition (in which Lee had been trained) as a means of giving clarity to the position of the limbs, is not in fact insisted on; on the initial panels in particular, the drapery is largely caught up in soft radiating creases, wrapping around but only imperfectly revealing the action of the figures beneath; this is most obvious in the matronly figures of Wisdom, whose

mantle obscures any underlying division at the waist and gives an unfortunate pillow-case effect to the personage (flying in the face of another Beaux-Arts recommendation normally used to give increased roundness and flexibility to the figure, and also Watts' interpretation of Phidian 'impression of colour' as an effect produced through the contrast between drapery cut up with many folds and the broad masses of the body) and in that of Fame, whose long tunic, pinned at the shoulders so as to form a ladder of loosely hanging crumples down the front of the garment, materially contradicts the action of the figure underneath.

Beattie, who holds Lee's panels for St George's Hall in high esteem, is highly critical of Thornycroft's management of drapery in his work for the Institute of Chartered Accountants (1888-93), where numerous modern as well as pseudo-antique costumes are represented, the mundane alongside the overtly idealised – 'Thornycroft,' she writes, 'for all his passionate admiration of the Parthenon sculptures, had little instinctive feeling for carving' – but despite the stiff, boxed-in effect associated with much highly constructed late nineteenth-century attire it is questionable whether there really is anything on that building as clumsy as the draping of these two figures in Liverpool, remarkable in the work of a Beaux-Arts-trained sculptor.⁴⁷⁹

It is important not to overstate the divergence between the two main branches of the New Sculpture in this respect by viewing Lee as a talented and unconventional sculptor who could manage his material appropriately, and Thornycroft as a modeller of clay, less comfortable with work in stone, which is the main point of Beattie's

⁴⁷⁹ Beattie, 1982, 69.

criticism of the latter (neither was working in marble, incidentally, but, respectively, in Istrian stone, most strongly associated with Venice, and Portland stone). In truth, Thornycroft was always stronger in the round than in relief, and seems also to have placed a greater importance on shade than Lee, though the architectural setting inevitably governed the depth of relief in both cases; with Thornycroft's frieze, such considerations as the height at which the panels were to be placed and concomitant distance and steepness of angle from which they might be seen were taken into account, and, justify a certain heaviness of treatment here and there when seen up close; also relevant is the fact that Thornycroft's frieze was more of a workshop production than Lee's initial work for St George's Hall, and that assistants were entrusted with the modelling (C. J. Allen, John Tweed) as well as the carving (Davis, Hardie, Webber, Murphy), carried out *in situ*.⁴⁸⁰

On the subject of St George's Hall, Thornycroft was in reality one of Lee's supporters, and even adapted the other sculptor's child Justice, Understanding and Wisdom for the left-hand side of the relief representing *Education* (modelled by Allen in 1892), expressing (and grounding) the allegory in more familiar terms: Justice is transformed into a young (fully clothed) boy, cricket bat in hand, apparently interrupted at his play and perhaps just a little sceptical of the bright academic future being planned for him: Understanding is his mother or governess, practically dragging the child forwards; Wisdom becomes a stern but sympathetic schoolmaster, engaging directly with the boy. The personages are identifiable not just because of their costumes and attributes, or even because of the fact that the

⁴⁸⁰ See Manning, 1982, 204, Cat. 120.

word 'Education' is included in the design, but also because the relationship between the figures has been expressed with greater directness and clarity. Another connection between the two projects was established in the later stages of Lee's work on St George's Hall, when Allen, alongside Conrad Dressler, was employed to work on the remaining panels under Lee's direction.



Fig. 75. William Hamo Thornycroft, Detail of the 'Education' panel on the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Moorgate Place, City of London, 1888-93, Portland stone.

The later panels executed by Lee adopt a much more conventionally classical approach to drapery. This surely reflects the artist's responsiveness to criticism and experience gained. As late as 1901, however, Spielmann – presumably thinking of the draping of the figure as well as the general balancing of masses, and still going on the early reliefs for Liverpool on which he thought Lee's reputation rested – was

still able to comment that the sculptor's work was 'never "cut up"', and that 'firmness [was] sometimes wanting as a foil or contrast.'⁴⁸¹

Reviewing the first panel, Mackmurdo defended Lee's work in the following terms:

[...] while in sympathy with the Greek architecture, this sculpture is vital and full of the breath of our own life. No archaeological carving is this. Its figures have enough realism to give them life, enough idealism to give them the dignity becoming their architectural position. Thus this single panel bears evidence enough for those who will read it, of quite unusual care in maintaining the past relations between sculpture and architecture.⁴⁸²

'It would be indeed surprising', wrote a bitter and anonymous 'Dickey Sam' in the correspondence section of *The British Architect*, 'if men of taste, such as Liverpool architects are, should not have denounced the sacrilege (for it is nothing else) of Mr. Elmes' noble work. The men of letters (many and profuse) may think differently, for the simple reason that they are "in the swim." But after the thought of Elgin marbles and the shade of Michael Angelo what is this voice of theirs but idle wind?' [...] I would sooner far see those panels in the rough for ages than the execution thereon of meaningless and ridiculous burlesques of sculpture, save the mark.'⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Spielmann, 1901, 66.

⁴⁸² Mackmurdo, 1886, 54.

⁴⁸³ *The British Architect*, 12 Feb 1886, 157.

There is much truth in Mackmurdo's defense of Lee's work, but if the carving was not overtly 'archaeological' in character, the composition of this and subsequent panels was still heavily indebted to a specific antique source that gives them a certain archaeological interest. Upon learning, apparently belatedly (a remarkable point, this), how firmly neoclassical St. George's Hall was (albeit of a Roman stamp), and in modifying his figures accordingly from seated to upright positions, Lee must have given renewed attention to ancient frieze sculpture, for the derivation suggested here cannot be accidental, and he seems, moreover, to have been keen enough that any imputation of anticlassicism in his work should not be chalked up to ignorance of antiquity. To the Architectural Association in 1891 Lee spoke about Greek sculpture and, without alluding directly to the St George's Hall debacle, justified his stylistic departure from classical precedent on the grounds of the dissimilar climatic conditions of Athens and London or Liverpool:

The Greeks worked so geometrically that they had set forms for different characters of figures, and the process of working is clearly shown by some blocks still lying at the marble quarries of Paria [Paros]. The sculptor had sent a drawing of his work in planes. These were worked at the quarries to facilitate the raising and removing of the block, and also enabled one to judge of the quality of the marble, the name of which Lychnitie (light) [*sic*] gives the account of the way in which the quarry was worked by lamps

The allusion is to the celebrated *lychnites* (λυχνίτης) stone, a brilliant, translucent variety of marble which Pliny (HN, 36.5) says was mined, rather than quarried, by lamplight; it is Pliny who connects the name with *λύχνος* ('lamp'). Lee continues:

the geometrical methods of working stone explains why the Greeks had one word for mason and carver, λιθοργός, and how often the mason rose to be a figure sculptor, and it comes clearly home to all carvers how necessary is the ground-work of a knowledge of masonry. The more he knows, the greater his experience, the greater amount of knowledge will he put into his geometrical forms.

[...] How beautiful and subtle is this study of light and shade in carving and full of interest, for by it we can read and understand the climate and atmosphere of countries. As atmosphere governs the effects of objects, so we understand the different treatments varying in character according to the aspect in which the work was situated. So proportions, mouldings, carving designed for Egypt, Greece, Italy, become unsuitable for slavish copying in England, and poor London. And how wrong one may go in working away from without [*sic*] studying the ultimate position of your work *in situ*. You will understand me to mean that all carving should be executed *in situ*, and whenever possible I certainly advise one doing so.

Lee was a purist of a kind. Of the six completed panels, four are strictly set out as three-figure reliefs, and all are in some measure modelled on an ancient – probably neo-Attic – relief type known from examples in Naples, Paris, and Rome, and generally associated with the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. The first and last examples especially were reproduced widely in the nineteenth century; reductions of the latter – the Albani version, by some distance the most influential – were also offered in bronze by Barbedienne.



Fig. 76. Orpheus, Eurydice and Hermes (the Orpheus relief), Roman, traditionally held to be after a fifth-century Greek prototype, Marble, 104 × 96 cm, Villa Albani, Rome.

Although the so-called Orpheus relief was widely known and admired during the late nineteenth century, it does not seem to have been recognised as the source for Lee's panels, if only because all the figures in it are draped. At any rate, the connection did not invite comment, and recent scholarship has likewise remained

mute about the sculptor's quotation of the ancient relief, despite the fact that the panel that in compositional terms corresponds most closely with it happens to be the very one that prompted the cancellation of the commission. One, however, helps to explain the other.

In *Justice in her purity refuses to be diverted from the straight path by Wealth and Fame*, Justice takes the place of Eurydice between Wealth and Fame, standing in, respectively, for Hermes and Orpheus. Wealth, whose identity is indicated by a small tiara and matronly aspect, attempts to take the hand of Justice, while Fame, holding a sprig of laurel, stands by and is rebuffed with a slight gesture from the other hand. Justice advances cautiously, 'in her purity', and yet immature. Aside from complaints about decency, it may still be objected that the iconography is unclear. The artistic intention surely cannot have been to show Justice dithering, or seriously weighing up the advantages and disadvantages attached to financial success and renown, and yet her central position in the relief, flanked by personages representing these interests would seem to imply a choice or a struggle between two opposing courses of action, as in traditional representations of Heracles or Scipio between vice and virtue or virtue and pleasure. The composition implies the crossroads. More awkward still, the attitudes and gestures of the figures, especially those of Justice herself, can be seen as reinforcing such a reading. Her very stance, with the non-weight-bearing leg turned outwards towards the viewer, expressive in the ancient relief of the reluctant parting of Orpheus and Eurydice, seems more than faintly hesitant in this new context, even if the arm languidly caught by Wealth conveys greater decision. The exquisite dramatic tension of the Orpheus relief, in which the sensuous, almost Correggienesque hand gestures express most eloquently the

pain of the situation,⁴⁸⁴ is in Lee's relief almost entirely dissolved. Here the implied momentum, however faltering, is in one direction only (later panels largely dispense with this sideways movement in favour of a frontal, static arrangement), and the gestures simply have not the same poignancy, now they are divested of specific mythological resonances. Without the lengthy explanatory title, inscribed in full beneath the reliefs affixed to the building for the benefit of the uncomprehending British public, it would be easy to assume that Fame in particular is in fact guiding Justice – that a choice has been made between the two objectives, and that one has been selected rather than both shunned: as it stands, the reliance on the engraved word only underscores the weaknesses of Lee's design.

That even the sculptor's supporters could see this may be ascertained from an ostensibly appreciative comment in *The British Architect* – Beattie suggests the author might be the editor, Thomas Raffles Davison – written partly in response to criticisms made by Joseph Boulton, discussed above: '[w]e may be interested to know that Justice is being led satisfactorily and happily by Understanding in the way of Wisdom, and that Joy in consequence thereof is casting the flowers of life in her path. [...] But if [the sculptor] gives us lines of harmony and modelling of beauty, we care little how the moral lies from an architectural point of view and should not greatly grieve to learn that Gaiety was being taken in hand by Vice and led into the

⁴⁸⁴ An argument has been made that the ancient relief actually represents a pre-Virgilian and ultimately successful reunion of Orpheus and Eurydice (Touchette, 1990, 77-90), but this has not found widespread acceptance.

ways of Debauchery, whilst Beauty was throwing a glamour of flowers in her pathway to Hades'.⁴⁸⁵

The sculptor was a young man, and it must be acknowledged that his initial intentions concerning the commission were thwarted. It may be that the narrative would have played out with greater internal coherence on a scale approaching more nearly to that originally intended, yet it is certainly doubtful whether the work would have proved more emotionally affecting for its intended audience if this breathing space had been granted – unless likely to be moved by the panels' sheer strength in numbers. One of two reliefs commissioned from Lee as part of a separate, complementary series proposed in 1895 would again allude to the Orpheus relief, this time with Hermes Psychopompos translated into a Liverpudlian fisherman (like Justice, 'in his purity'). The god's guiding and restraining hands, of which the nearer might, in the ancient relief, almost be clutching a rein as well as catching up his chlamys, now serve – both – in the modern work to keep a fishing net in place. The occupation of the seagoing fisherman may well call for the qualities of control and restraint, but there is a modicum of bathos in the metamorphosis. In *Liverpool, a fishing village, gives her sons the boat and the net*, more of the man's body is on display than in the ancient relief, and it is treated with a more strongly asserted naturalism too, but the gestures are not invested with anything like the same expressive significance.

⁴⁸⁵ *The British Architect*, 5 Feb 1886, 107; partly quoted also in Beattie, 1983, 45-6.

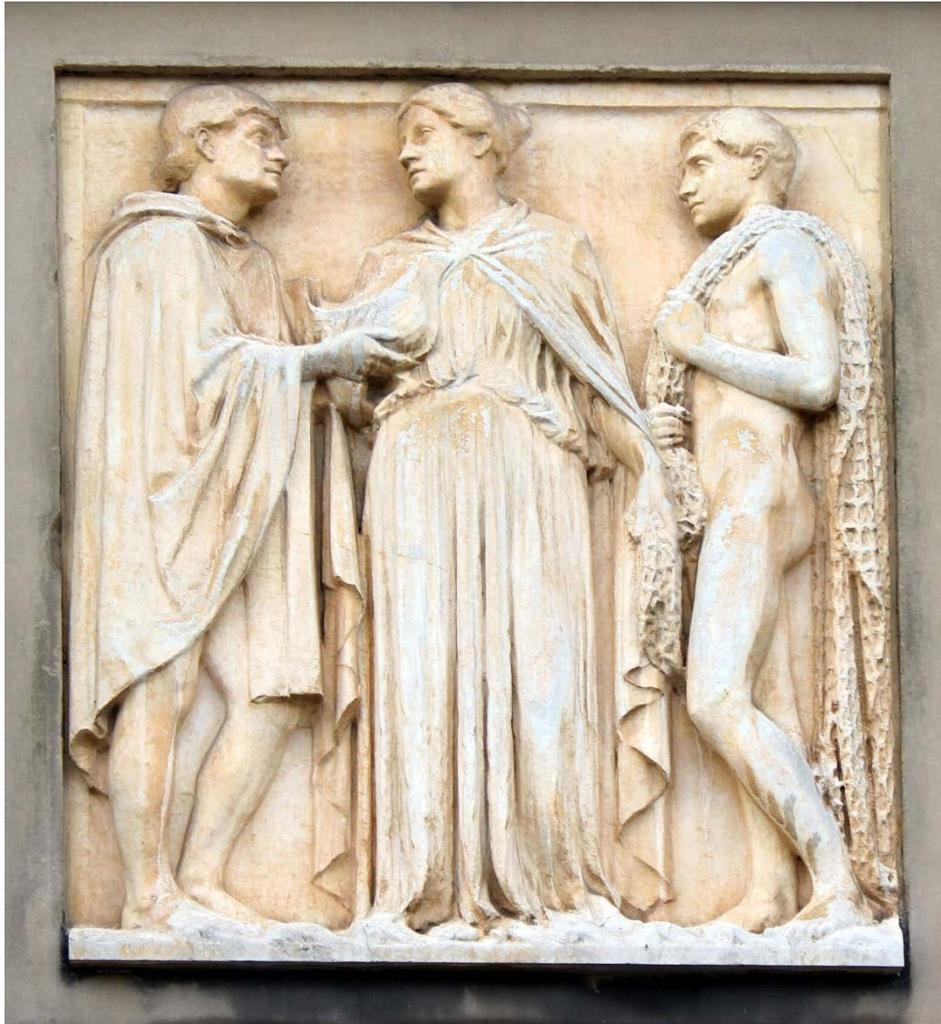


Fig. 77. Thomas Stirling Lee, *Liverpool, a fishing village, gives her sons the boat and the net*, 1895-8, Istrian stone, St George's Hall, Liverpool.

4.1. Neo-Atticism and the New Sculpture: Perraud's *Adieux*

Lee's adaptation of the Orpheus relief may profitably be contrasted with one that is more overtly neo-classical in style, designed approximately forty years earlier in an avowedly academic context, and by a sculptor then, but no longer, much admired. Jean-Joseph Perraud's *Les Adieux*, completed in Rome and exhibited in the plaster in

1849, but finally translated to marble (with some alterations) to fulfil a commission from the French state during the 1870s, is easily seen as a conservative work by the standards of the late nineteenth century: Charles Blanc claimed of it in 1876 that French sculpture had produced ‘rien de plus pur, rien de plus grec,’ and even recounted that on first seeing it in the sculptor’s studio he had taken it for a cast after the antique;⁴⁸⁶ incidentally Max Claudet, the sculptor’s student and biographer, tells a similar story concerning Rosa Bonheur: she too spotted the plaster in the studio and declared that ‘Je ne connaissais pas ce *Phidias*.’⁴⁸⁷ Perraud’s work is in reality no straightforward pastiche of surviving fragments from the Parthenon, or even of post-Phidian works of a fifth-century-revivalist character. It has rightly been connected with Flaxman’s illustration of Hector and Andromache, dating to 1805,⁴⁸⁸ and a scene engraved in Millingen’s *Peintures antiques et inédites de vases grecs tirées de diverses collections avec des explications* (Rome, 1813), described cautiously as ‘Guerrier sortant au combat prenant congé de son père’ (Pl. LV).⁴⁸⁹ A stamnos with a similar departing warrior to the one in the Millingen plate had been acquired by the British Museum in 1843 from Alexandrine Bonaparte, incidentally through Millingen himself, and is attributed to the Achilles Painter. The relief may be seen, at the same time, as paying some tribute more loosely to Grégoire Giraud’s *Aethra et Phalante* of 1814, a striking relief, pure in line, which treats an obscure

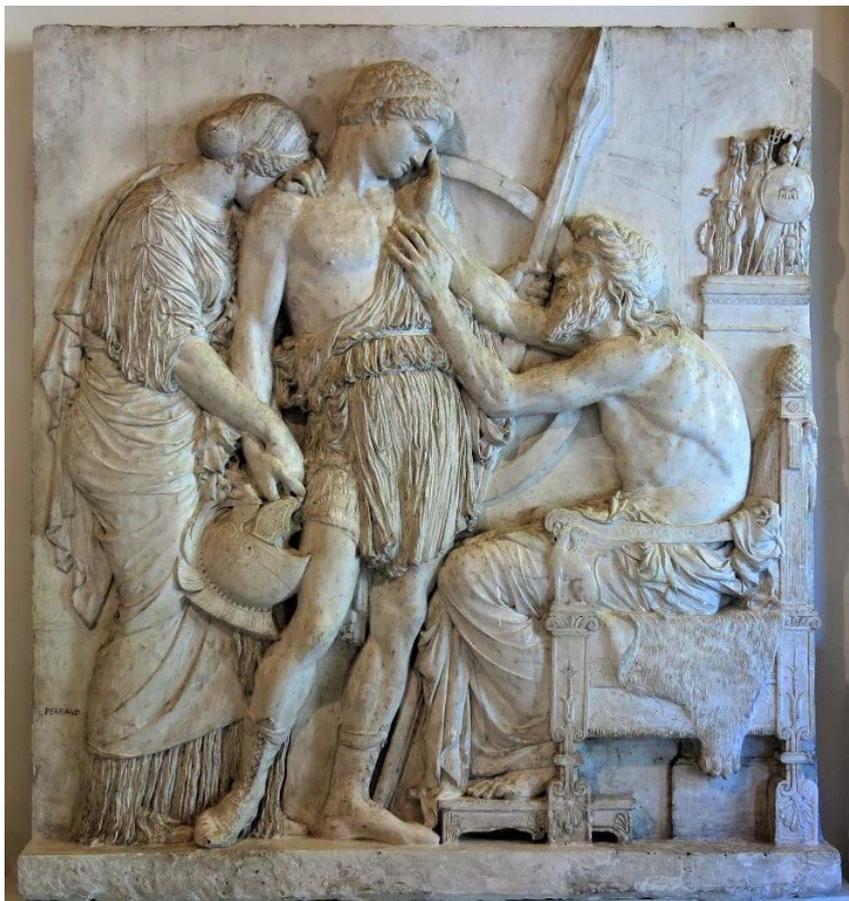
⁴⁸⁶ Blanc, 1876, 330-1.

⁴⁸⁷ Claudet, 1877, 110.

⁴⁸⁸ See Dotal, 2000, 80; 2004, 37.

⁴⁸⁹ Dotal, 2000, 78; 2004, 36.

legend recounted by Pausanias with a grave but possibly unwarranted solemnity.⁴⁹⁰ Perraud had won the Prix de Rome in 1847 with his response to an imposed subject featuring a different Phalante (*Télémaque apportant à Phalante l'urne d'Hippias* – a scene from Fenelon rather than an ancient source), and it has been suggested that the sculptor was, with the later relief, 'playing safe, relying on a tested format'.⁴⁹¹ For all its apparent conservatism and neo-Greek severity, however, the *Adieux* is a brilliantly coherent and expressive as well as a delicately handled work, more original in arrangement than the second of Lee's panels despite the fact that it can be seen as closer to its several sources.



⁴⁹⁰ Unwarranted because Aethra is shown searching Phalanthos' hair for nits (Paus. 10.10,7-8).

⁴⁹¹ Wagner, 1986, 129.

Fig. 78. Jean-Joseph Perraud, *Les Adieux*, 1849, Plaster, 194×180cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lons-le-Saunier.



Fig. 79. Jean-Joseph Perraud, *Les Adieux*, 1876, Marble, 221×214cm, Louvre, Paris.

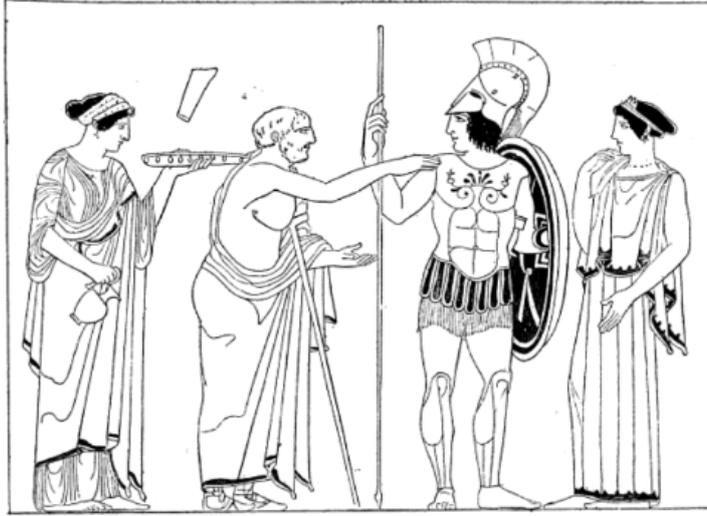


Fig. 80. *Guerrier sortant au combat prenant congé de son père*, from Millingen, 1813, Pl. LV.



Fig. 81. Achilles Painter, Red-figured stamnos with a departing warrior, 450-40 BC, 38.10cm, British Museum, London.

It is not, however, a straightforwardly mythological work: Claudet identifies the central figure only as a young warrior, the seated personage as his blind father, and the weeping girl to the left as his sister, and this reflects the description of the

original work given in the minutes of the Académie des Beaux-Arts.⁴⁹² This then, rather than the main alternative – the relief is sometimes called *Les Adieux de Jason*, with the flanking figures presumably Alcimedé, the hero's mother, and Aeson – must be accepted, not least because the work seems to have been given this second title at some point in the early twentieth century, and Aeson is, furthermore, not typically associated with blindness. If Perraud does not here illustrate a myth, he does perhaps imbue the *Adieux* with mythological connotations through the adaptation and synthesis of his more explicitly mythological sources, yet the governing motive in borrowing these elements is surely to present the new scenario most effectively, transcending any one mythological or anecdotal point of reference. Crucially, Perraud recognises (and reconfigures) the scene as one of parting, expressing the emotions of his figures with great sensitivity to the expressive possibilities of the gestures which link them together. It is through the attitude of the body as a whole – and particularly of the hands – that Perraud communicates. The sculptor's attention must have been directed to Flaxman's illustration largely because of the economy and clarity of its expression, especially in the joined hands of stoic husband and fearful wife: if Perraud knew the illustration from a French edition of the *Iliad*, it will have been labelled 'Hector fait ses adieux à Andromaque', but the engraving is accompanied in the English by a half-line from Pope: 'Hung on his hand'.⁴⁹³ The young warrior 'dans une attitude qui indique une douleur profonde', as

⁴⁹² Claudet, 1877, 109. See Leniaud/Bellamy-Brown, 2008, 581, 655. Beulé identifies her instead as the young warrior's wife, Blanc as the young hero's fiancée: Beulé, 1861, 670; Blanc, 1876, 331.

⁴⁹³ See *Il.* 6.507.

Claudet suggests,⁴⁹⁴ is not like Hector, but Orpheus in reverse, helmet rather than lyre in hand; his sister weeps like Flaxman's Andromache, but the arms are threaded together in such a way as to allude to, but not to quote from, the Orpheus relief – where the pressure of Hermes' thumb implies control and authority, this action is here comparatively feeble,⁴⁹⁵ and deliberately so, as the hopelessness of the young man's staying is understood. The hopelessness of his returning is equally to be understood – this is how the archaeologist and *secrétaire perpétuel* of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Ernest Beulé, interpreted the relief in an 1861 article on Perraud: '[i]l part pour les combats où il succombera peut-être.'⁴⁹⁶ The blind father has, of course, the most expressive face, but his combined sorrow and hopefulness are articulated most clearly, again, through the attitude of his body as a whole; his hunched back and searching hands are treated, as the viewer finds on close inspection, with an almost disconcerting naturalism.

Beside Lee's reliefs in Liverpool, the *Adieux* makes for a more successful and compelling work. In all likelihood, Lee would have been familiar with it from his period of study at the École des Beaux-Arts, when he might have seen the finished marble at the Musée du Luxembourg, yet his own work for St George's Hall shows little of the sensitivity to gesture and attitude in which Perraud excels – qualities indispensable for monumental sculpture – and it is probable that he would

⁴⁹⁴ Claudet, 1877, 109. Dotal, on the other hand, suggests only that the '*flexion de la jambe vers l'avant permet d'accentuer les contrastes de la lumière*': 2000, 81.

⁴⁹⁵ Or '*traitée avec plus de souplesse que celle entre Hermès et Eurydice*', as Dotal suggests (2000, 80), calling this in her catalogue of Perraud's work '*un arrangement particulièrement raffiné*': 2004, 37.

⁴⁹⁶ Beulé, 1861, 670.

not have had much sympathy for it on stylistic grounds. Albert Toft, who worked in the same studios as Lee, would even single it out in his 1911 manual, *Modelling and Sculpture: A Full Account of the Various Methods and Processes Employed in these Arts*, as an example of what the student should avoid: '[t]he student will quickly see for himself that the over-filling of a panel and the over-elaboration of detail is a fault. This work is overdone everywhere, it is restless, and not in the least inspiring; but it may serve to point out to the student that an abundance of elaborate detail and cramming of work into a panel are not requisite to the production of a fine work.'⁴⁹⁷ Toft contrasts Perraud's relief with the famous Stele of Hegeso: '[o]bserve the simplicity and purity of all the lines, and the absence of any attempt at elaboration of detail. Yet the whole is rich by reason of the value of the beautifully shaped plain parts as contrasted with those parts more cut up by the folds of the drapery.'⁴⁹⁸

It would be unfair in discussing the actual execution of the *Adieux* to assign too much blame to Perraud himself, since the marble was completed posthumously by Gabriel Jules Thomas,⁴⁹⁹ and a photograph of the unfinished work in the sculptor's studio, which might have given some clue as to how far it had progressed under the former's chisel, is of uncertain date. The criticisms, however, pertain to the design and composition of the work as well as its finish. It is true that the marble the *Adieux*, now in the Louvre, is rather cluttered with stage properties – more so than the original model from 1848-9 – but it is also intended for a different setting than

⁴⁹⁷ Toft, 1911, 292.

⁴⁹⁸ Toft, 1911, 290.

⁴⁹⁹ Claudet, 1876, 32; Delaborde, 1876, 20n.1.

the Stele of Hegeso – where its extreme delicacy of execution and pictorial qualities can be appreciated at close quarters: ‘le bas-relief des Adieux serait l’ornement d’un portique ou du palier d’un grand escalier’ wrote Beulé of the original model.⁵⁰⁰ It should be apparent that the background elements in particular would not tell at any great distance, and that this is really carving for a salon or other interior space; low light is already enough to resolve any confusion between dominant and subordinate lines in the composition (nestled as it is beneath a staircase, these are more or less the conditions in which it may be seen at present), yet it is also doubtful whether the same complaints would have been made about the relief had it been exposed to the elements for any extended period of time. Lee’s reliefs, on the other hand, have weathered more than mere criticism.

4.2. Gosse on Perraud: A False Icon for the New Movement?

How are we to harmonise Toft’s depreciation of the *Adieux* with Gosse’s enthusiasm for its sculptor? In September 1880, the critic had written to Thornycroft with great excitement, praising Perraud’s work, and in particular an overlooked group still visible in Paris, *Le Jour*. This, Gosse confidently proclaimed, was the sculptor’s ‘masterpiece to my mind, and on the whole the most wonderful piece of 19th century modelling I have seen’.⁵⁰¹ Few have concurred with this viewpoint, and Perraud is generally remembered, if remembered at all, as a representative of dull official

⁵⁰⁰ Beulé, 1861, 672.

⁵⁰¹ Gosse to Thornycroft, 26 September 1880.

classicism, directly opposed to the romanticism of the generation that followed. For Mark Stocker, Gosse's statement is 'a surprising choice to have come from the champion of the New Sculpture.' Admitting the 'excellent' workmanship involved, Stocker suggests that Perraud's sculpture 'looks drily reactionary beside that of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux or even that of Paul Dubois.'⁵⁰²

The division of these sculptors into rival camps is crude but understandable. There is no doubt that contemporaries, in the main, saw Perraud as a traditionalist: Charles Garnier caricatured the sculptor as a *pompier par excellence*, wearing a diminutive Corinthian helmet and acting out the subject of his Prix de Rome piece; Beulé, too, from whom we have heard above, was characterised after his early suicide (1874) both as one of the sculptor's 'plus dévoués amis' and as 'le plus grincheux des grinchus de l'ancien Institut'.⁵⁰³ The contrast between Carpeaux and Perraud on the façade of the Opéra Garnier (Gosse's sympathies were with the latter, Lee's with the former) could hardly be starker than it is, but Perraud and Dubois certainly shared mutual friends and admirers and were in touch with one another⁵⁰⁴ – it was, in a sense fittingly, Dubois who would in 1877 take Perraud's chair in the Académie and read the 'Notice sur Perraud', as was customary for an incoming member, a moment that might well have seemed a momentous step in the ascent of Quattrocentism and the displacement of the neo-Greek; the eclipse, even, of one

⁵⁰² Stocker, 1985, 300.

⁵⁰³ Delaborde, 1876, 24; de Chennevières, 1885, 181.

⁵⁰⁴ Dotal, 2004, 213. Chief among these was Louis Pasteur, but another mutual member of this circle was the painter Jean-Jacques Henner, a close friend of Dubois and one who had also painted portraits of Karl and Max Beulé, sons of Ernest (1872-3, Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers).

classicism by another, though Dubois was more eclectic than contemporary journalism sometimes suggested.

There is also a complicating factor in the breadth of the elder sculptor's stylistic sympathies. Perraud's manner was varied enough that it could strike viewers as unexpectedly baroque: admiring the male figure in *Le Jour* – the same muscular *buveur* about which Gosse enthused – Castagnary saw 'un morceau d'exécution extraordinaire' and claimed that '[d]epuis Pierre Puget, il n'en a pas été fait de plus colossal en France'.⁵⁰⁵ 'C'était un Puget corrigé par l'antique', wrote Charles Blanc, who went further still and claimed Bernini's *Fontana del Tritone* as the principal source for Perraud's *L'enfance de Bacchus* (1857), despite Bernini's profound unpopularity during this period.⁵⁰⁶ Blanc presumably had some inside knowledge on this point. Dotal likewise sees links with Puget, and detects evidence elsewhere of the sculptor's taste for 'la sculpture néo-baroque hellénistique'.⁵⁰⁷ It is not really so easy to dismiss Perraud's sculpture as something 'drily reactionary'.

⁵⁰⁵ Castagnary II, 193. The critic was less impressed by the female figure, however, which he calls *la Source*, on account of her 'pose [...] disgracieuse' and her 'trop courts' arms.

⁵⁰⁶ Blanc, 1876, 336; on the *Fontana del Tritone*, 332.

⁵⁰⁷ Dotal, 2004, 9-10.



Fig. 82. Charles Garnier, *Portraits-charges de Tourny et Perraud* (to the right with the annotation ‘*Télémaque apportant à Phalante les cendres de son fils [sic – this should be frère] Hippias*’), Pencil on calque paper 21.3×35.7cm, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

This was 1880 and not 1894, and we would surely expect some modification of Gosse’s views and tastes in the interim. ‘[A]s was usual with Gosse,’ says Manning in quite another context, ‘first enthusiasm gave place to a more critical attitude.’⁵⁰⁸ It is true that other art-critical pronouncements of the early 1880s seemed less tenable fifteen or so years later, and that Gosse did change his mind in a few areas. One of his 1880 articles on modern sculpture, published anonymously in the August issue of the *Cornhill Magazine*, on the very cusp, as it were, of the new movement as it is

⁵⁰⁸ Manning, 1982, 92.

usually recorded, had rather unconventionally traced the beginning of the revival – ‘the signs of revival are clearly to be observed by any eyes that are open to perceive them’ – to the unveiling of the Albert Memorial, selecting this moment largely because of the unprecedentedly collaborative but uncompetitive circumstances of the monument’s design and execution;⁵⁰⁹ Gilbert, we may note, was still maintaining something similar over twenty years later, in his praise for Brock’s master, John Henry Foley, to whom he believed greater credit was owed for the transformation of British sculpture.⁵¹⁰ More strikingly, of those conventionally associated with the new movement only Brock and Thornycroft had been mentioned. Then again, Gosse’s earlier criticism of Carpeaux, and, more pertinently, of Lee’s ‘extravagant fondness for Carpeaux’ subsequently softened into a more sympathetic acceptance of that sculptor’s influence,⁵¹¹ if not outright enthusiasm. His comparatively dogmatic strictures about how the face should be represented in relief work – forcefully expressed in the *Saturday Review* – were largely ignored by all the principal actors of the movement over the following years, including his hero Thornycroft. In 1881 Gosse took Henry Hugh Armstead – of the preceding generation one of the most sympathetic to the aims of the younger men – to task for ‘the startling ugliness and coarseness of the face’ of his Aphrodite (in *The Ever-Reigning Queen*, the sculptor’s diploma work for the Royal Academy), which, he said, ‘might have satisfied an artist of the most archaic age in Greece, but [...] is hardly admissible in the work of a modern sculptor’:

⁵⁰⁹ Gosse, 1880, 180-1.

⁵¹⁰ Dorment, 1985, 211, 339 n. 37.

⁵¹¹ Gosse, 1881, 782.

We believe that Mr. Armstead has obtained this unfortunate result by persisting in disregarding the rule to which we have drawn attention in these columns before, that in very low relief the face must always be treated in profile or fully in front; the features of the goddess are drawn here midway between the two, and the result is positively ugly.⁵¹²

A year later Legros would receive similar criticism for his medallion portraits of prominent men, some of which were treated in a slight three-quarter view rather than the pure recommended profile: ‘crudities’ Gosse termed these – not entirely without reason – that would not pass in Paris; the Darwin in particular he thought ‘grotesque’.⁵¹³ Here however, Legros’ technical shortcomings – the naïve and rigid modelling of the bristling beard and cursory delineation of the features – were evidently as offensive to the critic as the viewpoint of the sitter chosen and general conception of the portrait. Later, during his American tour of 1884-5, Gosse would be extremely impressed by the immeasurably more refined low relief work of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, whose reputation in England he would subsequently seek to nurture. Saint-Gaudens, whose adventuring in this branch of the art was apparently inspired in large measure by Henri Chapu’s sensitive medallion portraits of the 1860s,⁵¹⁴ mostly opted to observe Gosse’s ‘rule’, though there are exceptions, such as the portrait of Bessie Smith White (modelled 1884, carved by 1888: Metropolitan Museum, New York) that would have challenged the critic’s

⁵¹² Gosse, 1881, 781.

⁵¹³ Gosse, 1882, 732.

⁵¹⁴ Saint-Gaudens I, 216. This was the 1860 portrait of the landscapist Jean-Baptiste Adolphe Gibert.

preconceptions. Gosse encountered both Saint-Gaudens and Kenyon Cox, whose article presenting low relief as the principal achievement of the Quattrocento was then very recently published and formed the basis for some discussion between artist and critic.⁵¹⁵ Already Gosse had received a jolt from Harry Bates' *Socrates Teaching the People in the Agora*, which he was still describing eleven years later as 'the best relief ever done by a student in the schools' and the greatest work of its author, at once 'as severe as a fine taste demands' and marked by 'a charming picturesqueness'; Bates did *not* follow Gosse's 'rule' in this work, but triumphantly broke it and still managed to succeed in 'avoid[ing], with a most delicate tact, the errors of archaism and studied oddity which betray Mr. Armstead when he attacks the same difficult province of the art.'⁵¹⁶

These were later developments that seem to have taken the critic by surprise. It appears that in 1881 Gosse had already been anxious to encourage Thornycroft to carry out more work in this more pictorial field of practice: possibly as a response to Armstead's *Ever-Reigning Queen*, Thornycroft had modelled in that year a medallion portrait of Gosse himself, blank-eyed and in severe profile, which was exhibited in 1882 like a firmly classical corrective to the ambitious experiments with faces in perspective being attempted elsewhere, though it is difficult to say whether the work is formal or informal in quality; one suspects that Thornycroft found his friend a little uninteresting as a subject, as he filled up the corners with swirling arabesques and winged figures representing Literature and Thought as a means of

⁵¹⁵ See Morgan, 1995, 48-9.

⁵¹⁶ Gosse, 1894, 280.

enlivening and poeticising the portrait and symbolising the areas in which the straight-haired and prosaic-looking Gosse excelled – a personal touch comparable to the sculptor’s decision to attach a small bronze relief to the base of his marble bust of Thomas Gray at Pembroke College, Cambridge a few years later (1885), another difficult subject, and in that case not from the life, that the sculptor must have judged sorely in need of some such counterpoint in a more elevated and merciful mode. Existing casts are relatively rough (the work is informal in this sense), but the outline throughout is kept firm and the whole has not the sparkling variegation of surface that the Donatello-loving Saint-Gaudens aimed for in relief, where the forms emerge from and melt into an uneven and atmospheric ground; the American sculptor might have faulted Thornycroft’s portrait of Gosse for what he called the ‘drop of wax’ effect,⁵¹⁷ a quality probably encouraged by Watts’ insistence on ‘the clear edge’ and, in the context of relief specifically, on the necessity of getting ‘the lines as precise and sharp as the lines of the twigs on any tree’.⁵¹⁸ Watts’ view was that ‘[i]n Bas-relief the edges, however low the relief may be, should be sharp. Lines that are blurred in the ground are bad.’⁵¹⁹ Again, he is recorded as having insisted that ‘[t]he loss of the clear edge in all sculpture and metal-work corresponds with the smear in painting and the slur in music’, the one approximating ‘the language one would use in giving a distinct order’ and the other ‘the language one would use when making a little flowery speech.’ The conceit may be flipped around: ‘[h]ardness is unpopular in itself, softness is popular’, wrote the art critic Philip Hamerton, ‘the first answers

⁵¹⁷ Saint-Gaudens II, 23-4.

⁵¹⁸ Watts III, 14-15.

⁵¹⁹ Watts III, 16.

to dogmatism and decision in conversation, which nobody quite likes, though it may be the affirmation of pure truth; the second answers to flattering acquiescence, or to affirmation of the very gentlest and mildest kind, which is incomparably more pleasing to all of us.’⁵²⁰

The sculptors of this generation did not always wish to bark orders at their public, and in so much as clarity of line can be said to approach spectators in a stridently didactic manner, this must go for Lee especially, whose compositions were aerated, as it were, by a vaporous blending here and there of ground and figure – what Spielmann referred to as ‘a “losing and finding” of the drawing and planes that possesses a great charm for the sensitive eye’ even though that critic would have preferred at times a more substantial and solidly sculpturesque rendering of form.⁵²¹ Some of Thornycroft’s later works in relief – especially the tender medallion portraits of his wife Agatha and his son Oliver modelled in 1888⁵²² – would be softer and less insistently sculpturesque in character, mirroring the general development of his work in the round throughout the decade from a flatter, more archaising ideal towards a fuller, more Hellenistic one and reflecting in some measure the colouristic and sometimes form-disguising modelling of his peers, but by 1885 he had also flouted Gosse’s earlier ‘rule’ by treating the face from very varied angles in low relief; in the memorial to John Goss in St Paul’s this is done within an extremely shallow depth of marble, and, it must be admitted, with probably not much more

⁵²⁰ Hamerton, 1882, 200.

⁵²¹ Spielmann, 1901, 66.

⁵²² Manning, 1982, 110, Fig. 70, 210, Cat. 199; 106, Figs. 67-8, 198, Cat. 36

success than Armstead. As it happens, Thornycroft's own diploma piece for the Academy, modelled in 1889 and exhibited in 1890, would again attempt to tackle the difficult problem of the near-profile in low relief with the same partial success. *The Mirror* is defenceless against unfavourable lighting. The problem, all the same, was evidently too attractive to dismiss.

It is easy to picture Gosse struggling to maintain a firm verbal hold on the leash of the runaway dog of the movement. That Perraud is not mentioned in his 1894 articles is significant. By this time, Gosse might well have come to the conclusion that Perraud was very distant indeed from the developments that had taken place in British sculpture during the 1880s, but this sculptor had also died in the very year that the critic wished to present as the most important for French sculpture and in turn for the new movement in Britain – a moment of rejuvenation, rather than loss – and Perraud had, besides, contributed to the Salon of 1876 only busts, and not the kind of imaginative 'iconic' sculpture that Gosse favoured, though he made a point of singling out for praise Chapu's extraordinary and 'colossal' portrait of Alexandre Dumas in an open, crumpled shirt, which for all that sculptor's allegiance to the classical would have appeared thoroughly romantic in spirit beside Perraud's overtly herm-like treatment of Pasteur in the same exhibition.⁵²³

It has so far escaped attention, however, that within a month of his letter to Thornycroft, Gosse had published an article on Perraud in the *Saturday Review* in which his great enthusiasm was already tempered by various qualifying statements. His views turn out to be not so distant from Toft's after all with regard to the *Adieux*:

⁵²³ Gosse, 1894, 140.

‘[i]t is described as full of charm and Attic grace in its original cast; unfortunately Perraud retouched it again and again, until its final form is by no means worthy of his name.’⁵²⁴ The phrasing is curious, implying as it does that the critic has not himself seen the original, though he must surely have done so while visiting Lons-le-Saunier; it may in fact be the original, rather than the final, adapted version, that Gosse judged unworthy, mistaking the old studio plaster for an up-to-date cast from the model that was used for the marble.

On the other hand, the article maintains the admiration for *Le Jour* expressed in the private correspondence:

any one who has a spare hour on his hands may judge the group by which the name of Perraud is likely to be remembered in the history of art. [...] “Le Jour” of Perraud is a work which will outlast a hundred popular productions of ephemeral talent, and will survive to show that the grand manner in sculpture was not entirely lost in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Gosse admires especially the composition – it is, he writes, ‘beyond praise, intelligible and noble from every point of view, and executed with the strong hand of a master’ – but asserts that this transparency of intention has little to do with the title of the work; it is, he suggests, ‘very ineptly called’ *Le Jour*.⁵²⁵ Sketched in the plainest terms, the work represents a half-draped woman raising a jug to allow a muscular labourer to quench his thirst; contemporaries naturally associated the man

⁵²⁴ Gosse, 1880, 515.

⁵²⁵ Gosse, 1880, 516.

with Hercules, while the woman seemed ‘moitié Vénus, moitié naïade’;⁵²⁶ the motif might have been inspired in part by the comparatively anecdotal treatment of a similar scene in Léopold Robert’s 1827 picture of a *Pêcheur et jeune fille de l’île de Procida*, in the museum in Neuchâtel, or, alternatively, by earlier and grander representations of Eliezer and Rebecca at the well, where the interaction between the figures is often closer still, Eliezer typically being shown as a man of mature and even powerful build in a position of relative humility, while Rebecca achieves a beneficent authority of her own in the act of giving. The subject of Perraud’s group is not exactly unclear, even if iconographically peculiar, though it could perhaps be questioned whether the sculptor intended for day to be associated with labour, heat, thirst, and exhaustion, or saw it rather as a period of refreshment and renewal: the group juxtaposes these apparently contrary ideas in a compact exchange, at once literal and symbolic. Still, if the group conveyed its message with any success, then it did so, at least as far as Gosse was concerned (which is not to say that his word on the matter need be final), quite independently of its title, and through its formal qualities alone. We may well contrast this state of affairs with that in Liverpool, where, as we have seen, it was deemed necessary to append wordy adjuncts to Lee’s sculptural works.

If, however, intelligibility is one of the criteria by which the success of *Le Jour* is to be measured and confirmed, it must be admitted that this is a quality more easily apparent in Perraud’s works in relief, where the constraints associated with the format are inevitably conducive to the objective of narrative clarity. Beulé saw

⁵²⁶ Blanc, 1876, 336.

Perraud's the *Adieux* as a work of intimate appeal and domestic as opposed to monumental purpose, imagining it above a door or a fireplace in a private setting.⁵²⁷ He had, no doubt, the example of the Villa Albani Orpheus relief in mind, likewise let into the wall above a fireplace. Lee's setting, on the other hand, was public, but as in his standalone exhibition pieces his attention was concentrated in the minor and superficial details that might be considered appropriate for sculpture intended for the interior, rather than in the broader gestural legibility that was usually thought essential for monumental work. Lee's allegory of the Progress of Justice, in its rejection of the grand manner, of decisive modelling, and clear motive, accidentally became a symbol of the injustices with which sculptors had to contend.

⁵²⁷ Beulé, 1861, 671-2.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Form and *Couleur*: The Principle of Colouristic Modelling and its Projection onto the Past

Spielmann saw Lee as an extreme representative of the colouristic approach to form practised by French modellers and associated also with his colleagues, Gilbert and Ford. The ‘fascinating colour [...] suggested by his light and shade’ could produce ‘a pictorial effect as much as sculptural’, he observed, cautioning, however, that Lee’s ‘beautiful feeling for colour sometimes runs away with the artist at the sacrifice of form—which principle of form, after all, is the true test.’⁵²⁸

In 1900 *The Architectural Review* published an article by Dixon on the sculptor Edward Onslow Ford, which attempted to provide a definition of the term ‘colour’ as it applied to sculpture:

The mention of this important attribute [style] reminds me of another quality which Mr. Ford possesses in a marked degree—I mean the special quality that the learned call colour in a work in the round. The term, which may seem somewhat confusing to the uninitiated, is in reality one full of significance. It implies, to begin with, that the sculptor is not only a stylist, but has learnt the rare art of leaving out, a knack which, as a recent critic has pointed out, is only gained “by a perfect acquaintance with the art of putting in.”⁵²⁹ A sculptor who states essential facts and leaves the more mundane trivialities to take care of

⁵²⁸ Spielmann, 1901, 66.

⁵²⁹ Dixon is quoting from Gleeson White (1898, 181) on the prints of W. P. Nicholson.

themselves may be said to possess colour. Breadth, balance, and the rare gift of appealing to the imagination of the spectator, are no less indications of the quality I am attempting to indicate. A severe simplicity and an engaging waywardness imply colour in the plastic arts.⁵³⁰

As examples of ‘colour’ in Ford’s oeuvre, Dixon singled out *Folly* (1885-6, Figs. 5-8), *Echo* (1895, Figs. 11-12), and the sculptor’s sympathetic bust of the Queen (1900). None of these can be described as chiefly polychromatic productions, though each admits colour in its way, especially as part of the decorative *ensemble*; in the case of *Echo* especially, some accents of contrasting hue are introduced on the plinth, and these are both ornamental and symbolic in character, alluding to the surrounding context of the myth; in form too, as the stylised rock-like forms at the corners are topped by stylised narcissi, and the strigilation lower down suggests water; the bronze itself was given not a warm ‘Renaissance Brown’ patina as was most affected throughout the middle and latter half of the century *à la* Barbedienne, but a deep green one – for Ford a trademark – to imbue the nymph with a false sense of antiquity and to imply a more meaningful connection with the landscape from which she has sprung and to which she is returning.⁵³¹ Colour in this sense was

⁵³⁰ Dixon, 1900, 263.

⁵³¹ The polychromy serves a similar purpose in the *Shelley Memorial* and the later *Snowdrift*, where the materials, which are intrinsically rather than superficially coloured, are selected to evoke something of the elements: in the former, The inviolate body of Shelley, in (originally toned down) white marble, is tossed like sea foam on a pale green slab of Connemara marble, with the bronze muse and winged lions that support it also patinated in the pseudo-antique green favoured by the sculptor, suggesting both the sea and the action of the soil over time; with *Snowdrift*, the Mexican green onyx and lapis lazuli again evoke water under different conditions, carrying the melting of the snow shown in the white marble above down through layers suggesting the crystalline quality of ice and deep blue of the sea. It is certainly of some relevance that Ford’s essays in painting during the 1890s were landscapes; in his sculptural settings he did not attempt realistic colouring in waxwork fashion but looked to borrow from nature more broadly, as Gilbert did in his search for a new ornamental vocabulary.

unimportant for Dixon, but her suggestion that the concept could be understood as a matter of ‘leaving out’ was, nonetheless, unusual, especially since Ford, more than any of his peers, was known for his disdain for the *non finito*. Frank Rinder later wrote of the sculptor’s characteristic ‘determination not to leave vague or unfinished detail which in his opinion called for definite expression’;⁵³² this set Ford apart from Gilbert, a more ‘suggestive’ modeller in general, but Rinder’s observation was, coloured by a sad irony, in that it related specifically to the clay model for *Snowdrift*, which the sculptor left unfinished at his death. The other characteristics which Dixon listed as indications of ‘colour’ – ‘breadth’, ‘balance’, an ability to appeal to the imagination, ‘severe simplicity’ and ‘engaging waywardness’ – leave the term’s meaning, on the other hand, *rather* vague.

Beattie describes the concept of ‘colour’ in sculpture as one ‘widely discussed and widely misunderstood during the late nineteenth century.’⁵³³ The term, derived in fact either from French studio-slang of the early nineteenth century or art criticism of the period, had by 1900 been in currency for decades. The (monochromatic) sculpture of the ill-fated Antonin Moine had been described as ‘pittoresque et coloré’ as early as 1831, when it had been contrasted with the ‘sécheresse systématique et inanimée’ of other contemporary sculptors.⁵³⁴ During that decade, of course, the all-too-simple division of modern artists into the rival camps of colourists and draughtsmen had provided something of a relevant backdrop to the use of this loaded

⁵³² Rinder, 1902, 60.

⁵³³ Beattie, 1983, 62.

⁵³⁴ Planche, 1831, 100.

word; retrospectively, in the first of his articles on the Salon of 1850-1, Théophile Gautier would place Moine, along with David d'Angers, Préault, Barye and Clésinger, among the *coloristes* of the 1830s (with, on the enemy line, Pradier, Simart, the suitably named Duret, and others representing the *dessinateurs*),⁵³⁵ the term signifying at once the general allegiance of the individual artist concerned and something of the principles followed through in each one's work, but not, crucially, anything to do with polychromy proper, which was in any case more a preoccupation for neo-classicists like Simart, wishing to reconstruct and reinterpret antiquity, than men like David, who was an avowed opponent of those who wanted real colour in sculpture even on the grounds of historical precedent. The term *couleur*, used figuratively, is encountered frequently enough indeed in nineteenth-century French writing on art, but predictably enough something seems to have gone awry in translation: in 1888 Gilbert – uncharacteristically – wrote, for the newly established periodical *Universal Review* (the editor was his early supporter Harry Quilter), an article intended either to clear up or muddle further any existing confusion concerning the term:

It is common to hear a work of sculpture spoken of as being either full or devoid of 'colour,' and every one affects to comprehend exactly what is meant, and to accept the term as complimentary or the reverse to the work, whether they understand it or not. Few attempt to question its significance or fitness, and their inquiries—if they are so bold as to make any on the subject—are addressed for the most part hesitatingly to this or that disciple of the so-called

⁵³⁵ Gautier, 1851, unpag.

‘new school,’ for it is they who are held responsible for its introduction. As to what is really meant by the word ‘colour’ in sculpture, there is as great a difficulty in explaining it as possibly there is to some in understanding that it should exist as a quality at all; for it is something to be felt rather than described, that inexplicable management of plane, surface, and texture which the brain guides the hand to compass for the translation of its impressions from the living original to the lifeless clay; and sometimes it is easier to answer a question by proposing another, and in this case possibly the quickest way for getting at a clear and simple definition of the word ‘couleur,’ as applied to sculpture, is to inquire what sculpture really is?

The last question offered the sculptor an opportunity to remind readers of the *Universal Review* that the meaning of the word ‘sculpture’ was itself contested (the definition of sculpture upon which he would settle, that of modelling, would be rejected by a later generation of direct carvers), and also, as was Gilbert’s customary practice, to engage in some digression. In an important passage he wrote that:

in speaking of ‘couleur’ in a work of sculpture, we are merely expressing our sense of the presence of that just proportion of relief and due relation of one part to another which together bring about a harmony of light and shade, and gradation, and convey to us the suggestion of reality through the means of convention.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁶ Gilbert, 1888, 526.

We have already seen the word ‘coloré’ paired, above, with ‘pittoresque’. Gilbert too sought, albeit rather abstractly, to tease out some of the term’s painterly connotations:

the qualities which are inseparable from a good picture are necessary to a work in sculpture, and these command our admiration. This consideration then points to the near affinity of the two arts, and suggests therefore that the word ‘couleur,’ which to every one seems to be a misapplied term, is after all, nothing more than the most proper and natural expression of the sense of the presence in a piece of sculpture of those qualities.⁵³⁷

Beattie proposes that the word ‘had acquired a special significance for Gilbert’, denoting ‘the freedom for sculpture to probe, as painting did, beyond the surface of things, to establish a link between external reality and the unseen world of the imagination [...] an approach to sculpture widely different from that encountered by Gilbert in Paris.’⁵³⁸ We must take exception with Beattie’s unfounded insinuation that French sculptors did not look ‘beyond the surface’. On the contrary, British and French critics alike during the nineteenth century commonly accused Italian sculptors, especially carvers of marble, of precisely the same limited reach and overreliance on the *primo aspetto* that she ascribes to French practitioners: the Romantic sculptor-medallist David d’Angers, already mentioned above, had written in 1846 of the ‘charlatanisme de la forme’ that – in his view – characterised modern

⁵³⁷ Gilbert, 1888, 526.

⁵³⁸ Beattie, 1983, 145. Getsy (2004, 96) also sees Gilbert’s article as an effort ‘to acknowledge while nevertheless downplay [*sic*] the influence of French naturalistic techniques on British sculpture.’

Italian sculpture;⁵³⁹ critics at the London International Exhibition of 1862 had been impressed but troubled by the supposedly excessive realism of works such as Pietro Magni's *La Lettrice* (1856-61),⁵⁴⁰ but on the whole it was the low quality productions churned out for tourists – some of which undoubtedly made its way into exhibition spaces – rather than the dazzling work of sculptors like Vincenzo Gemito – whose aims were really not so far from Gilbert and Ford's after all – that was most offensive to those who believed themselves in possession of a purer taste. Spielmann wrote at length in 1901 of 'the extraordinary popularity of that clever trash from Italy [...] Clever it often is in surface work, and attractive to those who love the trivial and the ridiculous in subject; but though "clever" in its way, it is tricky, dodgy, vulgarly imitative, trifling, distinguished by paltry, false, or overforced sentiment, and by lack of appreciation of the elementary proprieties.'⁵⁴¹ As for '[t]he mere skill of imitation, the over-laborious rendering of lace, of jewels, of hair, and the like,' these were "'for the gaping wonderment of the mob.'"⁵⁴² For someone with a completely contrasting view of modern Italian sculpture – proudly part of that admiring 'mob' – we can find no better example than the pioneering

⁵³⁹ The passage as a whole is relevant: 'Les Italiens s'occupent plutôt du *primo aspetto*, de l'effet extérieur, ou, qu'on me passe ce terme, du charlatanisme de la forme; ils sont tellement impressionnables et ils parlent à un peuple qui comprend si vivement, même une simple indication, pourvu qu'il en soit frappé tout à coup, se réservant pour plus tard, s'il en a le temps, la sévère analyse, qu'ils ne sentent pas le besoin de pousser aussi avant l'étude de l'anatomie et de la physiologie, étude si nécessaire à qui veut rendre la nature agrandie dans sa réalité saisissante. Et c'est en cela, je le répète, que les statuaires français diffèrent, à savoir que l'impression de l'âme, quoique ayant sur eux une immense influence, n'exclut pas l'analyse, condition indispensable à toute œuvre appelée à résister à l'engouement d'une époque.' See Jouin II, 1878, 222-3; part of this passage is copied out in one of Paul Dubois' notebooks: Du Castel, 1964, 29-30.

⁵⁴⁰ On this and other examples, see Jones, 2018, 37-48.

⁵⁴¹ Spielmann, 1901, 6.

⁵⁴² Spielmann, 1901, 7.

American traveller Lilian Leland, who, if not exactly well educated in art history or relevant technical processes, was at least frank about her personal preferences. In Florence she wandered uncomprehending and unimpressed through the Uffizi and the Accademia, emerging with no great love for the old masters (whether painters or sculptors), but wrote, on the other hand, gushingly of the works she saw in the 'marble image shops':

I found them, and gave myself up to feasting on modern sculpture. And here, as in painting, the modern artists are infinitely superior to the old in design, execution and expression. I would not have one of the old original Venuses in my house, but I like the statuette copies of them pretty well; they are so white and delicately cut, but oh, what wouldn't I give to possess four or five good-sized statuettes that I saw to-day, most emphatically modern! First a pretty little snubnosed girl sitting on the back of an ostrich, in whitest, purest marble; then a little girl in modern dress, with a parasol over her head, looking with delighted face at the medal she wears; next a pretty girl with robe slipping off, simply the bathing Venus, but quite modern of face and head, and therefore pretty; then a head of Marguerite with Faust behind her; and there was a little Italian boy with a violin; and at another shop was a little girl with a parasol which a high wind had turned inside out and torn. The wind had blown the child's hair about, and a tear was on her cheek. All of these were extremely pretty and natural, and the expressions on the faces were most excellently true.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴³ Leland, 1890, 204-5.

This was precisely the kind of ‘clever trash’ that caused grief for critics like Spielmann and all the leading sculptors of France and England, who felt such overcut anecdotal work undignified, saccharine, sentimental, and – above all else – frustratingly popular. This kind of sculpture was also picturesque in the sense that it aimed to translate into stern marble effects (the glistening tear, the ragged parasol, etc.) that seemed wasteful and even disrespectful towards the medium and better suited to a humbler class of object, while demanding the viewer’s attention via theatrical *grimace* and unrestrained use of the drill.

For all the attention they gave to surface effects, the so-called New Sculptors were anxious indeed not to approach too near to this extreme, though they too were keen on borrowing something from the more popular sister-art of painting, exploiting not only a broader selection of possible subjects in their own work – as was accepted for painters – but also what might be considered painterly qualities in handling of form; these encroachments into pictorial territory, made by both branches of the movement, could involve allusion to specific painters, not necessarily limited only to the triumvirate of Stevens, Leighton, and Watts, whether singly or together, and always steering a safe distance away from the newsprint anecdotalism associated with the more questionable representatives of modern Italian sculpture: Spielmann felt that Brock’s 1906 statue of Gainsborough, for instance, was ‘elegant and melancholy as the painter was, [and] executed in such a manner as to suggest Gainsborough’s own technique—in short, a *tour de force* well within the limits allowable to sculpture’;⁵⁴⁴ the swirling Rococo-revival base of

⁵⁴⁴ Spielmann, 1908, 94.

Frampton's Peter Pan statue (1912), full of fairy-animal incident and interaction, would draw on Watteau for much of its expressive charm, even wittily citing the so-called 'Watteau pleat' in the gracefully disposed sweep of some of the ladies' dragonfly wings. These are relatively late examples, made possible in a sense by the innovations of the 1880s and 1890s, largely attributable to Gilbert and the immense influence of modern French painting and sculpture. Lee was also important in this respect: in 1889 Morley Roberts had penned an article in *The Scottish Art Review* on the artists – including Lee – who occupied the studios at Manresa Road, a relatively cohesive French-influenced 'Square Brush School' whose leader, in his view (whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of the supposed followers), had been the Paris-trained Henry Herbert La Thangue: Lee, whose own Beaux-Arts training had coincided with La Thangue's, produced sculpture that was, as Roberts put it, both literary and 'like painting'.⁵⁴⁵ We have already encountered Spielmann's view that the 'pictorial' qualities in Lee's work could involve the 'sacrifice of form', a demerit that he did not cite in relation to Brock or even Gilbert.

Lee's own idea of what it meant to be 'correct in colour' – conveyed in an 1891 paper for the Architectural Association – took into account something more of the setting of the work in question, which must, he argued, be in agreement with the sculptor's contribution and *vice versa*:

[...] carving must be controlled by scientific laws, [...] all stone enrichments must be geometrical, [...] This fact brings home to us that carved work is but the highest form of masonry, enrichment by light and shade and balance of

⁵⁴⁵ Roberts, 1889, 76.

parts, all starting and contained within plains [*sic*], beginning with its plain of work, and its depth governed by the amount of shade necessary to carry and keep it harmonious with the surrounding mouldings, in other words, to use a modern expression, to be correct in colour.⁵⁴⁶

Sculpture should preserve something of its architectural origin, then, even if advancing into painterly territory. It is true that Gilbert's unusual effort in 1888 to explain the meaning of the term *couleur* has something to do with what was then a nascent attempt on his part to bring the arts of painting and sculpture into closer relation, an end to which he remained dedicated throughout his career. An attendee of Gilbert's 1901 Royal Academy lectures recorded the sculptor's claim that '[n]o work in sculpture can arrive at achievement without aid from architecture or painting',⁵⁴⁷ and he also told Hatton of his reaction to the news that his own work had been judged 'too picturesque'; covering the same ground in discussion with McAllister more than twenty years later, Gilbert emphasised that he had taken 'pride' in this particular criticism, which however, he seems rarely if ever to have encountered in quite the same way as Lee.⁵⁴⁸

There is an assertively practical element here. Gilbert explicitly stated that the principles upon which his definition of *couleur* was founded were also 'the

⁵⁴⁶ Lee, in *The Builder*, 31 Jan 1891, 86.

⁵⁴⁷ Whitley, 1903, 544.

⁵⁴⁸ Hatton, 1903, 11; McCallister, 1929, 115.

principles upon which the training of all students in French schools of art is conducted', even if there were other important qualities to be attained in art too.⁵⁴⁹

In Dixon's definition of 'colour', on the other hand, no appeal whatsoever is made to the qualities of 'just proportion of relief', 'harmony of light and shade', or 'gradation', all of which are technical considerations relating to modelling and fundamentally rooted in the materiality of the medium, whether, clay, wax, plaster, bronze, or marble; instead the term is defined through the more thoroughly abstract and insubstantial notions of 'leaving out', 'severe simplicity', and 'engaging waywardness'. If ideas of breadth and balance are more concrete, they nevertheless appear without any of the oppositional points of reference found in Gilbert's article – most importantly 'light and shade'. 'Colour' was, then, for Dixon – who is not known to have had more than a rudimentary knowledge of working practices – not a technical question at all, but something approximating Gilbert's evocation of 'individuality' and 'mind over matter', as well as Beattie's 'unseen world of the imagination'.

Dixon's article was not intended as a meticulous and intelligible treatise on technical matters. In a sense her analysis of Ford's work is all the more penetrating for its relative looseness. Still, her mystification about *couleur* – she had presumably discussed the concept with Ford, who might well have been unable to explain clearly to her what the word signified – was shared by others with less literary aims. James Ward, headmaster of the Macclesfield School of Art, had noted of 'Colour' in the glossary at the back of his *Elementary Principles of Ornament* (1890) that 'apart

⁵⁴⁹ Gilbert, 1888, 527.

from the literal meaning of the word, ornament, to possess the value of colour, must be designed to express movement and contrast, it is best obtained by the use of light, dark, and intermediate effects, interlacing or superimposed on each other, as we see in Moresque and Celtic work.⁵⁵⁰ When this book was edited by George Aitchison and republished as *Principles of Ornament*, the not unimportant reference to highlights, shadows, and ‘intermediate effects’ was smoothed out to produce the following – almost worthless – definition: ‘*Colour*, apart from the literal meaning of the word, is a vague technical term to express character and contrast in ornament.’⁵⁵¹

Less vague technical approaches can be found elsewhere. In an 1879 article on Carpeaux, Ernest Chesneau had made use of the term to explain something of the vivacity associated with that sculptor’s work: ‘[...] la qualité maitresse du talent de Carpeaux, c’est la vie intense qu’il communiquait à la matière où se portait l’empreinte puissante de son ponce. Or, la science qu’il apportait au calcul des lumières, des demi-teintes et des ombres, c’est-à-dire la couleur en ses compositions modelées, est un des éléments qui concourent avec le plus de force à leur donner cette émotion, ce « frémissement », – le mot est de lui – qui les anime.’⁵⁵² The French sculptor Jules Salmson defined *couleur* in 1892 as the ‘utilisation de la gamme indéfiniment puissante ou nuance des effets de couleur et d’ombre’.⁵⁵³ In his

⁵⁵⁰ Ward, 1890, 86.

⁵⁵¹ Ward, 1896, 200.

⁵⁵² Chesneau, 1879, 91-2. The passage is paraphrased in English by Theodore Child (1892, 236): ‘[t]he master quality of his work is intense vivacity, a very thrill and quiver of life—or, as he used to say, *le frémissement*—and one of the elements which most contribute to produce this impression is the skilful handling of light, half-tones, and shadows, or, in other words, the sense of *color*, which Carpeaux displays in his modelled compositions.’

⁵⁵³ Salmson, 1892, 343, quoted in Le Normand-Romain—Olivié, 1986, 148.

1902 manual on modelling and sculpture Lanteri would define the term *colour* simply as ‘*light and shade*’, and more precisely as ‘the comparative values of the half-tints’.⁵⁵⁴ In one place he substitutes the expression ‘colour-effect’ for ‘colour’ alone,⁵⁵⁵ recalling the similar formulation given to the idea by Watts in a letter to Gladstone some decades earlier: the painter, who was fluent in French and had been (especially during the 1850s) almost astonishingly well-connected in French art-circles, had written that he had sought to impart his *Clytie* of 1867-78 with the same ‘impression of colour’ that he had recognised in ancient sculpture.⁵⁵⁶ Elsewhere he wrote of Phidian ‘palpitations of colour’,⁵⁵⁷ and Swinburne wrote of the unfinished marble that ‘[s]culpture such as this has actual colour enough without need to borrow of an alien art’.⁵⁵⁸

Of course, ‘colour’ in this technical sense, meaning the skilful management of light and shadows – comparable to ideas of ‘relation’ (Gilbert had referred to ‘due relation of one part to another’), ‘value’, or ‘tone’ in painting – is reliant upon modelling, upon shrewd arrangement of mass, and on expert handling of planes, and is therefore not at all (like real colour) distinct or divisible from form, though the persuasive translation of certain delicate or difficult materials into one unifying sculptural substance could demand from the *couleur*-conscious sculptor a greater

⁵⁵⁴ Lanteri, 1902, I, 16, 78.

⁵⁵⁵ Lanteri, 1902, I, 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Watts, letter to Gladstone, 3rd May 1868 (Gladstone Papers, BL, Add. MS 44415, f. 7), quoted in Watts, 1912, I, 237.

⁵⁵⁷ Watts, 1912, II, 81.

⁵⁵⁸ Swinburne, MS RA *Notes* 1868 (Watts Gallery), quoted in Gould, 2004, 91.

departure from literal replication of form, The distinction is partly between actual, 'essential' form and the appearance of it; that is to say, the same 'intentional stopping short of complete realization' in some cases, that Kenyon Cox recognised in Quattrocento sculpture – also described by him as 'not form, but the appearance of form' – though it must be observed that, depending on the colouristic effect aimed at by the picturesque sculptor in a given scenario, increased depth of relief or undercutting might sometimes (as a means of deepening a value, especially in harsh daylight) be preferable to the shallow, illuminated shadows and thickened forms produced with the low relief modelling that he praised and advocated as the prime way to give sculpture greater truth to nature.⁵⁵⁹

Though Dixon took her phrasing from another context altogether, and does not seem to have understood the concept perfectly, her sense that *couleur* could involve a 'leaving out' as well as a 'putting in' actually brings us very close to Cox's idea of the sculptor's 'stopping short', a mode of execution observed principally from sculpture intended for the interior, but it must be emphasised that there is more than one kind of *couleur* as there is more than one kind of light, and this explains why the term has sometimes been interpreted as implying precisely the opposite of low relief. Central, however, to most interpretations of the word, is the idea of contrast, whether of passages of intricate detail with more simply treated parts, or of deeply cut portions with lighter surface work.

If Lee implied that correct colour could be produced through a sense of harmony rather than contrast, especially between a piece of sculpture and its

⁵⁵⁹ Cox, 1884, 65.

immediate surroundings, he nevertheless recognised that execution depended in some measure on the conditions for which the work was intended: he declared that ‘the law which governs relief is, the deeper the shade the lower the necessary relief, the stronger the light the higher and bolder the work, so that when you have a sunny, southern aspect, sunlight playing into your shadows, your work will only tell by undercutting’.⁵⁶⁰ Lee’s reliefs for St George’s Hall faced eastwards, catching the morning sun and losing it in the afternoon, and so needed to look well whether illuminated or in shade, not that the critics who studied his models in the exhibition space or from published reproductions – about which the sculptor was exceedingly touchy – were necessarily able to appreciate them in context. It would seem that Lee prioritised the shady aspect. Spielmann, who complied with the artist’s wishes in 1901 and did not include any photographs to illustrate his commentary on his work, felt that a decisive firmness was sometimes lacking in Lee’s too atmospherically colouristic modelling in relief, where crisp edges might be slurred into imperceptibility and forms deliberately lost against a variously swelling and receding ground.⁵⁶¹

In ‘The Lamp of Memory’, the sixth chapter of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (first published in 1849), Ruskin had marked the difference between ‘picturesque’ sculpture and its opposite, ‘sculpturesque’, or ‘dramatic’ sculpture: ‘[t]here are [...], both in sculpture and painting, two, in some sort, opposite schools, of which the one follows for its subject the essential forms of things, and the other

⁵⁶⁰ Lee, in *The Builder*, 31 Jan 1891, 86.

⁵⁶¹ Spielmann, 1901, 66.

the accidental lights and shades upon them.’⁵⁶² On the whole, the New Sculptors fell into the latter category, but the word ‘colour’ implies the interpretation of qualities that might be regarded as essential, belonging, that is, to the represented object and not wholly dependent on the chance conditions of surrounding environment. Watts’ ‘palpitations of colour’ had implied something internal rather than external, even approaching the idea of ‘local colour’. His own understanding of the relative values of colours – a key component of the modern method in painting as well as sculpture – was sometimes questioned (or dismissed) by external observers; Cox, as it happens, noted that Watts’ pictures took ‘no account of the requirements of modern realism as to truth of value and atmosphere’ but admitted also that ‘if his figures have not their exact value against the sky, yet their palpitating flesh swims in an atmosphere of color.’⁵⁶³ Chesneau attributed a significant part of the sense of ‘colour’ in monochromatic sculpture – emphasising in particular this same impression of ‘palpitation’ given to the outer skin – to the process of modelling *à la boulette*, an old technique, but one which he associated especially with Carpeaux.⁵⁶⁴ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the method was most closely associated with Falguière.⁵⁶⁵ In Child’s judgement, it was Falguière who dedicated himself more than any of his peers to imparting a sense of ‘*morbidezza*’⁵⁶⁶ to the flesh of his figures through the refined treatment of surfaces: ‘the smooth parts of the model are

⁵⁶² Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Chap. VI, § 14.

⁵⁶³ Cox to the editor of *The Critic*, 27 December 1884, in Morgan, 1995, 49-50.

⁵⁶⁴ Chesneau, 1879, 92.

⁵⁶⁵ Child, 1892, 239.

⁵⁶⁶ Child, 1892, 247.

really composed of an infinity of asperities, which catch and reflect the light, and so seem to vibrate with the pulsation of life.’⁵⁶⁷ Here we are not far at all from the sense of *ποικιλία* that Ruskin had seen as a neglected characteristic of Greek art.

More recent criticism has sought to paint Falguière as little more than ‘an establishment hero’ and the epitome of ‘what might be called the artist of talent who lacked genius but served his country, students, and profession well’,⁵⁶⁸ but contemporaries such as Child judged him differently, even going so far as to claim that ‘one may safely say that there is no living master whose influence has contributed more than the influence of Falguière towards emancipating sculpture from academic routine, and encouraging independence of conception and of treatment.’⁵⁶⁹ Texture was part of this emancipation.

Gilbert’s emphasis on ‘due relation of one part to another’ points to another aspect of *couleur*: after the general handling of light and shade on a given surface through projection, depression, or detail – including texture – it was chiefly through *contrasting* textures, judiciously juxtaposed so as to imply, even in monochrome, the differentiation of one material from another, that modellers could be said to possess or to lack a sense of ‘colour’. By ‘relation’ Gilbert certainly meant the balance of values or tones within a composition rather than the balancing of masses or regulation of proportion between one part and another, as this was the usual meaning

⁵⁶⁷ Child, 1892, 239; this passage is, again, adapted from Chesneau (1879, 92): ‘[...] le procédé du « modelé à boulette » qui multipliant à l’infini sur toute l’étendue des parties lisses d’insensibles aspérités y accroche et retient la lumière et lui donne une vibration perceptible à l’oeil, comme une simulation du mouvement.’

⁵⁶⁸ Elsen, 2003, 414.

⁵⁶⁹ Child, 1892, 244.

of the word ‘relation’ among painters at this time and the article specifically connected this quality, moreover, with ‘harmony of light and shade, and gradation.’

‘One of the chief distinctions’, proclaimed Ruskin, ‘between the dramatic and picturesque schools of sculpture is found in the treatment of the hair.’⁵⁷⁰ The ‘plastic’ or ‘sculpturesque’ treatment of textural and ‘colouristic’ effects was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often seen as a just or superior alternative to actual colour, rendering the painting of surfaces, for instance – never the preferred polychromatic process for the so-called New Sculptors – entirely unnecessary. This had implications for modern practice but also, as we have seen, for attitudes towards ancient sculpture, since such figures as Watts always connected the two: in relatively recent times Nicholas Penny has made precisely this argument that colouristic modelling might have made full polychromy redundant by pointing out that even in antiquity ‘[t]he introduction of high relief and of deep undercutting, also the increasing use of shadow – what modern sculptors, significantly, call ‘colour’ – must have been the chief reason for the increasing tendency to leave marble unpainted, at least in parts.’⁵⁷¹ Penny’s interpretation of the concept does not take into account that colouristic effects can be produced through subtler surface manipulation of the kind discussed by Cox, involving more restrained undercutting, but in general principle this is right, as in either case it is a matter of how shade is managed. Despite Ruskin’s controversial observation that ‘[b]y the artists of the time of Pericles [the

⁵⁷⁰ Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Chap. VI, § 15.

⁵⁷¹ Penny, 1993, 42. In referring to ‘modern sculptors’, Penny is presumably thinking above all of Gilbert.

hair] was considered as an excrescence,⁵⁷² an especially intricate form of the ‘plastic’ or ‘sculpturesque’ approach to hair was sometimes associated with the practice of Phidias, and from the 1890s onwards – following its reconstruction by Furtwängler – the *Athena Lemnia*, with its crisply cut but compact curling locks, could be held up as an exceptional example.⁵⁷³ Here individual locks are treated with clarity, the shadows created by their elaborate projection and recession creating a ‘colouristic’ contrast with the broadly executed masses of the face and neck. Watts, who was not at all opposed to polychromy, nevertheless believed that Phidias’ ‘method of suggesting difference of texture and colour (by means of the chisel alone) would certainly go far to render colour unnecessary’.⁵⁷⁴ Later, discussing the ‘rich treatment’ of the hair in the fourth-century marble head known as the *Asclepius of Milos* (British Museum), Albert Toft observed: ‘[t]hat the Greeks coloured their statues is beyond doubt; that they considered colour in form an essential is also evident’.⁵⁷⁵ Lanteri advised students to ‘put the hair on with regard to its principal masses, which ought to be laid on in varied planes, for the suppleness of hair is never obtained by detail, but by numerous planes or surfaces, which give variety of light and shade’, stressing also that while deeper cuts were needed ‘to obtain the effect of a dark mass’, ‘in white hair details must almost disappear’.⁵⁷⁶ The desire to suggest some ‘picturesque’ effects could necessitate greater departures from the actual or

⁵⁷² Ruskin, however, credited Charles Newton with the observation: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Chap. VI, § 15.

⁵⁷³ Furtwängler, 1893, 3-45; 1895, 3-26; Hyde, 1921, 53.

⁵⁷⁴ Watts, 1912, I, 149.

⁵⁷⁵ Toft, 1915, 298.

⁵⁷⁶ Lanteri, 1902, I, 60, 73.

‘essential’ form of the object represented, and in these cases, modelling could take on a truly suggestive rather than literal mode of representation by seeking rather to manage ‘accidental’ light and shade with sensitivity, without necessarily following individual strands of hair from root to tip.

Modern scholarship frequently uses the word ‘impressionistic’ to describe roughly carved or indistinct areas on ancient (chiefly Hellenistic or Roman) sculpture, and most particularly the execution of the hair or hairline, where careful disposition of masses designed for effect must ordinarily take precedence over the minute rendering of individual hairs, and where some variety of treatment is often necessary for the sake of legibility.⁵⁷⁷ This term – ‘impressionistic’ – has, unlike *couleur*, remained popular, despite the all too evident anachronism of its application to ancient sculpture, though references can still be found to ‘the colourful turbulence of light and shade’ or the ‘new colouristic principle in the treatment of the hair’ in Roman imperial portraiture:⁵⁷⁸ here the New Sculpture has influenced classical scholarship.

⁵⁷⁷ The term is used, for instance, by Fowler, Wheeler, and Stevens (1909, 258) to describe the hair of the *Hermes* of Olympia; likewise Blümel, 1948, 24-30; Adam, 1966, 125; Childs, 2018, 72. Themelis (1996, 179-81) uses the term of Damophon; Ridgway uses the term in relation to the late fourth-century *Themis of Rhamnous* by Chairestratos and the so-called *Hippokrates* from the Odeion at Kos, which she regards as belonging to the third century, as well as to describe the hairline of the *Hermes* of Olympia (1990, 56, 223; 1997, 261). Neville Rowley has suggested that if during the twentieth century Bellini’s reputation grew at Mantegna’s expense, it is largely because of Roberto Longhi’s ‘taste for colour rather than drawing [...] for handling rather than finish’ – these being by-products of his discovery of the Impressionists at the Venice Biennale in 1910; moreover, he deems this ‘only a symptom of a global change of perception’: Rowley, 2018, 49. Hyde, 1921, 53, draws a distinction between the ‘plastic use of light and shade’ and the ‘impressionism’ of the fourth century, seeing the former rather than the latter in the work of Lysippus and Praxiteles.

⁵⁷⁸ See Bonanno, 1983, 88, where these technical innovations, heavily reliant upon the drill, are attributed to a desire to imitate in marble the effect of ‘the effect produced in soft clay models with the modelling spatula.’ Elsewhere (page 79), the employment of the running drill is described as an ‘impressionistic technique [that] contributed further to the departure from objective naturalism and organic cohesion of forms in traditional Graeco-Roman art.’

5.1. Thornycroft and *Couleur*: A Phidian Interpretation

In 1882 Thornycroft told students at the Royal Academy that the primary qualities to be sought by the sculptor were ‘compactness of mass, flatness of forms and straightness of lines giving the impression of great size or capacity, and for distinctness of line to accentuate forms expressing dignity’. For illustration of these unmistakably Phidian – or at least a Wattsian idea of the Phidian – principles in practice the sculptor turned, as Watts always did, to the Parthenon.⁵⁷⁹ In the marbles of the Parthenon these qualities are largely appropriate because of the monumental context, and the distance from which the sculptures would have been seen, but Thornycroft proposed that the same characteristics might just as well be applied to works designed to be seen at close quarters, perhaps even on a smaller scale, and disengaged from an immediate architectural setting.

If Lee’s melting forms were never overly ‘cut up’, an alternative interpretation of *couleur* was generally present in Thornycroft’s work. The latter’s Phidian manner involves, among other qualities, the maintaining of a pronounced and springy linearity in the design, a judicious flattening of planes, and if not always a heightening of relief, certainly an exaggerated depth of undercutting in many of the recessed parts of a work, the purpose of which partly colouristic. This he applied both to the figure and its raiment. Watts’ idea that some kind of equivalence of style or execution existed between fifth-century Greek sculpture – specifically that

⁵⁷⁹ Draft for RA Lecture, Henry Moore Institute and Archive, Leeds; Manning, 1982, 84.

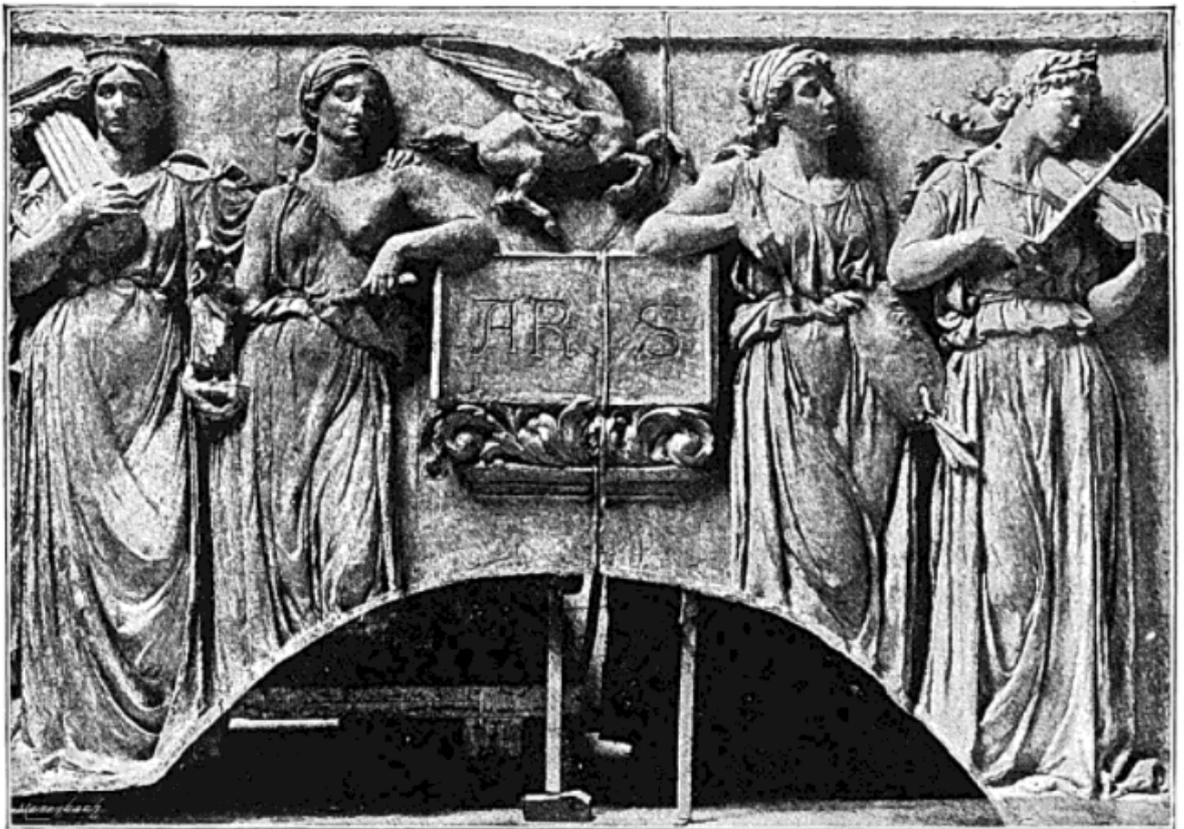
associated with Phidias – and Venetian painting of the sixteenth century is likely to have been persuasive for Thornycroft, who is said to have admired the ‘Tintorets’ in Venice during his first trip to Italy,⁵⁸⁰ at that time a painter still closely associated with Ruskin and also one who might be seen, more than Titian, as treating form in a sculptural manner that makes extensive use of the kind of strong contrasts, flattened planes and straightened lines that he admired in the sculpture of the Parthenon.

Still, any suggestion that Thornycroft’s work owed more to Venetian than Florentine (or neo-Florentine) example must be met with ample caution and qualification, since the sculptor was often perfectly happy to employ what can only be described as a Florentine idiom in his sculpture, and had certainly been influenced by the French Florentine revivalists. Brushing such figures as Perraud to aside, Gosse claimed in 1894 that ‘We may roughly, but not inaccurately, say that Mr. Thornycroft started from Dubois and Mr. Gilbert from Mercié’,⁵⁸¹ and also cited Albert Lefevre – the first recipient (in 1876) of the grand prix de Florence, instigated by the journal *l’Art* – in relation to his friend’s forays into ‘ideal realism’. It is a commonplace observation that the *Mower* approaches closer to Donatello’s *David* than any supposedly Donatellesque figure by Gilbert – at least in terms of pose – but there are other more persuasive examples to consider as well, not least the fact that the sculptor modelled his own *David* in 1880 (unexhibited, presumably unfinished), which might well have been a musical rather than a defiant or

⁵⁸⁰ Manning, 1982, 57. Note the Ruskinian appellation.

⁵⁸¹ Gosse, 1894, 282; cf. Marquand – Frothingham, 1907, 273: ‘Teucer [...] has a style about it which makes us think of Paul Dubois’.

conquering David, since a 'David Playing before Saul' is mentioned on a list of possible future subjects that Thornycroft penned in the early 1870s, presumably not long after returning from his formative seven-week trip to Paris, Venice, Florence, and Rome.⁵⁸² It is also impossible not to see Thornycroft's bas-relief of choirboys on John Belcher's memorial to John Goss in St Paul's (unveiled 1885) as explicitly Florentine in conception, or the figure representing Music on the 'Arts' section of the frieze of the Institute of Chartered Accountants:⁵⁸³ she, with her dreamy expression, curling, fly-away locks of hair, and waving, wind-tossed ribbon, might well be a tribute to Delaplanche.



⁵⁸² Manning, 1982, 58.

⁵⁸³ Modelled by C. J. Allen in 1890.

Fig. 83. William Hamo Thornycroft, 'Arts', from Institute of Chartered Accountants, Moorgate Place, London, c. 1890-2, Portland stone.

Still, it is recorded that, upon seeing Paul Dubois' grand equestrian statue of Anne de Montmorency at the Salon of 1886, a masterpiece commissioned by the Duc d'Aumale for Chantilly, Thornycroft judged the whole 'a little tame and shadowless, but very just.' This perceived quality of shadowlessness is equivalent to the 'paleness of treatment' – as Pomeroy put it – produced via the subtle system of 'half-modeling' that Cox associated with Quattrocento practice.⁵⁸⁴ Thornycroft, who worked on his sculpture outdoors as much as possible, maintained a preference for more dramatic contrasts in light and shade, and he explored this 'Phidian' balancing of breadth and richness of detail especially in his treatment of drapery, whether antique or modern, deepening the hollows of the folds to reveal the nude form beneath: this, he told students at the Royal Academy in 1884, was the practice of the sculptor responsible for the *Fates* at the British Museum, a group which Leighton had sought to evoke in the Life School years earlier, setting the model and arranging the drapery himself.⁵⁸⁵ Here, said Thornycroft, the undercutting in the shadowy recesses was exaggerated 'to express the feeling which the spectator has when looking at nature of the presence of the figure beneath the garment, which presence is given in a living figure by the slight movements and swaying of the folds.'⁵⁸⁶ It was, in other words, a sense of the vibration, pulse, or palpitation of life that the sculptor found in the Parthenon marbles and sought to capture in his own work.

⁵⁸⁴ Pomeroy, in *The Builder*, 31 Jan, 1891, 87.

⁵⁸⁵ Manning, 1982, 60.

⁵⁸⁶ Manning, 1982, 97.

Lanteri would make a similar argument about the *Fates* – which he judged ‘the greatest masterpiece of draped Sculpture’ – in the second volume of his manual on modelling (1904):

When you have the chance of seeing a cast from this group, or the original in the British Museum, I advise you to look up into the folds from underneath. [...] all the shadows cast by the folds will draw the section of the nude; these shadows follow completely the graceful undulations of the figure and illustrate its form.

Without this treatment, he claims, ‘the substantial force of the figure would disappear, and although the statue is in the round, it would have the appearance of low-relief.’⁵⁸⁷ Lanteri admits that arrangements such as this involve taking ‘liberties’ but cautions that ‘in order to take liberties you must first know the unalterable laws of nature.’⁵⁸⁸

When working with marble, Manning reports that Thornycroft took to wearing a dark glove – ‘it might even have been an old black sock!’ she remembers – on his left hand to preserve something more like the proper tonal relation of shadow in the hollows he was carving to the lights of the projecting masses around them; the glove prevented the light reflection of his hand from leading the sculptor into misjudging the depth of carving that had already been achieved. This was a purely practical precaution, but Thornycroft would certainly have agreed with Lanteri that the

⁵⁸⁷ Lanteri II, 47.

⁵⁸⁸ Lanteri II, 50.

relative attention given to interior forms in modelling or carving was something that determined to a significant extent whether the result should be considered good or weak sculpture.⁵⁸⁹

If Thornycroft stressed the architectural and ‘sculpturesque’ side of sculpture, he did not do so at the expense of the picturesque treatment of form, which he explored through contrasts not only between light and shade but also between passages of calm, open execution and turbulent subdivision, never losing sight of the Greek examples to which he had initially been drawn. In a sense, he actually remained closer to the leading painters of the British school than many of his peers, developing from Leighton and Watts, but also from Frederick Walker and George Heming Mason, a grand and outdoorsy but also intimate and expressive kind of classicism that never left his work regardless of subject.

⁵⁸⁹ See Lanteri II, 28-30, where this principle is discussed in relation to drapery.

CHAPTER SIX

6. Painter-Sculptors: The Role of Leighton, Watts, and Stevens

6.1. Leighton's 'Many Moods'

At the Paris Exposition universelle of 1878, Frederic Leighton was spotted jumping for joy – ‘comme un gamin’ wrote Émile Bergerat – in response to some appreciative remarks from Falguière. The *Athlète luttant avec un Python*, as the painter’s first essay in sculpture was there shown, was, Falguière had said, ‘la master pièce de la statuaire anglaise’.⁵⁹⁰ If the great sculptor’s enthusiasm was not shared unanimously by his peers – Ernest Christophe is said to have glanced at the group at the exhibition and said to his English guide only ‘Merci, pas de ça! Montrez-moi autre chose; nous faisons ça ici, et mieux!’ – still the group obtained a significant status in France, and remained instantly recognisable long after its first appearance. Leighton, who would have been excluded from consideration for any prizes in the painting section due to his position as an international member of the awarding jury, received a first class medal for the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, while a second class medal went to Boehm, whose principal contribution had been his seated statue of Thomas Carlyle. In his official report on the sculpture section at the exhibition, which deals briefly and for the most part unenthusiastically with the British contribution, Chapu commented that the *Athlete* ‘a le mérite d’être bien compris’, adding also that ‘le jet de son figure est original et hardi’.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹⁰ Bergerat III, 208.

⁵⁹¹ Chapu, 1884, 9.



Fig. 84. Frederic Leighton, *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, 1877, Bronze, 174.6cm, Tate Britain, London.

When sketching out the history of the New Sculpture in 1894, Gosse afforded to the *Athlete* a place of great importance in the development of the ideals of the movement, seeing in it a practical demonstration of principles that either been forgotten or that had become anathema to the prevailing school of neoclassical sculptors who had long taken their aesthetic models from Rome rather than Greece:

This, in short, was something wholly new, propounded by a painter to the professional sculptors, and displaying a juster and livelier sense of what their art should be than they themselves had ever dreamed of. 'The Athlete and the Python,' even with shortcomings which it may now not be difficult to point out, gave the start-word to the New Sculpture in England.⁵⁹²

The inspiration for this intervention, Gosse intimated, had been the Salon of 1876, when 'the French sculptors, long scattered and depressed, drew themselves together and produced a show of models which took the light completely out of the pictures. [...] the most accomplished, and at the same time most promising, collection of New Sculpture ever brought together anywhere in the modern world.'⁵⁹³

In fact, Leighton had been working already at his *Athlete* for three years prior to its exhibition in London, at the Royal Academy, in 1877, and cannot have been motivated solely by the Salon of the previous year, though it remains entirely true

⁵⁹² Gosse, 1894, 140.

⁵⁹³ Gosse, 1894, 140.

that he was keeping a close eye throughout the decade on goings-on in Paris.⁵⁹⁴ ‘Presque tous les artistes anglais sont à la fois peintres et statuaires, ils ont la coquetterie de cette dualité’ wrote Émile Bergerat, but Leighton’s decision to branch out into sculpture at this point had its corresponding development in Paul Dubois and Falguière’s concomitant adoption of painting earlier in the decade. Falguière’s medal-winning *Lutteurs* had produced a stir at the Salon of 1875, and, far from the sculpture taking the light out of the pictures at the Salon of 1876, as Gosse would later claim, Dubois had, in a spectacular feat, carried off the medals in both categories that year. At the Exposition universelle of 1878, when the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* was shown in Paris for the first time, Gérôme, too, was making his debut as a sculptor. One critic wrote of this ‘new athlete’ in the ring that he, ‘weary, no doubt, of seeing sculptors invade the domain of painting, has wished, like M. Doré, to take a painter’s revenge in the realm of sculpture. M. Doré and M. Gérôme on one side—M. Falguière and M. Dubois on the other!’⁵⁹⁵ Another contender on the side of Falguière and Dubois – not that there was really a genuine rivalry here – would appear during the 1880s in Antonin Mercié, who was reputed to have begun his career as a painter and, moreover, to have preferred the sister art.⁵⁹⁶ At the Salon of 1883 Mercié showed his luminous and delicately coloured *Vénus*, which was swiftly snapped up by the state for the Luxembourg Museum.

⁵⁹⁴ Lang, 1884, 24; note, however, that an earlier source says rather that ‘[t]he better part of at least two years was devoted [...]to carrying out the full-sized model’: Pattison, 1882, 23.

⁵⁹⁵ Dubosc de Pesquidoux, quoted in Hering, 1892, 221-2.

⁵⁹⁶ See, for instance, Gille, 1888, 309; Moreau-Vauthier, 1910, 930.

There was certainly something about the artistic climate of the time, especially in Paris and among students who reached maturity around the middle of the century, that encouraged artists to express themselves in more than one medium. In Leighton's case, as in those of his French peers, one medium could serve a practical preparatory function in the studio when working towards the other: *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python* originated as a small-scale study for one of Leighton's most ambitious works, the *Daphnephoria* (1874-6), for which numerous models were created and displayed for many years in his studio; Leighton continued to produce similar modelli when working towards many later pictures, including *Cymon and Iphigenia*, *Invocation*, *An Idyll*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, and *The Garden of the Hesperides*. In one case, one of these models even appears untransformed, as itself, in a finished picture: the draped figure of Cymon stands in the background of *The Jealousy of Simoetha the Sorceress*. For visitors to the studio, these figures, which either remained in the clay during Leighton's lifetime or were cast in plaster, irresistibly recalled the terracotta figurines being unearthed in Tanagra and elsewhere from the 1870s onwards, his principal point of reference appearing, in these at least, to be Hellenistic and post-Praxitelean rather than fifth-century Phidian, despite the presence in his studio also of casts from the frieze of the Parthenon.

To what extent the various individuals associated with the New Sculpture in Britain dabbled in painting is a question deserving of further consideration in the future, but one that may be, and certainly has been, held back by the relative paucity even of known preparatory studies on paper. Gilbert indicated to McAllister that he had studied painting with Leighton's friend, Giovanni Costa, and talked about taking

up the palette and brush later in life, but sketched his ideas out in two-dimensions relatively infrequently and showed Adrian Bury a self-portrait in oils that was, in Bury's opinion, 'lamentably weak in drawing';⁵⁹⁷ John Macallan Swan is reported to have studied painting under Gérôme, Bastien-Lepage, Henecker (Wencker?), and Dagnan-Bouveret, and he exhibited pictures too; Ford, like Mercié, began as a painter, was connected with but never a student of Dagnan-Bouveret, and in the last years of his life was just beginning to spread his wings in this direction, showing a few landscapes at the Royal Academy; among the succeeding generation, Frampton was perhaps the most inclined towards painting, and indeed, he had spent time in the studios of Mercié and Dagnan-Bouveret.

On the whole, Gosse's narrative has descended to us with little need for modification. Benedict Read sought to show that a certain awareness in Britain of the achievements of modern French sculpture existed, or at very least was possible, considerably earlier in the century than Gosse had recognised, disseminated especially via the International Exhibitions of 1862 and 1871 and the cast collections of the Crystal Palace, but in most particulars remained persuaded of the general truthfulness of the account set out in 1894.⁵⁹⁸ Leighton's importance, both in terms of influence and more practically as a puller of strings, Read accepted and promoted in his writing on the subject, describing him as the 'Morning Star' of the new movement.⁵⁹⁹ By far the greatest challenge to Gosse's interpretation of the ideals and

⁵⁹⁷ Bury, 1952, 57.

⁵⁹⁸ Read, 1992, unpag.

⁵⁹⁹ Read, 1982, 286.

origin of the New Sculpture came with Susan Beattie's *The New Sculpture* in 1983, which not only sought largely to do away with the idea that British sculpture was indebted, especially during the 1880s and 1890s, to so-called Academic French sculpture, but also made a significant effort to downplay the role of the President of the Royal Academy, whose 'guidance and encouragement' and 'untiring fostering care' Gosse had been at pains to emphasise.⁶⁰⁰ In his place, Beattie set up a different hero of the movement, Alfred Stevens, but also reserved an important place for Watts, whom, indeed, Gosse had also considered a critical influence on the sculptors with whom he was concerned. Both, in Beattie's account, are treated as figures with more resolutely Symbolist credentials, in contrast with the French-influenced Leighton, whom she represented as concerned only with the manifestation of physical strength and superficial perfection of outward form. In fact, it was chiefly Watts' ideas about form that the younger sculptors adopted, even if none ultimately went so far as the painter in following these principles to their conclusion.

All three had been represented at the Exposition universelle of 1878: Leighton, by the *Athlete*; Watts, by *Clytie*; and Stevens, by two plaster models of caryatids designed to support the mantelpiece above a fireplace at Dorchester House. On the rising generation of sculptors, including Thornycroft, Gilbert, Ford, and so on, these three – all 'painter-sculptors' – wielded what has been seen as a disproportionate influence: disproportionate, that is, when the actual quantity of their sculptural output is considered, either individually or together.

⁶⁰⁰ Gosse, 1894, 140.

In proclaiming Alfred Stevens the principal moving influence, Beattie was in fact reviving an interpretation of the origin of the movement that was current during the 1880s, predating and to a certain extent prompting Gosse's dissenting account of the origins of the New Sculpture, in reality a defensive version in which Leighton and Thornycroft were given greater importance than Stevens and Gilbert. As early as 1879, Joseph Comyns Carr, who had, along with Charles Hallé, Coutts Lindsay and his wife Blanche, been a key figure in presenting certain masterpieces of French sculpture to the British public at the opening of the first exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, expressed a similar view. 'Sir Coutts Lindsay's choice of sculptor-exhibitors was and continued to be governed rather by his instinct for the socially acceptable than by any deep feeling for their art' Beattie wrote rather sneeringly, seeing works by Dubois, Delaplanche and Chapu as 'extrovert and coolly objective', in contrast with the paintings on display in the same setting,⁶⁰¹ but she would surely have been pleased with Carr's claim at this early stage that the 'recent revival' – the allusion may be to Leighton's *Athlete* as well as to recent French sculpture, which he believed had escaped 'the paralysing restraint of classic tradition' by rediscovering the Renaissance – had been discernible in the work of only 'one English artist, only lately deceased, who was driven by the force of his own genius to the source from which the new inspiration has been derived.'⁶⁰² Again, he expressed the view that Stevens 'stands alone among English sculptors in his appreciation of the new departure which art has taken'.⁶⁰³ Harry Quilter was probably the first to proclaim

⁶⁰¹ Beattie, 1983, 137.

⁶⁰² Carr, 1879, 248-9.

⁶⁰³ Carr, 1879, 250.

Gilbert ‘the successor of Stevens’, which he did in print in 1884.⁶⁰⁴ By the end of the decade, the idea had become almost commonplace; in an 1889 article on Gilbert, Cosmo Monkhouse ventured to suggest that:

in connection with Mr. Alfred Gilbert and other living sculptors who form what may truly be called the “new school,” the most important is that of the late Alfred Stevens, the designer of the Wellington monument in St. Paul’s, perhaps, in grandeur of style and vigorous imagination, the greatest monument since Michelangelo. Stevens was the precursor, it may be said the founder, of the school, which by its reference to nature for its models and its motives, and to the artist’s own feelings for its inspiration, has made little less than a revolution in English plastic art.⁶⁰⁵

It would appear that it was this passage, or something very like it, which prompted Gosse’s tetchiness on the subject in 1894, not that his intervention was necessarily motivated primarily by what had appeared in print. ‘It is usual to attribute the start of the New Sculpture to the example of Alfred Stevens’, he began, before advanced swiftly to the forthright contention that ‘the character of his [Stevens’] work was wholly out of sympathy with what was going to be produced five or six years after his death.’ It is here that Gosse made one of his clearest statements about the New Sculpture:

⁶⁰⁴ Quilter, 6 May 1884, quoted in Dorment, 1985, 50.

⁶⁰⁵ Monkhouse, 1889, 38-9.

The central principle of the New Sculpture has been a close and obedient following of nature. This was not a characteristic of Stevens, although he worked much from the model. He persistently bent the individuality of the model to a certain type which he kept before his imaginative eye. Alfred Stevens was a sort of pioneer for the new school; he was in no sense its founder or proposer. Far more truly might the ‘Clytie’ of Mr. Watts, that swallow of 1868 which brought no summer with it, be said, with the veracious texture of its flesh, its *aura* of unexampled life and picturesqueness, to have been the true forerunner of the New Sculpture.⁶⁰⁶

All the principal figures associated with the New Sculpture seem to have been admirers of Alfred Stevens: that Leighton and Watts were both devoted to his legacy is well known; Thornycroft told Harry How in 1893 that he considered Stevens, with Flaxman, one of ‘the greatest sculptors this country has ever seen’, but also pointed out that French sculptors were ‘the most gifted in Europe’;⁶⁰⁷ Brock has sometimes been seen as an admirer or even an imitator of Stevens;⁶⁰⁸ Gilbert expressed apparently inconsistent views about Stevens – describing him both as ‘derivative’ and ‘supremely creative’, but Adrian Bury, who found Gilbert ‘variable’ in his moods and opinions, believed that his real attitude was one of combined reverence and regret that he had never met the man (on the other hand, it may be perverse to

⁶⁰⁶ Gosse, 1894, 139.

⁶⁰⁷ How, 1893, 279.

⁶⁰⁸ See, for instance, Spielmann, 1901, 2.

claim Stevens, who as Stannus said, ‘did not greatly value landscape’,⁶⁰⁹ as the closest precursor of Gilbert if the latter is to be seen as an almost anti-figurative sculptor, specifically looking to expand the ornamental vocabulary available to the sculptor);⁶¹⁰ Alfred Drury collected Stevens’ drawings; Thornycroft and Ford both acquired sketch-models for the figural groups on the *Wellington Memorial* in St Paul’s;⁶¹¹ the latter also owned a bronze cast of Stevens’ best loved creation, the wonderfully expressive lion originally designed for the railing outside the British Museum during the 1850s, and freely adapted it for the sea-green winged lions – strangely Venetian in effect – that, in his *Shelley Memorial* of 1892, support the poet’s incorrupt body.⁶¹²

On the other hand, even Hugh Stannus, who on his own formed the most direct link between most of these sculptors and Stevens, could not avoid noting that certain mannerisms were present in the master’s drawings, including an exaggerated breadth of nose and inflated limbs, ‘this latter [...] a characteristic of all who have studied at Rome.’⁶¹³ Again, Edwin Roscoe Mullins, a sculptor who had studied in Germany alongside Ford, spoke highly of Stevens but admitted that one of the groups on the *Wellington Monument*, the “Truth taking the tongue out of Lying,” is not so pleasing, for the sight of a wrenched tongue is unpleasant, and the close imitation in

⁶⁰⁹ Stannus, 1908, 9.

⁶¹⁰ Bury, 1952, 55, 89.

⁶¹¹ How, 1893, 272.

⁶¹² This was bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Gordon Max Onslow Ford in 2004 (A.5-2004).

⁶¹³ Stannus, 1908, 11.

stone of a poetic thought rather revolting.’⁶¹⁴ Francis Derwent Wood would later approach the subject of *Humanity Overcoming War* (marble 1921-5, Cartwright Hall, Bradford) in an overtly Stevensesque fashion, resorting to the not much more palatable alternative of the former stopping the tongue of the latter *in* rather than *out* of the throat. Why war should be subdued in precisely this manner is not exactly clear. Evidently the sculptors who rose to prominence during the 1880s and 90s were not *wholly* out of sympathy with Stevens, as Gosse claimed, though the fact that he had died in 1875 is difficult to dismiss, and it is true that his contact with them was only indirect. One of the places where Stevens’ influence is most strongly felt is in the ornamentation of the South Kensington Museum, both inside, among the glazed ceramic work carried out by Francis Moody between 1865 and 1871, and outside, in many of the moulded terracotta details featuring solid and industrious infants that enliven the façades, especially the exterior of the Henry Cole Wing (1856-84), much of which was executed by Reuben Townroe, but how very distant these are from what was to come is easy to judge by a comparison with Alfred Drury’s later work above the main entrance to the museum, which, however, is evidently meant in some sense to complement the earlier embellishment. Moody, it was said, ‘worked in the manner of Alfred Stevens, and had reduced everything to a system, with methods of drawing heads, arms, fingers, etc.’;⁶¹⁵ what could be more at odds with the close study of the individual model and carefully particularised treatment of the body that characterised much of the work of sculptors of the succeeding generation? The New

⁶¹⁴ *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 8 April 1892, 520. The sculptor must have referred to ‘stone’ only figuratively; the group is of course in bronze.

⁶¹⁵ Clausen, 1912, quoted in Beattie, 1983, 13.

Sculpture was not a matter of mere formula. As for the grand claims made about the *Wellington Memorial*, a French perspective, from Henry Roujon, the *secrétaire perpetual* of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, is perhaps worthy of note: ‘*Probably the finest plastic work of modern times*’, he quotes from a too self-assuredly authoritative old entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, originally penned by John Henry Middleton,⁶¹⁶ ‘Ah! que cette anecdote anglo-saxonne ressemble donc à une anecdote chez nous!’⁶¹⁷

There is another aspect of the interpretation of the movement that seeks to credit Stevens over Leighton that should be considered, and that is the parochialism and prejudice against the latter, and by extension against the wrong kind of Academic French influence, that crops up in the writing of a number of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century critics such as D. S. MacColl, for whom Stevens was evidently a figure of less dubious nationality and masculinity than Leighton. Both men had in reality trained abroad, albeit in Stevens’ case only in Italy and not France; on the other hand, it is recorded by Kenneth Towndrow (with palpable glee) that Stevens himself had once referred contemptuously to Leighton as ‘that fop of an artist’.⁶¹⁸ In MacColl’s praise of Alfred Stevens an underlying nationalism and implicit aversion to qualities of design regarded as feminine become explicit. Two years after Leighton’s death, in response to Poynter’s ‘preaching of the

⁶¹⁶ Middleton, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1886, 561.

⁶¹⁷ Roujon, 1908, 83.

⁶¹⁸ Towndrow, 1939, 176. Towndrow elsewhere refers to the ‘inadequate brushes of Edward Poynter and Frederick Leighton’ and charges them with the ultimate failure of the scheme to decorate the interior of St Paul’s: Towndrow, 1939, 179, 152. The preface to the book was written by MacColl.

Gospel of Ingres' at the 1898 Royal Academy award ceremony, MacColl penned a petty diatribe in the *Saturday Review* in which he complained that:

[I]t struck one in listening as a marvellous thing that the President of an English Academy should go so far afield when searching for an exemplar. If Ingres, why not the infinitely greater artist and the Englishman, Alfred Stevens? [...] it is time that his nation should be told that he is their great man, and that his students should have his example set before them in their schools. Here was the man who could draw like Andrea del Sarto, who could design monuments like Donatello, sculptor, painter, architect, who did with virile force what the artist craftsmen talk about doing and set out to do with a precarious foundation of drawing and an effeminate ideal.⁶¹⁹

Leighton is not mentioned straightaway, but McColl withholds his name until the bitter end of his screed, where he concludes that the circulation among students of reproductions of Stevens' drawings might provide 'a corrective to the taste that finds in Lord Leighton's sugared art the summit of our achievement'.

Already, within a month of Leighton's death, Kate Greenaway had written to Ruskin complaining that '[y]ou must not like Leighton now, or Millais, and I don't know how much longer I'm to be allowed to like Burne-Jones'. The critical reaction against all three was already well underway. 'Oh dear!' she adds, finding herself to be in possession of insufficiently advanced taste.⁶²⁰ Again, only two and a half

⁶¹⁹ MacColl, 1898, 202-3.

⁶²⁰ Letter from Greenaway to Ruskin, 25 February, 1896, published in Spielmann – Layard, 1905, 205.

weeks before the publication of MacColl's article, she had sent a more optimistic missive to Ruskin reporting that the 'Millais Exhibition has rather woke them up. They got to think Leighton was a poor feeble being and Millais nowhere before the New Art, but I'm rather amused to hear the different talk now.—And then Poynter and Richmond, to my great joy, have been going for them in their addresses.'⁶²¹ Greenaway was perhaps unaware of the very public disagreement between Ruskin and Poynter just over twenty years earlier, but the important point is that Gosse's account of the origin of the New Sculpture in 1894 – and even his employment of such a term, was in large measure defensive, and should be seen within the context of wider attacks on the Royal Academy and its President in which Alfred Stevens – never admitted into its ranks – could serve conveniently as a stick with which to beat the institution and its leading personalities. 'The Academy never recognized Alfred Stevens as a sculptor,' complained Harry Quilter from the easy vantage point of 1883, 'but preferred Mr. Weekes and Mr. Woolner',⁶²² and yet there can be little doubt that Stevens would have been nominated had he lived into the Presidency of the man he called a 'fop of an artist'. Just as importantly, some of the prejudices that had characterised criticism of Leighton in the 1890s were carried forwards into the 1980s. The Leighton of Beattie's account is a 'cosmopolitan and charismatic' but blustery and prevaricating figure who, in connection with the Blackfriars Bridge competition, displayed a 'lack of confidence astonishing in the self-declared arbiter of sculptural values' and resorted to 'rhetoric to mask his confusion'.⁶²³ It seems he

⁶²¹ Letter from Greenaway to Ruskin, 26 January 1898, published in Spielmann and Layard, 1905, 229.

⁶²² Quilter, 1883, 9.

⁶²³ Beattie, 1983, 30, 44.

had been unimpressed but not necessarily confused by the entries. Beattie also charged Leighton with having ‘diverted’ Thornycroft from his Symbolist – and therefore, in her view, New Sculptural – aspirations towards an interest in the merely physical, and the overly French, signifying in her treatment of the movement the fault of style over substance.⁶²⁴ Leighton’s own sculptural productions, especially the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, Beattie saw at once as ‘highly pretentious’ and a demonstration of the artist’s ‘dependency on and many allusions to’ Alfred Stevens; *The Sluggard*, she claimed, was little more than a ‘feeble [...] variation’ on the theme of Rodin’s *L’Âge d’airain*.⁶²⁵

It does not follow, from the defensiveness of Gosse’s account, that the account was itself invalid. Nor was Gosse necessarily the first to suggest that Leighton had spurred on the new movement; already in 1890 an anonymous reporter for the *Standard* had mused that ‘[w]e are not sure that Sir Frederick Leighton’s excursion into this department was not the signal for the revival.’⁶²⁶ During the 1990s, in the context of the centennial commemoration of his death, numerous pro-Leighton partisans sallied out in his defence, and more than convincing demonstrations of the influence of the President of the Royal Academy on sculptors ranging from Brock to Gilbert and beyond were made in the catalogue accompanying the 1996 Royal Academy exhibition on Leighton and in the exhibition ‘Leighton and his Sculptural Influence’, held at Joanna Barnes Fine Art

⁶²⁴ Beattie, 1983, 147.

⁶²⁵ Beattie, 1983, 196, 3, 150.

⁶²⁶ *The Standard*, 13 Dec 1890, 4.

the same year. It was shown that Leighton had a hands-on role in shaping the new movement that involved teaching young students in the Life Room during the 1870s, campaigning for commissions to be awarded to sculptors of talent, supporting their election to the Royal Academy, and, perhaps most famously, dropping in on Gilbert in Perugia, commissioning from him one of the great masterpieces of British art – *Icarus* – and persuading the artist to return to Britain. At the same time, the case was made largely through formal comparisons of pose and gesture that Leighton’s own sculptural productions, especially the *Athlete* and the *Sluggard*, but also *Needless Alarms*, set out almost in pattern-fashion some of the categories in which young sculptors could succeed, and provided a stock of motifs from which they could borrow or which they could reconfigure in their own work. Benedict Read grouped together a series of ‘athletic males’ that he saw as examples derived from Leighton’s 1877 sculptural debut, ‘static males’ descending from the *Sluggard*, ‘flighty girls/boys’ related to *Needless Alarms*, and ‘[e]ven a snake sub-school’, referring back, again, to the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*.⁶²⁷

That Leighton’s debut as a sculptor was indeed received as a kind of summons or starting gun for a new movement Gosse thought apparent from George Lawson’s *In the Arena* of 1878, a tense combat between a man and a panther taking place, it was implied, within an ancient (Roman) setting, though he regarded the sculptor ultimately as a ‘transitional’ figure whose adherence to the new ideals was partial and inconsistent, while the named work was ‘a little raw in execution.’⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ Read, 1996, 89-91.

⁶²⁸ Gosse, 1894, 142.

Almost as quick to enter the arena and to attempt to work out the principles solidly embodied by the *Athlete* was William Blake Richmond, like Leighton himself a painter apparently looking to teach a lesson to the professional sculptors; whether his *Athlete* or *Greek Runner* of 1878-9 can be seen as a successful undertaking may, however, be doubted, so stilted is the pose and so far is the figure from conveying an impression of swiftness or agility in its inflated grandeur (a bronze cast was placed in St. Peter's Square, Hammersmith, in 1926); it is, in short, leagues away from Thornycroft's wonderfully impudent half-size statuette *Putting the Stone*, which appeared the following year and must have made quite an impression in the exhibition room, or his life-size *Teucer* of 1881, in both of which the spring and stretch of the body is much more thoroughly understood; compared to Alfred Boucher's famous and popular *Au but* of 1886, the *Greek Runner* appears thoroughly old-fashioned and superficial, guilty even of some of the aesthetic crimes with which Beattie charged Leighton's *Athlete*; it is as distant, indeed, from the vitality of the later athletes as Leighton's had been from the *Eagle Slayer* of John Bell (first conceived in 1837). Some though not all of its faults may be attributable to the fact that it was modelled not in clay but in *gesso grosso*, which Richmond had presumably discovered through his interactions with Watts, with a final layer in wax. Of the plaster and tow part of the process in particular the sculptor later admitted that 'he would not advise anyone to repeat that labour.'⁶²⁹ It would appear that – discounting Watts – no one was greatly tempted by the results. Gosse did not mention Richmond's *Runner* in his account of the New Sculpture; is it possible that

⁶²⁹ *The Building News and Engineering Journal*, 9 May 1890, 672; the wax layer is recorded in Reynolds, 1995, 124.

he did not know it? It is at least probable that he would not have cared to know it, simply viewing the *Runner* as something other than a serious contender in the race towards a more vital sculpture. The bronze had been exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery rather than the Academy in 1879 (as *An Athlete*), and seems to have been largely forgotten up to the point of its installation in St Peter's Square, Hammersmith, in 1926, but Gosse most likely shared Thornycroft's view of Richmond as an amateur rather than a professional sculptor, not to be entrusted with commissions of major importance: later in the 1890s, in the context of rumours that Richmond had been asked to carry out the memorial to Leighton in St Paul's (a commission ultimately given to Brock), Thornycroft made a few disparaging remarks about his rival, including a suggestion that '[t]he only good thing which may come of it may be that Richmond's hand may be stayed for a time from covering the grand work of Wren with colour where Wren would not wish it'.⁶³⁰ Elfrida Manning refers to Richmond as a 'novice' even in 1896, a full seventeen years after his debut as a sculptor. Still, regardless of its failure in Gosse and Thornycroft's eyes, the *Greek Runner* shows that Richmond had, like Lawson, taken Leighton's *Athlete* as a signal to imbue modern sculpture with a new dynamism, and to fill its veins with fresh blood.

Richmond would make a greater impression as a sculptor a decade later with the plaster model of his *Arcadian Shepherd* (1889, unexecuted), and although part of the work on the figure was carried out in a studio belonging to Watts,⁶³¹ he was in

⁶³⁰ Manning, 1982, 134.

⁶³¹ Dakers, 1999, 217. Thornycroft, on the same street, is not likely to have been unaware of this arrangement.

this too following Leighton's lead. The critic for the *Magazine of Art* (Claude Phillips?) wrote of it that:

This colossal work is conceived altogether in the "grand style," and while the head suggests Praxiteles, the torso is unmistakably reminiscent of Michelangelo and Sir Frederick Leighton. This indefiniteness of aim robs it of much of its unity of purpose and harmoniousness of line, and we cannot regard it as an entire success. It is like a glorified Academy exercise, so far does the conception outrun the execution and mastery of material, which the artist has not yet carried to completion.⁶³²

Gosse, as it happens, did have something to say about this 'coarse giant' in the *Saturday Review*:

This is a powerful and learned piece of work, marred by something extravagant in the gesture, and by the immense length of the almost ape-like arms. The head seems too young for the maturity of the thorax and legs [compare this with the above comment from the *Magazine of Art*, where youth and maturity are framed rather as Praxitelean and Michelangelian qualities]. Nevertheless, this swaggering young Hercules—for we refuse to allow that there is anything Arcadian about him—is an interesting specimen of modern English sculpture.

⁶³² Anon., 'The Sculpture of the Year', *Magazine of Art* 12 (1889), 369.

More interesting, however, is Mr. Harry Bates's vigorous and masculine group of a man holding two "Hounds in Leash".⁶³³

This too being, of course, in its great dramatic contrast between animal impulse and human restraint, a descendant of Leighton's first *Athlete*, albeit one that also owes something to Watts and to Thornycroft.



Fig. 85. William Blake Richmond, *An Athlete*, 1879, from Blackburn, 1879, 32.

⁶³³ Gosse, 1889, 785. Evidently one man's Arcadia is not another's. It is notable that Gosse declines to trace the *Shepherd's* thickset build to the work of Richmond's namesake William Blake.



Fig. 86. 'The Studio of Sir William B. Richmond, R.A.', from Lascelles, 1902, frontispiece.



Fig. 87. 'The Studio of Sir W. B. Richmond, R.A.', from Lascelles, 1902, 15.

THE BUILDING IRONS. FEB. 16, 1890.



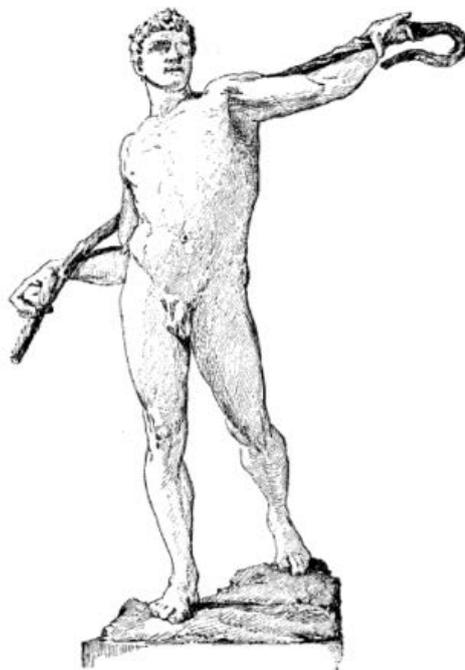
THE ARCADIAN SHEPHERD. BY JOHN GIBSON. 1870. MARBLE. IN THE GARDENS OF THE PALACE OF ST. JAMES, LONDON.

THE ARCADIAN SHEPHERD



Fig. 88a. William Blake Richmond, *The Arcadian Shepherd*, 1889, seen in a 'Photo-Tint' by James Akerman, *The Building News and Engineering Journal*, 14 Feb 1890, unpag.

Fig. 88b. William Blake Richmond, Sketch of the *Arcadian Shepherd*, from Blackburn, 1889, 99.



An Arcadian Shepherd. By W. B. Richmond, A.R.A. From a Drawing by G. E. Moira.

Fig. 88c. '*An Arcadian Shepherd* [...] From a Drawing by G. E. Moira', in Higgins, 1890, 198.

Importantly, the pervasive influence of Leighton appears, during the 1880s, to have encountered and been modified by the productions of the younger generation, these sculptors not only following his lead but providing new impulses that are noticeable in the painter's later excursions into plastic expression. Gosse wrote at the end of the decade that he could '[o]n all sides [...] see the imprint of the genius of

younger men on those who learned their art before the recent revival of sculpture.’⁶³⁴ Certainly the *école anglaise* seemed surprisingly – and perhaps a little deceptively – cohesive to external observers at the 1889 Exposition universelle, if not necessarily in a manner worthy of commendation.⁶³⁵ By this point, the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* in particular had been outstripped by the new arrivals in the arena. Gosse referred in 1894 to the ‘shortcomings which it may now not be difficult to point out’ in the *Athlete*. His initial response in 1886 to its follow-up or pendant piece, the *Athlete Awakening from Sleep*, better known as the *Sluggard*, had also involved a degree of reservation:

The fault of this learned and beautiful figure is that it does not fulfil the artist’s intention. The youth is in far too good training to be a sluggard. Sir Frederick Leighton has been tempted to make too elaborate a display of his anatomical knowledge, and in working out every muscle of the form he has lost the veil of fleshiness that should cover the muscular structure of a sluggard [...] The President still preserves a certain classic, or at least Renaissance, feeling in his work.⁶³⁶

⁶³⁴ Gosse, 1889, 786.

⁶³⁵ American criticism was heavily influenced by French criticism. ‘There is a form of artistic atavism, [...] to which, sooner or later, her [England’s] sculptors almost inevitably succumb. No matter how great the promise and the originality, they all come in time to work in the same way.’ So said Lorado Taft on the subject in an early lecture, though he later came to feel that he had been unduly harsh: Taft, 1921, 75.

⁶³⁶ Gosse, 26 June 1886, 883.



Fig. 89. Frederic Leighton, *The Sluggard*, 1885, Bronze, 191.1, Tate Britain, London.

This was a common criticism of both *Athletes*. Harry Quilter complained that the *Sluggard* lacked ‘the congruity and uniformity of the whole’: ‘despite great artistic qualities, despite style and anatomical knowledge,’ he claimed, ‘we find that we think of parts—of legs, arms, ribs, and so on.’⁶³⁷ Paillier, seeing it at the 1889 Exposition universelle, found the figure ‘dure et sèche d’exécution, avec des accents trop affirmés, et construite sans le souci de représenter la souplesse de la peau’, though he admitted that in Leighton’s painting there was ‘plus de charme et de poésie’ than there was in his sculpture.⁶³⁸ Claude Phillips felt that ‘the whole has the aspect rather of an *écorché* than of a supple and beautiful youth such as the sculptor has sought to represent’, and that this kind of execution was ‘especially out of place’ when the intention was ‘to display a type rather of voluptuous ease than of heroic enterprise’. Massing up examples with which to chide the President of the Royal Academy, Phillips turned first to Praxiteles, but could not stop there:

Not so did Praxiteles shape his “Hermes,” and still less his “Faun” or his “Sauroktonos;” not so did Pheidias represent his river-god “Ilissus,” or the severe Polykleitos fashion even his athletic “Doryphoros,” which aimed at displaying the ideal of manly strength and power.⁶³⁹

In fact, Leighton had closely followed the unearthing of the *Hermes* of Olympia on 8th May 1877, and, after his election as President of the Royal Academy the following year, he had overseen very rapidly indeed the acquisition of a cast for

⁶³⁷ Quilter, 1892, 356.

⁶³⁸ Paillier, 1889, 138.

⁶³⁹ Phillips, 1891, 207.

the institution.⁶⁴⁰ The Royal Academy still possesses a plaster cast, attributed to Brucciani, of the god's sandaled right foot (no. 03/2136), found together with but separated from the figure, which was broken at the knees and missing the lower legs and left foot. Elizabeth Prettejohn has proposed that Leighton's own pictorial essays in what might be considered a Praxitelean mode – most starkly conspicuous in the silky classicism of his earlier *Daedalus and Icarus* (1869) – might even have solidified the identification of the *Hermes* with that master.⁶⁴¹ We have observed before now that Pomeroy's *Perseus* of 1898 would serve both as an overt tribute to Leighton and as a celebration of a kind of Praxiteleanism in modern sculpture; the pose of this statue is the pose of Leighton's *Icarus*, only mirrored, and the very winged sandals of the hero – a highly distinctive style seen nowhere else in antiquity – have been borrowed, as in the relevant myth, and restored from the *Hermes*. If Gilbert's *Perseus* had seemed a little underequipped, the same is not true of Pomeroy's hero, who has reason to be grateful to the Olympian.

⁶⁴⁰ Ormond, in Jones *et al.* 1996, 216.

⁶⁴¹ Prettejohn, 2012, 168-9. Leighton's *Icarus* has been compared with and even mistakenly regarded as having been modelled on the *Hermes*. The late Rosemary Barrow found a more likely candidate in the Praxitelean *Satyr* in Dresden, which reverses the *Hermes'* contrapposto while keeping the right arm raised, but observed that Leighton's *Icarus* – who remains closer to the *Hermes* in the sophistication of his contrapposto, smooth finish, and refinement of modelling – may more suitably be judged 'a Praxitelean-type figure', accurately designed 'without [the artist] ever having seen an original': Ormond/Ormond, 1975, 89; Barrow, 1999, 59.





Fig. 90. Details of Pomeroy's *Perseus* and plaster cast of the Hermes' foot, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

By 1894, Gosse had changed his mind, arguing that in 1886, with the exhibition of the second *Athlete*, Leighton 'had passed from hardness into suppleness and flexibility, [...] the forms of flesh and bone were far more under his control than they had formerly been.' What had produced the change? 'No one could doubt, in examining 'The Sluggard,' that the influence of the French had been strong on Sir Frederic Leighton, nor that he had greatly admired the 'Teucer' of his own youthful colleague, Mr. Thornycroft. [...] nothing could be modelled more closely in accordance with the principles of the new school.'⁶⁴² Gosse will have been aware that Leighton had purchased a bronze reduction of *Teucer* from Thornycroft in 1889,

⁶⁴² Gosse, 1894, 281.

and that this was thereafter displayed in his studio.⁶⁴³ The statuette is clearly visible in a photograph of the studio taken by Bedford Lemere in 1895.



Fig. 91. Detail of Leighton's studio in April 1895, featuring Hamo Thornycroft's *Teucer* to the left.

‘The “something” Leighton’s art said,’ wrote Emily Barrington after his death, was ‘a solving of certain problems, a uniting of certain opposites. In it we find a union termed the *architectural sense* for form, defined accuracy in drawing and modelling—together with an emotionally intimate and caressing sense of beauty

⁶⁴³ Read, 1996, 86, 92 n. 33.

which crept into every touch. In this combination of the masculine and feminine qualities in the expression of form he has said the last word.’⁶⁴⁴ Ruskin, who never commented on Leighton’s essays in sculpture,⁶⁴⁵ viewed his painting largely from the perspective of this ‘caressing’ quality: ‘[o]f our present masters,’ he told his Oxford students in the early 1880s, ‘Sir Frederic Leighton delights most in softly-blended colours, and his ideal of beauty is more nearly that of Correggio than any seen since Correggio’s time. But [the professor had to hand Leighton’s justly famous studies of a lemon tree and a Byzantine well-head] you see by what precision of terminal outline he at first restrained, and exalted, his gift of beautiful *vaghezza*.’⁶⁴⁶ Giovanni Costa, too, who was exceptionally well placed to understand the technical procedures followed by his friend, saw Correggio as a major influence on Leighton.⁶⁴⁷ The painter had certainly sought out an overtly Correggionesque model during the early-to-mid-1860s, who appears to have posed for such numerous and varied pictures as *Bianca* (1862, Royal Collection), *Odalisque* (1862, Private collection), *Sea Echoes* (1862, Private collection), *Eucharis—A Girl with a Basket of Fruit* (1863, Private collection), and the picture known as *Mother and Child or Cherries* (c. 1864-5, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery). His much maligned nude of 1867, *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* (Private collection), can, moreover, be seen as

⁶⁴⁴ Barrington, 1911, 316.

⁶⁴⁵ He did, however, write the following to Leighton on 15th December 1882: ‘I wish the lecture on sculpture you gave that jury the other day had been to a larger audience, and I one of them.’ Barrington II, 42. The jury in question was that at the *Belt v. Lawes* libel case, for which Leighton provided evidence; Ruskin’s reference to it as a ‘lecture’ is a little facetious but perhaps implies some approval; he might have read about Leighton’s contribution in the *Times* on 12th and 13th December: see Ruskin, *Works XXXVII*, 424 n. 1.

⁶⁴⁶ Ruskin, *The Art of England: Lectures Given in Oxford*, 1884, Lecture III, 98.

⁶⁴⁷ Barrington II, 256-7.

an attempt to harmonise the popular Hellenistic statue type of Venus untying her sandal (of which, during the nineteenth century, the most widely reproduced example was probably the fragmentary marble from the Arenberg Palace in Brussels)⁶⁴⁸ with Correggio's Venus in the National Gallery (c. 1525); the anatomical peculiarities of this nude – peculiarities which have come in for much criticism – are largely the result of this union between ancient and sixteenth-century prototypes.⁶⁴⁹ Nowhere, perhaps, is Correggio's influence on Leighton more apparent than in such pictures as *The Music Lesson* (1877) or *Whispers* (c. 1881), where the delicate intertwining of hand and hand, with the exquisitely subtle gradation of tone across the fingers, recalls what Ruskin had referred to as 'the clustering and twining of the fingers' in *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* (c. 1526-7, Louvre), an effect 'enjoyed by the painter just in the same way as he would enjoy the twining of the branches of a graceful plant'.⁶⁵⁰ Leighton had surely studied the National Gallery's *Madonna of the Basket* (c. 1524) with care; in that picture the gentle pressure of the hands is almost as prominent a motif and just as tender.

Was this Correggiosity translatable to sculpture? During the early nineteenth century the French sculptor Charles-Gabriel Sauvage, known as Lemire, had produced (for reproduction in biscuit porcelain and bronze) models of infants engaged in various activities such as drawing, writing, and reading that were

⁶⁴⁸ On this particular example see de Mot, 1903, 10-20, Pl. X. The Arenberg Aphrodite was found in the environs of Alexandria.

⁶⁴⁹ Some of the same defects are present in Antico's well known *Seated Nymph* (c. 1503), which also constitutes an attempted restoration of a Hellenistic marble; the Nymph's shoulder is quite out of joint with the new position of the head, but Antico's judgement has not been questioned as Leighton's has.

⁶⁵⁰ Ruskin, 'The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret', *Aratra Pentelici*, 1872, 29.

explicitly modelled on Correggio's infants, all with their heads bowed as if in concentration; one model, very widely reproduced in bronze especially, of Cupid stringing his bow comes particularly close to the pose of the god of love in the so-called *School of Love* in the National Gallery, approximating also, albeit with a harder edge, the distinctive soft curls that crown the head of Correggio's infant.⁶⁵¹ Qualities that in painting might have been seen as reminiscent of Correggio were, however, more likely to be seen as Praxitelean in the context of sculpture. Ruskin used the word *vaghezza* of Leighton's delicate gradations of colour. In *Modern Painters* he had written, on the other hand, of Correggio's *morbidezza*, a technical term that he thought 'disgraced by affectation' but necessary to describe the impression of texture conveyed through colour, and, moreover, a quality that was linked in the painter's case with 'an exquisite sensibility to fineness and intricacy of curvature'.⁶⁵² The same term was also used during the nineteenth century to describe the quality of melting softness associated with Praxiteles; where Ruskin looked – quite appropriately – to Correggio, therefore, in order to shed light on Leighton's work, Barrington naturally turned to the Praxiteles: Leighton was, she said, 'a Praxiteles of the brush'.⁶⁵³

What of the modelling tool and the chisel? Falguière was, at least from the 1880s onwards, widely regarded as the Praxiteles of those implements, if not always for the same reason. Leighton, it was felt, had opted to emphasise rigidity and

⁶⁵¹ This is not the same model, however, as the *Amour mettant une corde à son arc* acquired from the sculptor by the Louvre in 1814, on long-term loan to the Musée historique Lorrain in Nancy.

⁶⁵² Ruskin, *Modern Painters* Vol. 1, Part IX, Ch. XI, § 8, 415-6 n.3 (Works III).

⁶⁵³ Barrington II 257; Barrington, 1911, 320.

tension in his plastic works, rather than the serene *sfumato* and *morbidezza* of, say, the winged youth seen in his own *Daedalus and Icarus*, a strongly Praxitelean – even proto-Praxitelean, since, in a sense, it predates the *Hermes* – type, softly modelled, and gracefully relaxed in attitude, quite free of any contortionist’s tricks or muscular exertion. The quality of incisiveness had certainly been chosen deliberately to form as great a contrast as possible with the slurred modelling of interior forms familiar from the standard sand-cast bronzes of the mid-Victorian period, which Leighton no doubt believed to be too inclined to *morbidezza* precisely where it was not wanted. We have already seen that Chapu was impressed by the cast of the first *Athlete*, but to a critic like Paillier, greater softness would have been desirable even in the second. Far from being able to distinguish the muscle from the bone beneath the skin, or to discover any *vaghezza* or suggestiveness of touch in the surface of the bronze, Paillier complained that in British sculpture generally ‘chaque muscle est découpé sèchement comme du bois.’ Alongside Leighton’s *Sluggard* the critic named works by Thornycroft and Brock as suffering from the same fault, the same dryness of touch and wooden quality which, as we have seen, he attributed to the unavoidable gloom of the London studio. All, he said, possessed ‘ce caractère de raideur qui distingue les productions de l’École d’Égine.’ There is of course a significant degree of exaggeration in Paillier’s abuse – for however this comment might have been taken in 1909 or 1929, this was in 1889 certainly intended as such – but there is some truth in the suggestion that British sculptors, including Leighton, were looking to early Classical sculpture as well as that more typically associated with a period of decline. The pose of Thornycroft’s *Teucer*, one of the examples named, had been overtly modelled on the Apollo from the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, borrowing some, but not all, of its severity.



Fig. 92. William Hamo Thornycroft, *Teucer*, 1881, Bronze, 240.7cm, Tate Britain, London.

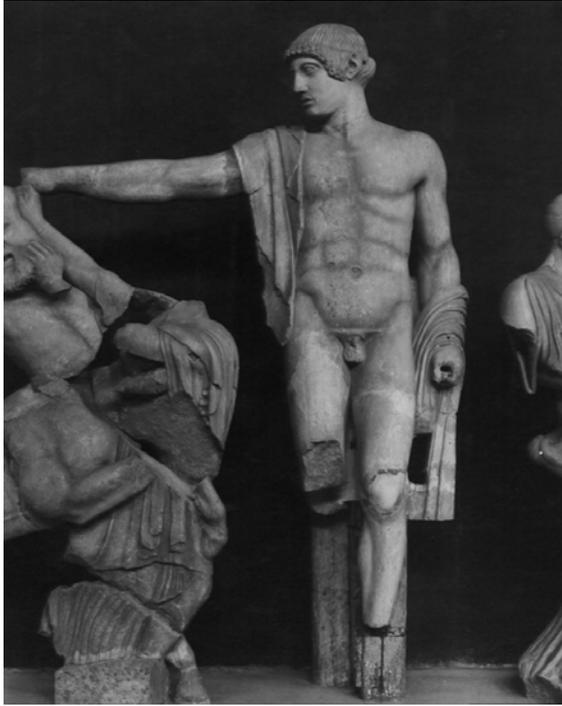


Fig. 93. Apollo from the West pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, Greek, c. 470-56 BC, Marble, 280cm, Olympia Archaeological Museum.

In 1883 Helen Zimmern saw above the fireplace in Thornycroft's studio – the 'altar' where the sculptor kept his 'Penates' – not only the usual reproductions from the Parthenon and the *Venus de Milo*, but also the so-called Oxford Bust, given by Watts, 'a torso of the Cyrenian Aphrodité', and 'the so-called "Hera" of Kensington, with her placid, archaic, curiously thoughtful beauty'; the sculptor's interest in sixth and early fifth-century sculpture seemed to her to be worthy of especial comment, as she concluded by observing that '[t]he other busts and statuettes all testify to the sculptor's sympathy with early Greek art.'⁶⁵⁴ A later photographic portrait by Ralph

⁶⁵⁴ Zimmern, 1883, 516.

Winwood Robinson of the sculptor in his studio, taken around 1889, shows a cast also from a Roman copy of an early fifth-century athletic statue – the so-called Choiseul-Gouffier Apollo of the British Museum (no. 1818,0801.1) – jostling for a place among casts mainly of post-Phidian works.



Fig. 94. Detail of Ralph Winwood Robinson, ‘William Hamo Thornycroft’, c. 1889-92, Platinum print, National Portrait Gallery, London.

Leighton’s *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* has, if only because of the snake motif, been associated by most scholars considering the subject with the *Laocoon* of the Vatican – that is, a full-blown Pergamene Hellenistic baroque group that was not an object of anything like unanimous admiration during the late nineteenth century, however much Winckelmann might have appreciated it – but there were evidently

numerous other sources and associations at play. The idea for the group came about while Leighton was working on the *Daphnephoria*, a festival held in honour of Apollo, for which the painter seems to have turned to diverse ancient sources and classical dictionaries for information, including Proclus' *Chrestomathia* and Pausanias;⁶⁵⁵ for all the anonymity of the *Athlete*, and the many variant titles by which the sculpture has been known (the man has been known to *wrestle*, *struggle*, *strangle*, and *slay* his enemy) the only word that is always present is *Python*, and in this the group has always retained something of a deep-rooted association with the archetypal Apolline defeat of Python; from 1877 onwards the group was regularly referred to as the *Python Slayer*. In his Slade lectures on sculpture, delivered in 1870, Ruskin had referred to the battle between Apollo and Python, together with that between Herakles and the Nemean Lion, as one of 'the two contests of leading import to the Greek heart',⁶⁵⁶ and shown, moreover, two silver coins to his audience treating the two subjects that, between them, might almost be seen as containing the germ for Leighton's *Athlete*. Leighton would have been able to study the originals, from Croton and Heraclea respectively, at the British Museum, both acquired from Richard Payne Knight in 1824 (RPK,p271A.8; RPK,p273B.3.Her). Both probably date to the fourth century, though the first may be earlier.

⁶⁵⁵ Proclus was the original source according to Barrington II, 195. Leighton owned a Latin edition. For a summary of Leighton's sources see Morris, 1994, 65 n. 2.

⁶⁵⁶ Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici*, 119. The battle between Apollo and Python was also of special significance for Ruskin, who had discussed Turner's 1811 picture of the subject in some detail in the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*.



Fig. 95. 'Apollo and the Python. Heracles and the Nemean Lion', from Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici* Pl. XIV, facing 119 (Works XX).

Certainly the much admired space left between the *Athlete's* legs, enabled by the comparative freedom of the material for which the group was designed, would seem to be prefigured best in the higher quality copies of Hellenistic works like the famous Boy and Goose attributed to Boethus of Chalcedon. Spielmann's view, looking back from 1911, was that 'while the "Athlete" may be compared, in idea, with the relatively debased "Laocoon," which it seems in some degree to follow if not to challenge; the "Sluggard" belongs to a more elevated expression of a distinctly

pagan art, and, as it were, to a better period.’⁶⁵⁷ Already in 1886 a critic for *The Magazine of Art* – almost certainly Claude Phillips – had cautioned in a tut-tutting notice concerning Brock’s *A Moment of Peril*, a key exemplar of the ‘snake sub-school’ inspired by Leighton’s example, that:

Violent action is not meant (it is said) to be eternalised in three dimensions: the agony of the “Laocöon” marks a decadence in art and in intelligence, as the inscrutable calm of the “Aphrodité” of Melos is significant of a culmination of both.⁶⁵⁸

Ruskin had used the silver coins to make something like the same point. In these, he argued, there was no sign of struggle:

You see that in neither case is there the slightest effort to represent the *λυσσα*, or agony of contest. No good Greek artist would have you behold the suffering either of gods, heroes, or men; nor allow you to be apprehensive of the issue of their contest with evil beasts, or evil spirits. All such lower sources of excitement are to be closed to you; your interest is to be in the thoughts involved by the fact of the war; and in the beauty or rightness of form, whether active or inactive.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁷ Spielmann *et al.*, 1911, 504.

⁶⁵⁸ Anon., “A Moment of Peril.” From the Bronze by Thomas Brock, A.R.A.’, *Magazine of Art*, 1886, 88.

⁶⁵⁹ Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici*, 119-20.

The *Laocoon*, naturally, was in Ruskin's view something quite other than the work of a 'good Greek artist'. The 'agony of contest', meanwhile, is very much present in the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, as it is in Brock's *Moment of Peril*, even if in the case of the former the agony is chiefly felt by the serpent. The steely stare, however, and even the distended veins on the *Athlete's* temple go some way towards suggesting that the battle is not one of brawn only, but one of concentration and character; here in the determined scowl creeps in an element of Renaissance feeling.

In some later works influenced by Leighton's example, the impression of suffering is suggested rather than shown through the torsion of the body. One of Brock's students, Henry Charles Fehr, would later model a *Rescue of Andromeda* (plaster, 1893, marble 1894), seemingly designed to obtain Leighton's attention – and ultimately successful in this end – that would be characterised by the *Times* as 'very Pergamenian' in style.⁶⁶⁰ In this group there is no actual struggle as such between Perseus and the dragon upon which he is landing, though Andromeda's suffering remains somewhat palpable. The Perseus is, however, based not on a Pergamene prototype but rather on a relatively sedate Hellenistic statue type representing Hypnos that was, at the time, associated with Praxiteles.⁶⁶¹ Sedate or not, Leighton's sculptural interventions were largely seen as pointing towards the Hellenistic era, at least from the mid-1880s onwards, though an association with an

⁶⁶⁰ *The Times*, 26 May 1894, 17.

⁶⁶¹ Murray II, 1883, 259; Murray credits Benndorf with having pointed out the similarity between the Hypnos type and the *Apollo Sauroktonos*. The idea of Praxitelean influence is frequently repeated elsewhere: see, for instance, Walters, 1899, 34 and 1915, 8.

earlier period still clung to the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* especially, which was described, for instance, as ‘quasi-archaic’ by an anonymous critic in the *Building News and Engineering Journal* in 1886.⁶⁶² Thornycroft’s *Teucer* was in the same place characterised as ‘the admirable quasi-archaic “Teucer”’. Quasi-archaic is, perhaps, not entirely the same as archaic; on the point of Leighton’s archaism or otherwise there was evidently some disagreement, since even in 1895 his Ernest Rhys made a point of insisting in print that he was ‘never archaic’ and never ‘antiquarian’ despite the ‘classic scenarium of his subjects’.⁶⁶³

In France, the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* could presumably have been seen as owing something to an iconic expression of the man-beast-combat subgenre, the famous *Thésée et le minotaure* (modelled in 1843) of the esteemed *animalier* Barye, who had been exceedingly direct in his allusions both to Myron and earlier Archaic Greek sculpture – this would go some way to explaining Christophe’s comment on Leighton’s group, that ‘nous faisons ça ici, et mieux!’ – but also to a naturalistic eighteenth-century work like Edme Dumont’s powerful *Milo de Croton* of 1768, which had explored similar formal problems; certainly Leighton would have known this earlier athlete, whose action is similar to that of his own – the outward thrust of the figure is in both cases balanced by an obdurate restraining force that pulls the straining limbs inwards.⁶⁶⁴ It is tempting to see this balance in the *Athlete* as Myronic – other commentators certainly have done – and in all probability the

⁶⁶² *The Building News and Engineering Journal*, 7 May 1886, 732.

⁶⁶³ Rhys, 1895, 22.

⁶⁶⁴ See Getsy (2004, 25), on how the *Athlete*’s ‘internal relation’ resolves the problem ‘of the depiction of violent action and the inherent immotility of the sculptural object.’

principles of rhythmical movement explored and crystallised in extant copies of the *Discobolus* were in Leighton's mind as he twisted his wax or clay models into shape and considered a title for his work. Other examples of eighteenth-century French sculpture, such as Jacques Bousseau's *Ulysses tendant l'arc dont Pénélope doit être le prix* (1715), or Bouchardon's *L'Amour se taillant un arc dans la massule d'Hercule* (1739-50, Salon 1746), however different in conception or type to these athletes, had sought similarly to express movement and momentary stasis with the assistance of a pliable but resilient 'wooden' prop, employing a device that might more fitly be deemed Lysippan than Myronic. Alfred Boucher's *À la terre*, exhibited at the Salons of 1890 and 1891, would later marry a comparable device together with a more explicit borrowing from Myron; yet the motif in that case may also be tempered by a Quattrocento influence, in as much as the labourer's action recalls the toil of Jacopo della Quercia's fallen Adam on the façade of San Petronio in Bologna.

In France, the extended arm and staring contest between man and snake – which does not have a great deal to do with the *Laocoon* – remained for many years recognisable enough that it could be mimicked for widely different ends. On the one hand, it could be imitated with apparent sincerity by French sculptors, such as Gabriel-Jules Thomas, in his *L'Âge de pierre or Homme combattant un serpent* of 1893,⁶⁶⁵ and on the other, parodied in light-hearted advertising for a medicinal product marketed as Vin de Vial – probably snake oil. Frémiet's *Amor et paon* of 1900 would present on a small scale a similar battle between the god of love and the

⁶⁶⁵ Thomas' Stone Age man also possessed native French ancestors, however, in Charles Dupaty's *Cadmos combattant le dragon* (1800-1810) and François-Joseph Bosio's *Hercule et Acheloüs métamorphosée en serpent* (1824); with the former the link was direct, since Thomas had owned Dupaty's original wax and plaster model, and offered it to the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux in 1883. See Carel *et al.*, 2018, 57.

bird of Juno, while unmistakable, if superficial and clumsily managed, echoes of the *Athlete* are discernible in such stylistically distant works as Antoine Bourdelle's *Hérakles archer* (1909) and, in Germany, Arno Breker's *Der rächer* (1939).



Fig. 96. Examples from 1913 and 1917.

It may not be possible, then, to characterise Leighton's contribution to modern sculpture too exclusively as Archaic, Myronic, Phidian, Praxitelean, or Pergamene, or to apply any other descriptive and ultimately prescriptive term if it does not take into account the great diversity and eclecticism of his artistic productions in the fields of painting and sculpture, and the many ways in which these were received. Among British sculptors familiar with Leighton's comparatively informal modelli and direct teaching, this variety will have been more apparent than it was to those who experienced his work only in the exhibition setting. In general, however, and in spite of contemporary criticisms that the anatomical knowledge displayed in both *Athletes* was excessive and overstated, Leighton's taste was largely for fullness over meagreness of form, including, where appropriate, a degree of suggestive modelling of the kind that Getsy sees as absent from his sculpture but pointedly present in Gilbert's.⁶⁶⁶ In reality, the intentional covering over of structural detail was something that depended very much on the subject represented; for youthful figures, and especially infants, anatomical clarity was not necessarily desirable, and a finish that might be judged more Praxitelean was evidently thought of as rather more suitable: assessing Thornycroft's *Stepping Stones* of 1879, a group in which a young girl carries her brother across a brook, Leighton thought 'the detail in the flesh at the joints a little too marked and suggestive of age' and suggested that the sculptor should avoid achieving a 'mannered effect' by softening the girl's left elbow. Watts, on the other hand, told the sculptor that he liked 'the sharp cut at the

⁶⁶⁶ Getsy, 2004, 15-42, 87-117, esp. 89-92.

bend of the left arm’, adding that ‘you find that decision in the Elgin work always.’⁶⁶⁷ In this difference of opinion Leighton emerges on the Winckelmannian – but also the Florentine and Gilbertian – side, favouring an impression of unity in the youthful body, where ‘boundaries imperceptibly flow into one another’, and where ‘everything is and is to be’.⁶⁶⁸ Such may not have been the lesson of the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, but Leighton’s contribution to the plastic art was by no means confined to representations of adult men in whom internal divisions of muscle and bone were pronounced.

The smaller-scale sketch-model of the *Sluggard*, created probably around 1882, was carried out with greater suavity than the life-size figure shown four years later, and the same is true of the other models produced at this scale, not merely because of their preparatory nature – though this inevitably placed certain restrictions on the degree of finish desirable – but also because there is naturally a greater range of figure types and expressions in these fragments. Here Leighton did not limit himself to rigid little men of over-developed physique, but explored also the female nude in various attitudes and at different ages, and carried out drapery studies; in 1884 Leonora Lang saw in the studio ‘small models in plaster of arrangements of drapery for some of the more important pictures,’⁶⁶⁹ and one of the illustrations accompanying the article that eventuated from her visit showed an impressive draped model of the two reclining figures from *Idyll* (c. 1880-81) – for

⁶⁶⁷ Manning, 1982, 70.

⁶⁶⁸ Winckelmann (tr. Mallgrave, 2006, 197).

⁶⁶⁹ Lang, 1884, 28.

which Lillie Langtry was supposed to have sat – that is much larger and more ambitious than the better known sketch-models related to other pictures that have been preserved. This model was, according to an earlier article on Leighton by Wilfrid Meynell, the work of the Italian sculptor Giambattista Amendola, who had settled in London during the late 1870s, befriending the painter, carrying out work for his house in Holland Park, and, around 1884-5, faithfully translating the embracing couple in *Wedded* (1882) into three dimensions to fulfil a commission from the Fine Art Society.⁶⁷⁰ Meynell's article, published in 1881, implies not only that the relationship between painter and sculptor was collaborative, but also that the model was in this instance intended for more than a merely summary crayon study:

[n]ear the window stands a group sketched in clay—a lovely composition of two female figures reposing, one lying pillowed across the breast of the other, both being clad in real draperies, of which the folds have been the study of days. On the canvas near is the beginning of a noble idyllic picture from which Signor Amendola has made this clay group, and from this in turn the picture is to be finished. The painted figures are at the moment in the nude, and it is entirely for the sake of the draperies that this elaborate and laborious device is resorted to.⁶⁷¹

It is said of Leighton's own 'little clay figures', on the other hand, that they 'do good service in the setting of the composition, but after this their use is over.'⁶⁷² Rhys says that these models 'were prepared only for ten minutes' drawing of the first

⁶⁷⁰ See Richard Cacchione's contribution on Amendola in Barnes *et al.*, 1996, 26-9, Cat. 2-4.

⁶⁷¹ Anon., in Meynell, 1886, 15-16.

⁶⁷² Meynell, 1881, 172; reprinted also with alterations in Meynell, 1886, 13.

idea of the figures; all serious study being made from the draped model—or the lay figure.’⁶⁷³ The *Idyll* group was, of course, an exercise in the Phidian mode, designed to evoke the so-called *Fates* from the east pediment of the Parthenon, though Leighton was also looking to apply principles he had picked up from his study of Renaissance painting. ‘Raphael never had any holes!’ he told Meynell, referring to the solidity of the figural grouping in *Idyll*:⁶⁷⁴ the two women should be presented as a single, unbroken, monolithic mass.

⁶⁷³ Rhys, 1895, 48.

⁶⁷⁴ Meynell, 1886, 9.



Fig. 97. 'The Studio of Sir Frederick Leighton', from Meynell, 1881, 173.

Similar exercises, or rather demonstrations, had been made from the 1860s onwards on behalf of the students in the Life Room at the Royal Academy, albeit from the living rather than the clay model. Leighton would arrange the drapery himself and give practical advice on students' drawings. William Mulready's studies in red and black crayon, which hung on the walls of the Academy Schools, he found, it is said, 'extremely antagonistic to his own teaching', and so he took the precaution

of covering them up.⁶⁷⁵ Leighton's own crayon studies, wrote F. G. Stephens, 'irresistibly remind students of the robes of the so-called "Fates," carved by Phidias for the Parthenon, and reproduce the very motives of the "Nike Apteros" and similar contemporaneous masterpieces of the kind which Time has spared.'⁶⁷⁶ On 6 July 1872, Thornycroft, who had then been a student in the Royal Academy Schools, observed in his diary that 'Leighton set the model and draped like the reclining 'Fate' at the BM. The folds of the peplum at the waist, fell wonderfully like the marble.'⁶⁷⁷ That same year Leighton exhibited the first of his pairs of elaborately draped and reclining female sleepers – in many respects the prototype for later pictures like *Idyll* – in *Summer Moon*,⁶⁷⁸ bathing his figures in a subtle and evocative effect of moonlight; it was, according to Rhys, 'one of the loveliest things ever seen at the Academy',⁶⁷⁹ and almost as if to strengthen its message, it was accompanied in the same exhibition – though not the same room – by the soft and glowing twilight of his friend George Heming Mason's frieze-like *Harvest Moon*; Manning remembers that Thornycroft greatly admired this latter picture and hung a reproduction of it in his home, but also admired Leighton's pictures at the same exhibition.⁶⁸⁰ His friend, the architect Alfred Waterhouse, owned an oil study by

⁶⁷⁵ Leslie, 1915, 52.

⁶⁷⁶ Stephens, 1895, xix.

⁶⁷⁷ Manning, 1982, 60.

⁶⁷⁸ The exhibition catalogue gave the title as Summer Noon.

⁶⁷⁹ Rhys, 1895, 19.

⁶⁸⁰ Manning, 1982, 59.

Leighton, apparently painted in Rome by moonlight, for *Summer Moon*.⁶⁸¹ *Summer Moon* was also, according to Barrington, Watts' favourite of all Leighton's pictures.⁶⁸²

Leighton would return to the motif when preparing for *Cymon and Iphigenia*, exhibited in 1884, experimenting with many different configurations for the attendant sleepers in clay and on paper. In a sense, the later picture may even be said to have sprung from the study devoted to the earlier. Barrington reproduces a crisp study (c. 1883) of one such grouping that, she claims, is nearly identical in arrangement to one recorded in a (now lost) plaster model given by Leighton to Watts.⁶⁸³ Watts' enthusiasm for this model was such, according to Barrington, that he declared that '[n]othing more beautiful has ever been done! Pheidias never did anything better. I believe it was better even than Pheidias!'⁶⁸⁴ Leighton gave the drawing also to Watts, but the model was accidentally destroyed, Barrington says, when Watts lent it to an unnamed sculptor after Leighton's death to be cast in bronze. Still, a second plaster model of two sleeping sisters, one still a young child, remains at the Watts Gallery in Compton (COMWG.482, c. 1883), and this reflects much more closely the arrangement Leighton settled on for the final work. The design of this group is greatly varied by the subordination in scale of one figure to

⁶⁸¹ Barrington II, 192 n. 2, 366.

⁶⁸² Barrington I, 211; Barrington II, 192.

⁶⁸³ The same arrangement, more or less, is seen from two different angles on a page at the Snite Museum of Art in Indiana (no. 1978.40).

⁶⁸⁴ See Barrington II 198, 258-9; a slightly different version is given in Barrington, 1905, 202: there Watts says 'it was as good as anything that has ever been done, not forgetting Pheidias! Pheidias never did anything better!'

another, which produces a more complex rhythm of line and form across the whole as well as an impression of a possibly more maternal relationship between them.⁶⁸⁵ The weight of the eldest – implying also the depth of her slumber – is beautifully and clearly expressed; the nervous flexibility of the younger girl, meanwhile, who nestles by her side of, makes for a fine and meaningful contrast.



Fig. 98. Frederic Leighton, Study of Sleeping Figures for *Cymon and Iphigenia*, c. 1883, Black and white chalk on brown paper, 16.5×32.3cm, Leighton House Museum, London (LHO/D/0815).

⁶⁸⁵ A sheet of sketches in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (no. 408.1985), shows a similar arrangement, draped, where the difference in the age and size of the two sleepers is not quite as noticeable.



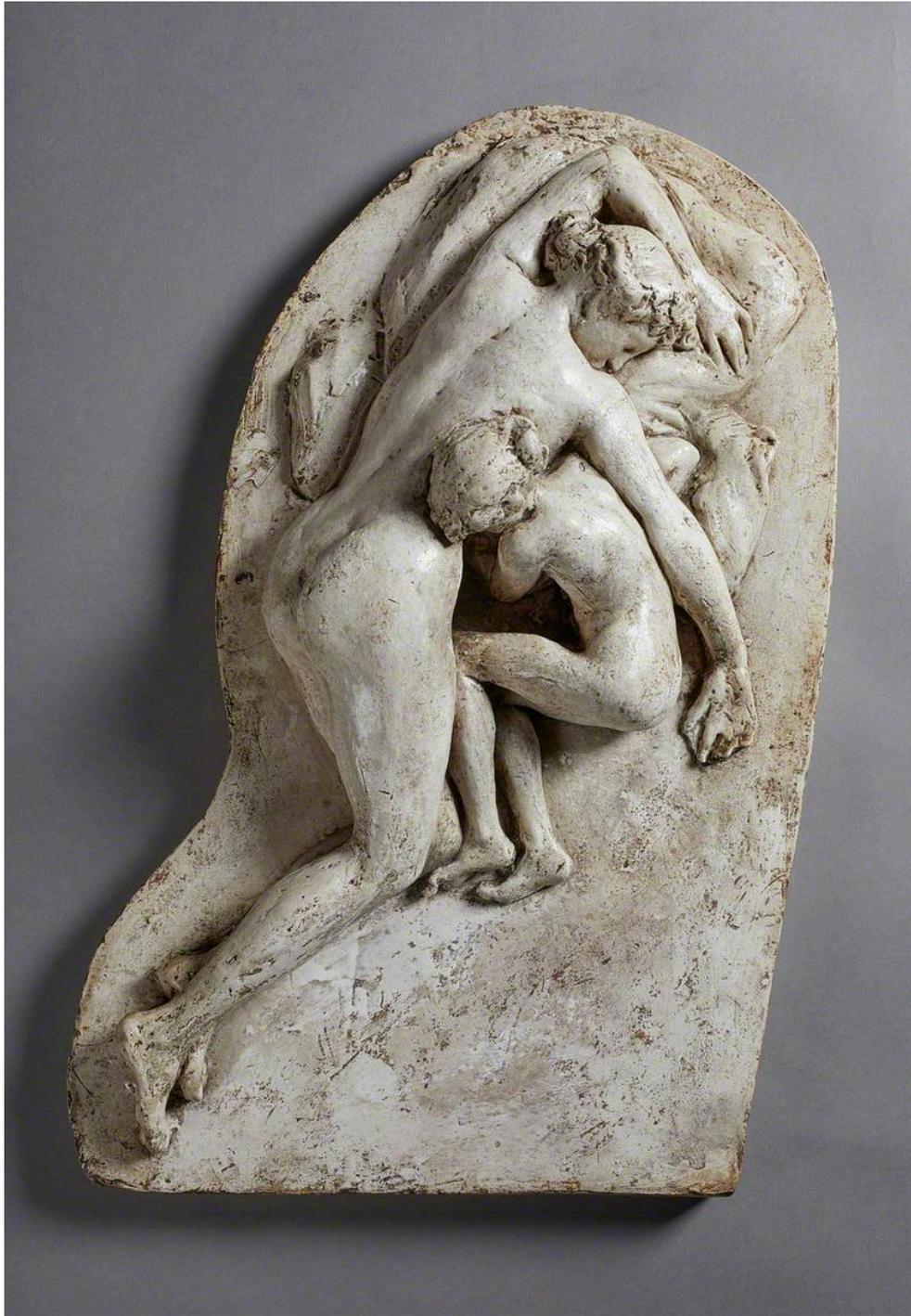


Fig. 99. Frederic Leighton, Study for *Cymon and Iphigenia*, Plaster, 12.5×53cm, Watts Gallery, Guildford (COMWG.482).

The third of Leighton's exhibited sculptures, *Needless Alarms* (1886), presented the same girl in an attitude of great but momentary fright, disturbed by a

small and harmless frog. It seems in many ways – if the expression may be allowed – a genuine *volte-face* when set beside the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*. The relationship between the human and animal elements is in another key altogether, and the modelling strongly emphasises the suppleness and elasticity of the – itself almost amphibious – human figure. Gosse was slightly repulsed by what he called ‘the Canova-like affectation of the long leech-like fingers pressed against the flesh and adhering to it’;⁶⁸⁶ he ought really to have said ‘froglike’, since any apparent tackiness of touch or Mannerist elongation goes together with the jumpiness to promote an implied equivalence between girl and frog, and it is on the suggestion of sympathy between the two that much of the humour of the piece really rests. That Leighton’s sense of humour was so inclined is testified by a remark recorded by the caricaturist Leslie Ward:

When I was drawing Leighton for the *Graphic* years ago,’ writes Ward, ‘he amused me by saying:—“Every one has his prototype, and some people resemble animals. What do I remind you of?” When Lord Leighton compared his own head with that of a ram, I saw the resemblance at once: his hair curled like horns upon his forehead, and the general contour of his features was certainly reminiscent of that animal.’⁶⁸⁷

Needless Alarms draws on a long tradition of surprised bather statue types, especially those intended for fountains, and also twisting Hellenistic compositions featuring

⁶⁸⁶ Gosse, 1886, 883.

⁶⁸⁷ Ward, 1915, 145. This conversation presumably took place during in 1878. A delicate pencil portrait of Leighton by Ward, drawn from life, is in the National Gallery of Victoria, acquired in 1881 (p. 168.8-1). The engraving based on it was published as a supplementary frontispiece to *The Graphic: An Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* 17.450 (13 July 1878).

children playing with their pets, but the figure is also unlike any ancient or Renaissance model in actual form and execution. The presence of the frog on the base may well have been prompted in part by the similar *animalier* device on the base of *Icarus*, though the ends to which it is turned could hardly be more different. There is no struggle here, no contest, and no real suffering. The Praxitelean or Correggienesque qualities of soft and suggestive modelling are more prevalent than any rigidity or muscular athleticism, at least as far as the interior forms are managed, but the same curvaceous and intricate terminal outline bounds the whole with its sinuous and unifying grace.



Fig. 100. Frederic Leighton, *Needless Alarms*, 1886, Bronze, 50.2cm, 1886, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

As late as 1891 Leighton would model another group in the round, this time of three languorous female figures, elaborately draped, but again encircled and in a sense unified by a large serpent, this last a having a considerably friendlier presence

than the python had had in its encounter with the *Athlete* fourteen years earlier; both the sculptural group and the painting for which it was modelled – *The Garden of the Hesperides* – are strongly reminiscent of Correggio's *Leda and the Swan* (1530-1); even the lyre-playing nymph alludes directly to the similarly musical Cupid of Correggio's picture, while the principal nymph holds out a hand towards Ladon, the serpent, apparently charmed by the music, much like the serpent in Thornycroft's *Medea* of 1888: in the preparatory model, though not in the finished painting, this nymph even offers him one of the golden apples – a symbol of discord and strife? Or is it one only of succour? The imagery is intensely ambiguous.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁸ F. G. Stephens reported that Leighton was inspired by Milton's *Comus*, in which the 'daughters three' of Hesperus 'sing about the golden tree.' Dormont, on the other hand, suggested in 1977 that the painter might have been influenced by Ruskin's allegorical interpretation, given in volume five of *Modern Painters*, of Turner's *The Goddess of Discord Choosing the Apple of Contention in the Garden of the Hesperides* (1806), and there may well be some truth in this; Turner's Ladon, a strange half-fossilised beast clinging to a high rock, might easily be seen as an ancestor of the great dragon-like sea monster of Leighton's *Perseus and Andromeda* (c. 1891), another serpentine creature that the painter explored in the round at about this time. Again, the contest presented in the latter picture is between serpent and a distinctly Apolline hero; the representation of Perseus at the centre of a bright auriole, and armed, moreover, with a bow, diverges sharply from the usual iconography and suggests a deliberate conflation of the first Greek hero with the sun-god as well as with the god of love, influenced, it may be, by the bowmen of his younger sculptor contemporaries; Gilbert's *Shaftesbury Memorial* would only be unveiled two years later, but Leighton would have been familiar with it as a work in progress; his admiration for Thornycroft's *Teucer* was solidified by his acquisition of a reduced cast of that figure in 1889. Still, it is significant that the same conflict between Apollo and Python that had been detectable under the surface in the *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* was no less present in this later picture. His depiction of a comparatively tame Ladon, on the other hand, twined in apparently intimate companionship with the nymphs of the garden, could not be at much greater odds with Turner's apparently vicious and isolated dragon-guardian. That Leighton ultimately withdrew the offer of a golden apple from the finished work may imply that he had decided that such a gesture would not make sense given the negative symbolic connotations of the fruit and Ladon's role as its guardian. In Turner's picture, by contrast, the goddess of discord had been offered two golden apples and, being the very representative of division, had been shown in a state of some indecision as to which she should take. Leighton, it would appear, was not in this work looking to stress the idea of contest or contention so much as that of harmony, the very opposite of discord, even if the underlying tension and ambiguity remain in certain ways; even the fact that the nymphs are three in number, for instance, means that they inevitably foreshadow, as a group, the judgement of Paris, but it is easy to imagine how much more forceful and disturbing this link might have been with the apple in hand. For a brief discussion of the importance of sun-myths to Leighton during this period and a summary of possible sources for *The Garden of the Hesperides* see Jones' entries on *Clytie* and *Perseus and Andromeda*, and Ormond's entry on the first-named picture in Jones *et al.*, 1996, 217-20 Cats. 110-11; 232-3 Cat. 118.



Fig. 101. William Hamo Thornycroft, *Medea*, 1888, Plaster, Life-size, Destroyed.



Fig. 102. Frederic Leighton, *The Garden of the Hesperides*, 1891, Oil on canvas, 169.5×169.5cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.



Fig. 103. After Frederic Leighton, Sketch model for *The Garden of the Hesperides*, c. 1891-2, Bronze (cast c. 1896), 18×35cm, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

‘[I]t is the variety of his conceptions, and his capability of adequately expressing each of them, that make us admire the magnitude of his scope and the diversity of his power’, wrote Meynell in an article entitled ‘The Many Moods of Sir Frederick Leighton, P.R.A.’,⁶⁸⁹ after he had visited the painter in his studio in 1881. Harry Quilter was uneasy with what he called the ‘Universality of Sir Frederick Leighton’, which he contrasted with the ‘eclecticism [surely not the intended word] of Mr. Ruskin’: ‘while the former will admire a *cocotte*, a Contadina, or a countess, with equal ardour, the other will look at nothing but an “English girl by an English

⁶⁸⁹ Meynell, ‘The Many Moods of Sir Frederick Leighton, P.R.A.’, *The Magazine of Art* 4, 1881, 51.

painter””.⁶⁹⁰ The critic was thinking, of course, of the range of Leighton’s subjects, but with such variety of motif went hand in hand a certain variety of treatment.

6.2. Watts, and Wattsian ‘Principles of Form’

If Leighton was a man of many moods, Watts can be seen as presenting a more straightforward alternative, one with clearer limits and principles, even if he was not always certain about them himself. His teachings on the subject of sculpture can even seem doctrinaire when contrasted with Leighton’s example, but they were by Thornycroft and Gilbert alike taken seriously and even to an extent preferred to the lessons taught either directly or indirectly by the President of the Royal Academy. It is sometimes supposed that Watts’ sculptural works did little to influence the New Sculpture in any meaningful way – Benedict Read, for instance, felt that Watts’ monumental works simply came too late to have any real importance for the rising generation⁶⁹¹ – but much depends upon which individuals, and which works, we look to in order to find evidence of this painter-sculptor’s presence. Watts had taken an early interest in what is now described as ‘natural’ polychromy, and we shall see in due course how his ideas in relation to that aspect of sculptural practice would be reflected in the work of the younger men. Specific borrowings of motifs from his works can be discerned – and discerned more easily, perhaps, than those from Leighton – in the productions of all the most prominent figures associated with the

⁶⁹⁰ Quilter, 1883, 8.

⁶⁹¹ Read, 1982, 286.

idea of the New Sculpture. That Ford's Muse on the *Shelley Memorial*, in many respects the sculptor's signature work, and ultimately the one that would grace his own monument in St. John's Wood, bears some relation to Watts' *Hope* is almost too obvious to mention; the derivation of Bates' *Mors janua vitae* from Watts' *Love and Life* has been mentioned before now; Thornycroft's *Lot's Wife* has been seen as the daughter, almost, of Watts' *Clytie*; the relief panels on the plinth of the same sculptor's *Gordon Memorial* are overtly related to *Time, Death and Judgement*; as, perhaps, is the *Mower*, though there were of course numerous other inspiring impulses in the background that also contributed towards the creation of the last named statue. In all these cases, something of the form remains from the Wattsonian prototype, while the symbolism changes. Are the resemblances only superficial?

Something that may fitly be described as a Wattsonian style, as well as the Wattsonian motif, can be detected at times. Perhaps even more important than the sculptor's actual essays in three-dimensions or his late so-called Symbolist works were a few of his early pictures dating to his stay as a guest of Lord and Lady Holland at Casa Feroni and the Villa Medicea in Careggi, outside Florence, and the period immediately following his return to Britain from Italy in 1847. Bates' *Hounds in Leash* of 1889, which, we have already observed, has something to do with Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python*, offers a vivid representation of animal passion and restraint, but the huntsman, who Benedict Read saw as vaguely classical only on account of his bound hair, struggles to keep his Great Danes under control, and gazes with an expressive anxiety – a desperation even – that has little to do with Leighton's *Athlete*, still less the calm, composed riders of the Parthenon frieze. The fact of the hair having been bound may well be intended to amplify in symbolic

terms the thematic contrast between the unruly, disobedient animal element and the restraining human master with his dominant will, forcefully applied; something like this had been the real significance of the unconventional and incomparably elaborate triple-belted arrangement that Thornycroft had devised for the chiton of his *Artemis*, also experiencing some un-godlike but well observed difficulty with a wayward hound – a ‘foolish hound’ said Gosse – and in truth the twining round and pressing of the python by Leighton’s *Athlete* can be seen as standing for a similar conflict between rebellious impulse and overruling discipline, but behind the exasperated brow and parted lips of Bates’ huntsman, as well as the outstretched arm and cropped figure, lies the example also of Watts’ *Orlando Pursuing the Fata Morgana*, an illustration of Boiardo begun in Careggi around 1846-7 (though revised in a different style in 1889).⁶⁹² In this picture, the expressive intensity had been put to other uses; the animal passion all belongs to the pursuing Orlando, not that Orlando is *not* derived in some wise from ancient sources; as in other early works by Watts in his grand manner, there is in this picture a synthesis between life studies and ancient sculpture; in this case, as in that of *Alfred Inciting the Saxons to Prevent the Landing of the Danes by Encountering them at Sea* (1846-7), the painter probably looked to portrait heads of Alexander as well as Roman mural painting, by which he was at the time much impressed,⁶⁹³ for the type and expression, and very likely modelled the head in clay too before fixing it on canvas;⁶⁹⁴ the eyes of Orlando surely have what

⁶⁹² Watts I, 234-5.

⁶⁹³ Gould, 2004, 16, 24, 371 n. 24.

⁶⁹⁴ Gould says that the figure of Alfred is ‘underpinned by the authority and form of Greek sculpture. His hair, modelled first in clay [...] looks hewn’. Watts intended Alfred to be ‘about the size of the Apollo’ and ‘in the most heroic mould, simple, grand, elegant. Phidias my adored Phidias shall rule throughout’: Gould, 2004, 20; Watts to Georgina Duff Gordon, undated, quoted in Gould, 2004, 369-

Aubrey Thomas de Vere described as ‘that roundness which, in the ancient fresco of the head of Achilles, so marvellously unites the expression of human intellect with the audacious passion of the animal.’⁶⁹⁵ A comparable expression and type had been used both for the head of the frantic victim in Watts’ fresco, *The Drowning of the Doctor*, at the Villa Medicea in Careggi (1844-5), and for figures on the left and right-most edges of the vast *Story from Boccaccio* (c. 1844-7); there is at the Watts Gallery, moreover, a highly animated plaster study of a head (COMWG2007.976) associated with his much later *Orpheus and Eurydice* (c. 1869; principal version exhibited 1879) that might almost date to the artist’s Italian period, and his first experiments with wax and clay.⁶⁹⁶

It has been suggested that between *Clytie* (c. 1868-78) and *Physical Energy* (c. 1883-1906), Watts’ work as a sculptor developed along a path that diverged sharply from the naturalism of the younger sculptors, and that the simplifications of form and flattened plane, for instance, which are visible in this later work differentiate it materially from the concerns of the new movement, whose preoccupations may appear to be rather with daintiness of design and execution and preciousness of substance, a decadent variety of aestheticised Symbolism, and attendant

70 n. 55. Barbara Bryant notes that one of the studies for the head of Alfred is ‘clearly based on a type of antique head of Apollo’: Bryant, in Bills – Bryant, 2008, 105.

⁶⁹⁵ de Vere, 1854, 53. The picture de Vere has in mind is presumably that illustrating the departure of Briseis, found in the House of the Tragic Poet and now at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (inv.9105). As it happens, Watts would treat the same subject a few years later in a fresco (c. 1858-60) for Bowood House, Wiltshire (now in the Watts Gallery; COMWG 94); the figure of Achilles would later provide the basis for *The Genius of Greek Poetry* (1878), of which a study in the round is also preserved (COMWG.452).

⁶⁹⁶ Gould, 2004, 17-18, 369 n. 49. Mary Watts claimed that of the painter’s sculptural works from Careggi only the *Medusa* survived: Watts I, 65.

concern with exquisiteness of effect for its own sake. Stephanie Brown has argued not only that Watts' attitude towards precious materials was 'very different to that of later Aestheticism, and the superfluous beauty and decorative excess of sculptures by Frampton or Gilbert',⁶⁹⁷ but also that '[w]ith *Physical Energy* Watts attempted something contrary to contemporary expectations and quite different to the anatomical verisimilitude, and sensuous surfaces of the New Sculpture, exemplified by Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* [...] and *The Sluggard*'. Watts, she claims, 'seems to have equated the idea of the 'characteristic' with the underlying physiological substance of both man and horse', while his deliberate distortion of anatomical details, and reliance in doing so upon *écorché* models, amounts to something 'antithetical to the practice of the New Sculptors whose anatomical knowledge enhanced the naturalism of their works.'⁶⁹⁸ Even Barrington, who rarely found reason to criticise Watts as a painter, found the rough and flinty execution 'exaggerated' and difficult to accept, and insisted in 1905 that in both *Physical Energy* and the unfinished *Aurora* (on which, she says, the artist broke off work around 1880),⁶⁹⁹ the artist would 'undoubtedly have modelled the surface into somewhat rounder form had he ever reached the point of feeling quite happy about the design';⁷⁰⁰ this suggestion has not been taken seriously, though there may be an element of truth in it despite Mary Watts' comment that *Aurora* was supposed to be

⁶⁹⁷ Brown, 2004, 90.

⁶⁹⁸ Brown, 2007, 24.

⁶⁹⁹ Barrington, 1905, 53.

⁷⁰⁰ Barrington, 1905, 54.

‘archaic, straight and flat in line like a ray of sunlight’.⁷⁰¹ It is certainly true that Leighton’s *Athletes*, even if a little hard or dry in execution by the standard of many a French critic of the late nineteenth century, and not a few English ones, represent on the whole a much fleshier and more variegated ideal than that explored by Watts in *Physical Energy*, where the whole external configuration of the rider and his horse are ossified into the resemblance of one unified substance more closely resembling bone than muscle, but the gulf between this late expression of Watts’ Phidianism – now characterised by a real *raideur* – and a work like *Teucer* is not really so very wide as may at first appear, and sure enough, the elder artist had in fact seen the model at an early stage and advised Thornycroft to make a number of changes, chiefly to the proportions of the figure. ‘Watts came in’, the younger sculptor wrote in his diary on 18th February 1881, ‘[h]e liked the Bowman much. V good statue. Thighs and legs a little short, remember that you are speaking in verse so you can offer to enforce and exaggerate all that will give dignity devotion. Legs to stride, arms to reach, hands to grasp. Neck to raise the head. Keep your masses large ... Spread the toes more.’⁷⁰² The sculptor duly made the necessary changes, apparently valuing Watts’ criticism in every respect.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰¹ Brown has argued forcefully that Watts never intended to carry out any rounding whatsoever: see Brown, 2004, 100-1; Brown, 2007, 24; Watts II, 315. Watts was unhappy with the ‘archaic’ version of *Aurora* and cut it to pieces, but later regretted his decision.

⁷⁰² Diaries of Hamo Thornycroft at the Henry Moore Institute and Archive; Gould, 2004, 166, 400 n. 4.

⁷⁰³ Watts had also told Marochetti many years earlier that the legs of his *Richard, Coeur de Lion* (1851; bronze installed outside Westminster in 1860) were too short and, seeing the same sculptor’s equestrian monument to Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy in Turin in 1888, was inclined to make the same criticism: Watts II, 119-20; Gould, 2004, 58.

One of the most repeated claims made about Watts, and one for which he was himself largely responsible, was that ‘the only teachers he had were Pheidias, Titian—and nature.’⁷⁰⁴ Watts had in fact spent time early in the studio of the sculptor William Behnes, where he spent his time drawing from casts (although apparently not receiving any instruction), and his aesthetic tastes were shaped by a plethora of other sources besides Phidias and Titian, in whom he found, nonetheless, an unexplained connection: Benedict Read suggested, for instance, that Watts’ sculptural works – especially those which he executed in alabaster rather than marble – show evidence of an awareness of English seventeenth-century memorial sculpture.⁷⁰⁵ *Clytie* has often been seen as Michelangelesque, but the contortion and muscularity seen in that work must have been drawn in the main from elsewhere, especially since the artist is known to have expressed a certain ambivalence about Michelangelo’s sculptural works, and was, moreover, not altogether happy with what he perceived as defects in the Old Master’s painting. Concerning the painting and sculpture of the Trecento and Quattrocento, Barrington records that ‘Leighton taught Watts to appreciate the Greek inheritance to be found in early Italian art’, and to recognise especially ‘the evidence of this legacy in Giotto’s work’,⁷⁰⁶ but also discusses the latter’s great enthusiasm for Orcagna and the *Trionfo della Morte* in the Campo Santo in Pisa, now attributed to Buffalmacco, which Watts first saw in 1844: ‘it was clearly Orgagna’s [*sic*] genius which stamped itself most deeply on Watts’

⁷⁰⁴ Barrington, 1911, 127.

⁷⁰⁵ Read, 1982, 280.

⁷⁰⁶ Barrington I, 230. Watts’ thoughts about the appearance of an affinity between Phidias and Giotto are given in more detail in Watts I, 146-7. Watts mentions that Haydon, rather than Leighton, had proposed that a genuine link might have been possible, in the form of ‘some wandering artist [...] with some fragments or some drawings’, though he is not altogether convinced of this himself.

imagination,' she says, 'though it was Titian's actual painting which inspired his greatest admiration.'⁷⁰⁷ That the claim is grounded in some truth is suggested by the fact that, following Watts' trip to Pisa, Lord Holland noted down his fears that the Sistine Chapel might not now meet the artist's expectations, and postponed the planned visit until later.⁷⁰⁸ Watts would write at a later date that '[o]ne cannot look upon the frescoes of Giotto, Orcagna, etc., without feeling that they were imbued with the same spirit that inspired the *Divina Commedia*.'⁷⁰⁹ More surprising, perhaps, than Watts' attraction to Orcagna, is the revelation that he seems to have encountered works by Botticelli during his stay in Italy, decades before that painter's much-vaunted rediscovery during the early 1870s by Walter Pater, Ruskin, and others. Watts' *Story from Boccaccio* (c. 1844-7), an exceedingly ambitious picture which, we have already seen, is closely related conceptually to that of *Orlando Pursuing the Fata Morgana*, is alarmingly close to Botticelli's treatment of the same subject – the story of Nastagio degli Onesti – on one of four panels given to Gianozzo Pucci in 1483; three of these, including the panel in question, are now in the Prado in Madrid, but all four were still present in the Pucci collection at Palazzo Pucci in Florence until 1868, and presumably accessible to Watts during the 1840s.⁷¹⁰ For the expression and movement of the fleeing woman, as well as the

⁷⁰⁷ Barrington, 1905, (esp.) 29-30, 35, 49; Barrington, 1911, 347.

⁷⁰⁸ Gould, 2004, 14-15, 368 n. 28.

⁷⁰⁹ Watts III, 2.

⁷¹⁰ Gaja thinks it likely that Watts saw the panels at the Palazzo Pucci: Gaja, 1995, 73. Pen and ink studies for the ghostly rider on the right, Guido degli Anastagi, give him a crested helmet with a raised visor-like peak in the form of a dog's snout, presumably derived from that worn by Michelangelo's statue of Lorenzo from the Medici chapel. Orlando's helmet is topped rather by what seem to be dragon's wings.

more naturalistic rendering of the ragged trunks of the stone pines that make up such a large portion of the design, the young painter inevitably looked to Titian's *Saint Peter Martyr* (1528-9), but Watts is evidently indebted to Botticelli for the motif as a whole. The two hunting dogs chasing after the woman in Watts' picture anticipate Bates' *Hounds*, discussed above.



Fig. 104. George Frederic Watts, *A Story from Boccaccio*, c. 1844-7, Oil on Canvas, 365.8×891.5cm, Tate Britain, London.

Watts' interest in Phidias, on the other hand, was augmented over time by influences from later Greek and Hellenistic sculpture: his studies of Phidian drapery from the Parthenon would be accompanied by admiration for the fragmentary relief sculpture of the parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike from the Acropolis in Athens, where the drapery is arranged in radiating lines and rounded hollows that explain without obscuring the action of the body beneath. Watts joined his friend Charles Newton on the momentous 1856-7 expedition to Bodrum, in Turkey, which resulted in the discovery of the site of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus and the entrance into the British Museum of colossal marble statuary and lions which certainly fired the

artist's imagination. In 1849 the two men had already, alongside Charles Cockerell, discovered among the Arundel Marbles a broken bust – sometimes known as the 'Oxford Bust' or 'Oxford Fragment' but promptly nicknamed 'Aspasia' after the mistress of Pericles – that Watts himself restored and praised to high heaven, distributing, with the assistance of Brucciani, plaster casts among friends and later 'translating' it to colour in *The Wife of Pygmalion* (1868); casts were offered to Gladstone,⁷¹¹ Leighton,⁷¹² and Thornycroft, who thereafter kept it on the mantelpiece in his studio as a readily consultable model of perfection; he would, according to Manning, compare it with his own work in times of need 'to see how bad it was.'⁷¹³ Some sources claim that Watts regarded the bust as Phidian,⁷¹⁴ but an almost breathless report published in the *Athenaeum* in 1867 made clear that it 'cannot well have been the work of Phidias or his school, but agrees more thoroughly with that order in Art which was practised by Praxiteles, and admitted more of simply human qualities than the earlier canon dictated.' This, the report claimed, was a *portrait*, 'full of character' and 'not simply beautiful in the abstract.' Pointedly, it asserted that Francis Chantrey had thought it and other works in the Arundel and Pomfret

⁷¹¹ Gladstone had eagerly wished to purchase *The Wife of Pygmalion* but was too late do so, and Watts offered to give him a cast of the Oxford Bust to 'cure [him] of [his] love and console [him] of his disappointment': Watts I, 236-7.

⁷¹² This is visible in many images of the studio. A modern cast from an earlier mould (pre-1849) now takes its place in the studio at Leighton House.

⁷¹³ The same comment was reported by Helen Zimmern in 1883 about all the 'masterpieces' over the fireplace: Zimmern, 1883, 515; How, 1893, 272; Manning, 1982, 67. How says incorrectly that the bust was found by Watts and Ruskin; this may be Thornycroft's rather than How's mistake.

⁷¹⁴ This is stated, for instance, in Gould, 2004, 24. Barrington says that Watts believed the bust a portrait, and characteristically adds that 'we settled it must have been that of Aspasia'; Mary Watts says more cautiously that 'Signor ranked this bust with the best art of Greece in the time of Pheidias'; it is not absolutely clear that this ranking pertains to the date of the sculpture, whereas it certainly takes its quality into account: Barrington, 1905, 170; Watts I, 237-8.

bequests ‘only fit to be thrown away or used for road-mending.’⁷¹⁵ By 1868, when Watts came to exhibit both *The Wife of Pygmalion* and his unfinished *Clytie*, he had been swayed not only by the sculpture of the Parthenon, but also by later manifestations in ancient art of ‘flexibility, impression of colour, and largeness of character’, the qualities he told Gladstone he was aiming to emphasise in the latter work, in opposition to the ‘purity and gravity’ more typically associated with antique sculpture.⁷¹⁶ In the dynamic twist of the long columnar neck and richly plastic treatment of the hair, which is caught up in a distinctive Apolline bow-shaped knot that appeared only in the late fourth century,⁷¹⁷ *Clytie* has – perhaps suitably in light of the mythological background – something more in common with Hellenistic representations of Apollo and Helios – even Alexander – than with anything seen in the pedimental or frieze sculptures of the Parthenon, though Watts might plausibly have believed that this kind of twisting action was already hinted at in certain figures among the Elgin marbles who look backwards at those behind them in the procession; he was certain enough that ‘ease, flexibility, and richness’ were characteristics present in the arrangement of the drapery.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵ Anon., ‘Miscellanea’, *The Athenaeum* 2073 (July 20th 1867), 92. Zimmern, discussing Thornycroft’s cast, says it is ‘probably a Demeter’: Zimmern, 1883, 515.

⁷¹⁶ Quoted in Watts I, 237.

⁷¹⁷ Ridgway, 2000, 35.

⁷¹⁸ These figures have been seen as ‘more meditative than visionary’: Vout, in Droth/Edwards/Hatt, 2014, 195; although backward-looking in a literal sense, these figures have an increased dynamism that complicates the one-way thrust of the movement and, in art-historical terms, seems to look rather to the future than the past; Watts I, 148.



Fig. 105. George Frederic Watts, *The Wife of Pygmalion (A Translation from the Greek)*, 1868, Oil on canvas, 67.3×53.3cm, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire.



Fig. 106. George Frederic Watts, *Clytie*, c. 1868-78, Marble, Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

Barrington, on the other hand, was struck forcibly by how far removed *Clytie* seemed from the frieze sculptures of the Parthenon in mood and expression, and sought to explain the difference partly in racial terms, but also by proposing that the human spirit itself had changed in the interim. At one of the musical soirees held in Leighton's studio she looked from a cast of the former to reproductions from the latter and, influenced also by the music, which, she felt, shared something of the restlessness of Watts' sculpture, thought to herself '[w]hat complications in the sensibilities of the human race have the growing years of the world developed since that frieze of the Parthenon was sculptured, and Tchaikovsky's trio and Watts' "Clytie" were invented! How happy, simple, and unagitating is the art of that noble Pheidian procession, so serene and composed in its dignified beauty compared to the

mystery of the half-hidden Slav passion surging out in intricacies of musical sound, and to the straining, appealing gesture in the sculpture of the Celt.’ Looking over at Leighton’s cast of Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave*, also, she saw not a source so much as a ‘stepping-stone between the eras’. ‘Here is also a struggle, an unrest,’ she added, ‘a deeper suggestion of human passion than in the Greek art; but that particular wild note, as of a spirit emancipated from the shackles of the explainable, had not asserted itself in the melancholy imagination of the Southern Italian as it has in these days in our more mystic North.’⁷¹⁹ So much for the quality of ‘ease’, then, in Watts’ work, but the ‘flexibility’ and ‘richness’ of the sculpture of the Parthenon, too, it is implied, are of a different kind and serve a different purpose in *Clytie*. ‘We are not Greeks or Italians,’ Watts himself wrote, ‘and must not try to reproduce their art, but as art must speak through the representations of material forms, the principles governing material forms, being laws of nature, belong especially neither to Greeks nor Italians’. These laws, he reasoned, ‘must be the same in all arts and climes, and therefore as applicable now as then’, regardless of any supposed change in outlook between the fifth and nineteenth centuries.⁷²⁰ All the same, Watts maintained that the correct way to interpret the laws of nature was that demonstrated by Phidias.

Still in later years, according to Mary Watts, the artist continued to assert the superiority of Phidias over Praxiteles; Praxiteles, he claimed, ‘could not touch Pheidias; for the reason that the mind of Pheidias was occupied with form, that which is the greatest intellectual effort: the surface—the finish—was nothing to him

⁷¹⁹ Barrington, 1905, 40-1.

⁷²⁰ Watts III, 5.

in comparison; but the beauty of the work of Praxiteles is on the surface [...] and this [...] proved decadence.’⁷²¹ Ironically, one of the aspects of Watts’ later sculpture that has tended to be admired is the presence of a lively texture across the surfaces, this being partly a consequence of his use of *gesso grosso* rather than clay, but also something that links his works in three dimensions with his later easel pictures, which can also be highly textural affairs, though not, crucially, in the sense in which the word texture is usually meant in relation to, say, Praxiteles, Correggio, or Leighton, though Watts is known to have studied Correggio at an early stage in his career (two watercolour studies, one after the Louvre’s *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, and another after *Danae*, at the Galleria Borghese, exist in a private collection.⁷²² Watts himself was surely inconsistent on the related subjects of surface and texture, since it would appear that he devoted much attention to achieving what he considered to be a Phidian ‘richness of surface’ in both his painting and his sculpture: ‘Giorgione and Titian are wonderfully Pheidian in texture of flesh and drapery’ he declared.⁷²³ The difference between Phidias and Praxiteles was not so much in the attention given to the surface as the nature of this attention; the former Watts associated with ‘difference of texture’,⁷²⁴ which can be seen easily as involving a more sustained elaboration of surface detail, and the latter with ‘finish’, which requires labour but, he felt, a diminution of thought. Despite the complexity

⁷²¹ Watts II, 82.

⁷²² Gould, 2004, 11. The study is presumed to have been made in September 1843, when Watts visited the Louvre en route to Italy; Crowther, 2014, Cat. 134. An incorrect annotation on the watercolour, ‘Titian’, has been crossed out and corrected to ‘Correggio’ [*sic*].

⁷²³ Watts I, 147-8.

⁷²⁴ Watts I, 149.

and eclecticism of the sources from which Watts seems to have borrowed elements, he tended to return to the same names, and his theoretical ideas about the management of form certainly became narrower than the opposite in the closing decades of the century.

Mary Watts gives us an idea in one place of the kind of apparently friendly disagreement that characterised many conversations between Watts and Leighton:

Differing as they did often with one another, there were many amusing little duels. Signor had perhaps mentioned the words “Principles of Form.” “There are no principles of form,” exclaimed Sir Frederic. “I beg your pardon,” Signor asserted, “there are principles of form, and very definite they are; with colour this is not the case.” “Oh, there you are wrong! Of course there are principles of colour;” and so the half of an hour passed too quickly in lively and interesting discussion, each continuing to hold his own opinion to the end.⁷²⁵

The accuracy of the dialogue is, of course, uncertain, though the general gist is probably quite right, and the whole firmly grounded in a genuine discussion or series of discussions; Watts’ insistence on ‘principles of form’ is very plausible, being, indeed, well supported by other evidence; among the fragmentary notes ‘to students’, for instance, compiled and published by Mary Watts in 1912, is the claim that ‘[f]orm is the only expression in art that is not dependent on vagaries of taste, having scientific laws for its principle.’⁷²⁶ Again, he claimed that the Greeks had ‘taught

⁷²⁵ Watts II, 97-8.

⁷²⁶ Watts III, 7.

him all his principles of form', and that one 'principle of form in nature' was that 'all lines curve towards their object.'⁷²⁷ Most important, perhaps, of all Watts' ideas, aside from his belief that Phidias and Titian were compatible, is his 'theory of curves', versions of which are recorded both by Barrington and Mary Watts. Barrington, true to form, claims that she was present when Watts first came up with this theory, presumably at some point around 1879, though she does not specify the date. She might almost have claimed that she helped to give him the idea:

I was working one morning in the room nearest Watts' garden [...] when he came to the paling of our garden, urgently begging me to come in for a moment at once. He was eager to propound a principle which had suddenly dawned upon his mind [...] The discovery interested and excited him. It was ever a great gratification to Watts to work impressions into principles and talk them out to a sympathising ear, thereby securing a permanent hold on them in his mind.

One can sense Barrington congratulating herself on her contribution. She continues:

The particular principle he expounded to me that morning was with reference to the suggestion of size, or the reverse, which different treatments of curved lines can produce. He had found, he thought, the cause why a "good" line in any work of art is composed of a series of flattened curves joined together, whereas a "bad" line is an even section of a small circle, therefore more tightly curved. The superiority of the "good" line lay in the fact that each flattened

⁷²⁷ Watts III, 6.

curve is a section of a large circle which, if continued, would find its completion far away out of the actual design, whereas the line which is part of a small circle, suggests a form contained well within a limited space. The mind in the one case is started with a sense of spring and size, whereas in the other it is restricted within the limits of the design which is before the actual eye. Whatever suggested growth in the imagination was to Watts the key-note of interest in all works of art.

Turning to a nearby cast of the so-called *Theseus* of the Parthenon, Barrington says, Watts found immediate confirmation of his newly discovered principle, one that applied also 'in vegetation, in trees; indeed wherever form expressed life, growth, spring, and onward movement'.⁷²⁸

A date of 1879 seems likely because early in 1880 Dorothy Tennant urged Watts to write an article to explain his idea to the public;⁷²⁹ the suggestion was not, in the end, taken up, though he certainly compiled some notes on the subject, it may be with a view towards such a result. Watts' clearest explanation of the idea, although unfortunately undated, is given by Mary Watts:

[...] to suggest the idea of such size by art, a treatment of the form under certain limitations is necessary. This treatment would not be possible in the case of absolutely regular forms such as the sphere, or the perfectly straight

⁷²⁸ Barrington, 1905, 49-51; quoted also in Barrington, 1911, 160-1.

⁷²⁹ Tennant had encouraged Watts to write his article on the 'Present Conditions of Art', which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* in February 1880. She proposed another on the 'theory of curves' after the success of the first: see Watts I, 316. Could she have passed on a version of his theory to French artists?

lines, horizontal or perpendicular, though possible in the details of architecture. The impression of vast size is most acutely experienced when only portions of a form are visible, perhaps because the imagination is at liberty to indulge in unrestricted flight. For this reason fragments appear to be grander in character than complete statues, partly because imagination, being a great artist, supplies what is wanting. Place the eye close to any form, and the lines that bound it will stretch away till the sight is unable to follow them into space. An impression of immensity is the natural consequence, and fragments, though portions of a great whole, are small enough as a whole to be viewed with the eyes near. The principle is now found. All curves, great or little, restricted or extended, composing the outside forms may be considered as portions of circles. The eyeball being a globe, the spot to which the sight is directed must always be a point, the centre of a circle; if close at hand the centre of a small one, if distant of a wide one. The farther we extend our gaze the wider the outward sweep, till the mental and physical eye fail alike to pierce the ever-retreating distance and follow the ever-widening sweep, this because the eye—perhaps unconsciously—presents to the mind the complete image; therefore the effect will appear large and the form noble. To the flatness of line suggesting length may be attributed the dignity that some very rude, angular, and even ugly, early works certainly possess. Though all great artists have acknowledged this principle, and have been conscious of the value of what is technically called square drawing, it does not appear to have been reduced to any guiding rule. It is not square form that is good and noble, but form that

carries the suggestion of greater form; and the sketch for this reason is commonly larger in character than the completed work.⁷³⁰

Again, Mary Watts says that her husband demonstrated the working of the principle by referring to his casts of the so-called *Theseus* and *Ilissus* of the Parthenon: '[e]very part of the outline of these figures he saw to be fractions of very vast circles.' In other sculptures where 'the development of muscle was emphasised by a certain roundness intended to be impressive' – the artist was perhaps thinking especially of the *Farnese Hercules* – the form was 'less majestic, the curve being part of a circle on a very much smaller scale.'⁷³¹

Pictorially speaking, the representation of only a portion of a large curve, with the understanding being assumed by the artist of the observer that the structure should extend beyond the truncation necessitated by frame or margin, is typically seen as a distinctively Japanese innovation that, although alien to European traditions, entered into Western art during the late nineteenth century via the woodblock *ukiyo-e* print. Characteristically, Watts believed he could see evidence of something rather like this compositional device in fifth-century Greek sculpture, not, indeed, stressing so much the fragmentary aspect of the surviving figures, whether caused by loss or design – the horses of Helios and Selene in particular were

⁷³⁰ Watts III, 47-8.

⁷³¹ Watts I, 317. Other examples – by no means exclusively ancient – might plausibly have been intended for criticism here, but the *Farnese Hercules* could certainly be seen as standing at the head of a long line of similarly globular colossi. Watts takes for granted that the 'sack of melons' anatomy associated with Baccio Bandinelli and, more recently, with Préault – thanks to the latter's *Désespoir* of 1835 (exhibited at the Salon of 1863 as *Hécube*) – is best avoided, but his condemnation of petty roundness of form has less to do with the impression of exaggeration or falsehood that can result from such treatment – the usual charge – than with the idea that the spectator is led in these cases to consider parts at the expense of the whole, and to think on a small rather than a grand scale.

originally shown in truncated form in the acute corners of the east pediment of the Parthenon – as the presence throughout of a kind of suggestive linearity that spoke to the imaginative sense of the viewer, each curved edge exhibiting a springy potential for extension and enlargement beyond itself.

In Barrington's account, notably, Watts had struck upon his theory not while modelling a work in the round or chiselling at the marble, but rather while experimenting with charcoal on paper. His distortions of form could perhaps be seen in part as a means of maintaining, even at the end of the long and laborious series of processes demanded by the many constraints and practical considerations associated with the art of sculpture, an impression of speed and spontaneity of the kind necessitated by rapid work with the pencil or charcoal, but such an impression is only valuable for the sculptor in so far as it sweeps up unnecessary detail and imposes 'largeness of character' on the whole. Barrington stresses that 'a "good" line in any work of art is composed of a series of flattened curves joined together, whereas a "bad" line is an even section of a small circle, therefore more tightly curved', but talks also of 'growth', 'spring', and 'onward movement', which all imply a more sophisticated understanding of the importance of variety in outline than the explanation regarding flattened or enlarged curves would seem to suggest; it is clear, however, both in her account and in Watts' own jottings, that these bounding lines, whether in sculpture or painting, are to be considered – just as much as if they were in scale rather smaller – as sections of large and apparently unmodified circles, since the proposed flattening of lines is only the enlarging of these imaginary arcs and not the simultaneous tightening and loosening of different segments of the same

line or the deliberate contrasting of smaller with larger circles.⁷³² Watts believed that ‘[a]ll lines bounding any form whatever will, if absolutely followed to the end, resolve themselves into circles’, a questionable notion at best, but then circles had evidently taken on a greater significance for the artist: ‘[c]ircles imply centres. All creation is full of circles which resolve into each other, the divine Intelligence must be the centre of all.’⁷³³ Quite aside from such claims, the theory as explained is somewhat weaker than it might be, as it does not account for the changeability of curvature upon which qualities of flexibility and growth depend, and only goes some way towards suggesting that curves might imply direction of movement even within a piece of sculpture.

As it happens, Alfred Stevens had also placed a certain importance on the circle, according to his associate and almost disciple-in-chief, Hugh Stannus, who touched on this matter in a lecture before the Royal Institute of British Architects in November 1884 on the subject of ‘The Architectural Treatment of Cupolas in general and that of St. Paul’s in particular’; a summary published in the *Builder* recorded that:

[Stannus] claimed the merit of the plain section for the late Alfred Stevens, who adopted circles as the main features of his design [for the interior decoration of the dome of St Paul’s – a scheme that was never carried out]. The circle, too, was the characteristic shape for visions and imaginings, and it was only when the painter had a square frame that he filled up the angles.

⁷³² Further thoughts about spheres and circles are set out in Watts I, 317 and III, 44-5.

⁷³³ Watts I, 317.

Another advantage to the circle was that though other geometrical figures were distorted by being seen on concave surfaces, the circle made an ellipse only. The gold ground permeating everything he held to be essential. [...] One then felt that the whole surface was going round, without a break in its continuity.⁷³⁴

Both Stevens and Stannus were chiefly concerned with the difficulty of minimising the unavoidable distortion that would occur in the union of curved architectural surface and flat pictorial ornamentation, that is to say, in the sympathetic integration of the sister arts and careful ‘articulation [of the surface decoration] with the existing architecture’ but it is clear from the report that symbolic as well as practical advantages were connected with the circle. Leighton and Poynter had sought to preserve something of the dominant *tondi* that had characterised Stevens’ design when invited to submit new plans for the cupola of St Paul’s during the 1870s, though the resultant scheme had again amounted to nothing as far as the building was concerned.⁷³⁵ Watts, on the other hand, at no point seems to have commented on the fact that the pedimental figures of the Parthenon, in which he saw the greatest and most immediate evidence of the validity of his ‘theory of curves’, were precisely that: pedimental figures designed to fit within a recessed architectural space, and one

⁷³⁴ *The Builder*, 22 Nov 1884, 687-8.

⁷³⁵ James Thornhill’s scheme, in monochrome, remains in place.

not circular, but triangular, albeit modified by subtle optical refinements that gave a degree of convexity to its broad horizontal base.⁷³⁶

Watts was not, of course, the first to dwell on the question of what constitutes good line, though his preoccupation with the connected problem of imparting an impression of grandeur and size sets his thinking apart in certain respects from previous considerations of good and bad practice. We may compare, for instance, the fumbling observations of Keats' friend, Charles Brown, on the old masters, expressed in a letter to Joseph Severn in 1838:

Going from the [Royal Academy] Exhibition to the National Gallery, I became intoxicated with admiration; and I endeavoured to account for part of their—the old masters'—superiority. Beyond any modern they contrived to give a roundness to the figures; somehow, it seems as if, by turning the frame, we could see the other side of the limbs. How this is managed I know not, but occasionally I perceive they adopted a bold, harsh outline, which, I thought, contributed to the magical effect. This, together with the depth they gave to their pictures, seems to me the grand secret.⁷³⁷

Though Brown is concerned here with painting, his musings are not so very far from Watts' notes on the subject, and particularly his recognition of some mysterious 'dignity' in what are otherwise 'very rude, angular, and even ugly, early works',

⁷³⁶ It is highly improbable that Watts was completely unaware of these refinements, especially with regard to the entasis of columns, though his reference to the 'perfectly straight lines' found in architectural design and suggestion that greater freedom from absolute regularity might be possible only in the 'details' rather glosses over this matter. Leighton considered entasis one of the 'especial beauties of the Greek order': Barrington II, 185.

⁷³⁷ Letter from Charles Brown to Joseph Severn, 2nd June 1838, published in Sharp, 1892, 186

though Watts was certainly more determined to discover (or at least create) the reason for ‘the magical effect.’ Whether in two dimensions or three, the principles seem to be more or less the same; Watts had worked out his principle on paper and in seeking to explain his intention turned, naturally, to ‘square drawing’. In *Physical Energy* the sensitive turning of the forms over which the artist had so laboured with *Clytie* – Barrington wrote of the ‘subtle conception of the different planes and delicate curves, worked in innumerable facets’⁷³⁸ – would be rather sacrificed in favour of deliberately harsh and angular outlines, as well as a certain flattening of the planes (not just the more prominent lines) that rather glosses over the more delicate forms of, for instance, the horse’s hocks and fetlocks; these forms are boldly blocked out and squared off. The facets, or planes, are perhaps rather numerable than innumerable. Stephanie Brown argues of Watts’ ‘theory of curves’, remarkably, that ‘its influence is nowhere apparent in *Physical Energy*’,⁷³⁹ presumably because the angularity of the forms is more extreme in this work than in his earlier efforts in the field of sculpture, but this is surely to take the artist’s ideas about flattening or straightening the lines of a composition in too literal a fashion; Watts still regarded relatively straight lines as portions of immense imaginary circles, and *Physical Energy* is nothing if not an effort towards a practical demonstration of the principle.

Watts’ fascination with circles is idiosyncratic, however, and his ‘theory’ even at odds with earlier theoretical ideas about line in relation to sculpture. Winckelmann had seen variety as one of the key characteristics of beautiful outline,

⁷³⁸ Barrington, 1905, 41 n. 1.

⁷³⁹ Brown, 2007, 55 n. 26.

writing that ‘the forms of a beautiful body are defined by lines that continually change their center point, never tracing a circle, and thus the forms are simpler but also more varied than a circle, which, however large or small it may be, always has the same center point and encloses others within itself or is itself enclosed’; to illustrate the principle he too had inevitably looked to Greek craftsmanship, but the limitations of his knowledge should not be seen as negating in the slightest degree the value of the observation, because he had had the perspicacity to see this refined ‘system of discernment’ operating in the simpler forms of vessels and vases as well as in the more complex ones of figural sculpture.⁷⁴⁰ On the relative dullness of circles Winckelmann’s views were in harmony with those of Ruskin, who in *The Elements of Drawing* (1857) had discussed the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ curves in some detail, asserting that in order to achieve graceful curvature a ‘close approach to straightness in some part of its course’ was necessary alongside ‘variation’ in the direction of travel or ‘general tendency’, involving a modulation ‘by myriads of subordinate curves’: commenting on an accompanying diagram of a ‘good curve’, he had noted that ‘no part of the line is a segment of a circle’; of a ‘bad curve’, he had observed that ‘it is part of a circle, and therefore monotonous throughout’. Variety then, and subordination of one curve to another, involving a change in implied radius as well as in direction, was necessary for graceful line: Ruskin had concluded by stressing that an ‘essential difference between good and bad drawing, or good and bad sculpture, depends on the quantity and refinement of minor curvatures carried, by good work, into the great lines.’⁷⁴¹ The architect J. K.

⁷⁴⁰ Winckelmann (tr. Mallgrave, 2006, 197).

⁷⁴¹ Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* III, section 208, p. 178-80.

Colling objected, on the other hand, that although ‘[m]uch has been said about the subtlety and beauty of compound curves, and of the circular being the least beautiful, [...] why it is so, is not so very clear.’⁷⁴² It may be that Watts would have agreed with Colling on this point; the circle certainly seemed to represent more to this painter-sculptor than any spiralling form more truly expressing growth might have done, in part because he seems to have associated it with the field of vision on the one side, and with ‘divine intelligence’ on the other. It is also doubtful that Watts had *not* encountered the passage from Ruskin cited above even before he is supposed to have developed his ‘theory of curves’, and the two might well have discussed the matter directly, since Mary Watts says that, for all their mutual appreciation of one another, ‘[t]he two friends were often in combat’ and ‘upon principles of form they differed to the end, and had many a passage-at-arms.’⁷⁴³ Still, Watts’ chief aim was largeness and grandeur of effect rather than beauty or grace – the qualities to which Winckelmann and Ruskin had referred – and this accounts to an extent for the comparative simplicity and bluntness of such advice as that the student of sculpture should ‘get the principal lines strong and flat, for that is the secret of monumental effect.’⁷⁴⁴ Watts, for his part, accused Ruskin of confounding truth with detail, of taking too ‘microscopic’ a view of nature, and of running the risk of ‘overlooking larger truth of fundamental properties’.⁷⁴⁵ Ruskin told Watts in 1873 that he had been ‘paralysed for years by [his] love of the Greek style’ and had ‘never made an

⁷⁴² Colling, 1865, 12-13. Elsewhere (23) Colling objects to Ruskin’s criticism of the Greek fret in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and also mentions *Modern Painters* (109-10).

⁷⁴³ Watts I, 93.

⁷⁴⁴ Watts III, 15.

⁷⁴⁵ Watts I, 92-3.

entirely honest, complete, unaffected study of anything',⁷⁴⁶ but would give a milder and more positive assessment of the artist's contribution a few years later in his Oxford lectures. That Watts never mustered up the courage to paint Ruskin's portrait indicates much.

At the same time, there is a curious reflection of Ruskin's writing in Watts' stated aim of creating in *Physical Energy* 'a figure that should suggest man as he ought to be—a part of creation, of cosmos in fact, his great limbs to be akin to the rocks and to the roots, and his head to be as the sun.'⁷⁴⁷ It may well be that Watts had in mind some of Ruskin's earlier writings about landscape, where the forms of mountains and clouds are sometimes likened to the human figure and ascribed not merely systems of internal structure, but even 'anatomy'. In Watts' 'theory of curves' there are substantial echoes of a particular passage from the first volume of *Modern Painters* in which Ruskin had dealt with cloud formation, an area of study which he believed the old masters – and most moderns besides – had almost wholly neglected:

There is, [...] usually a parallelism and consistency in their great outlines, which give system to the smaller curves of which they are composed; and if these lines be taken, rejecting the minutiae of variation, the resultant form will almost always be angular, and full of character and decision. In the flock-like fields of equal masses, each individual mass has the effect, not of an ellipse or

⁷⁴⁶ Letter from Ruskin, 13th February 1873 (Bod., MSS Eng. Lett. C.50, ff. 195-6), quoted in Gould, 2004, 110. The letter was published in Watts I, 95-6, but Mary Watts omitted this specific charge, which is by some measure the most forceful part of the letter.

⁷⁴⁷ Watts II, 265.

circle, but of a rhomboid; the sky is crossed and chequered, not honeycombed; in the lower cumuli, even though the most rounded of all clouds, the groups are not like balloons or bubbles, but like towers or mountains. And the result of this arrangement in masses more or less angular, varied with, and chiefly constructed of, curves of the utmost freedom and beauty, is that appearance of exhaustless and fantastic energy which gives every cloud a marked character of its own, [...] there is added to this a spirit-like feeling, a capricious mocking imagery of passion and life, totally different from any effects of inanimate form that the earth can show.⁷⁴⁸

Watts' sensitivity to the rhomboidal forms of such clouds and his particular attraction to the towering cumulus are visible in many of his later landscapes, including his assertively sublime *Sunset on the Alps* of 1888, in which there is a more than implied visual comparison between the mountain peak and surging vapour above, caught together and almost unified in the last roseate glow of the fading day. Leighton too had made use of the towering cumulus in several pictures, even expressing something of the welling emotions of his otherwise restrained actors through such means, as in his deceptively serene portrait of Lady Adelaide Chetwynd-Talbot, Countess Brownlow (c. 1879), and *Captive Andromache* (c. 1886-8), where Hector's widow is partially seen against a grand and threatening cumulonimbus. Watts' clouds are similarly imbued with an implied human passion. In 1891 he received a copy of Ruskin's *The Queen of the Air* (a birthday present

⁷⁴⁸ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* I, Part 2 Section 3, Chapter 3, § 5. Ruskin would return to the subject in volume five.

from Mary) with great excitement,⁷⁴⁹ and he will have found in this a very different Ruskin, apparently much more open to the blending of landscape with mythology and the personalisation of the forces of nature. Watts had already been looking, in a sense, to affect the opposite of this kind of personalisation, that is to say, to give a sense of the landscape and the cosmos to the figure. With his monumental horse and rider, Watts was aiming for precisely that ‘appearance of exhaustless and fantastic energy’ that Ruskin had seen in the flattened but constantly shifting outlines of vast masses of distant cloud.

Watts’ insistence that even angular curves should be thought of as sections of circles may seem all the more puzzling, though he too rejected the smaller, meaner variety as unfit for monumental purposes, and was careful enough, too, to note that the treatment of form which he was proposing would not apply ‘in the case of absolutely regular forms such as the sphere, or perfectly straight lines, horizontal or perpendicular’. Even the circle, presumably, must be approximate rather than precise, and the product ultimately of the imperfect human touch unaided to any great extent by rule, compass, or mechanical aid. The practical result in Watts’ work would be, as we have seen, a kind of desiccation of form, and in places a stripping down to the bone, but with a squarer, harder appearance even in the softer flesh and muscle. From the background of Watts’ 1888 portrait of Leighton (Royal Academy) may be received an idea of how differently *he* might have approached the subject of *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python*.

⁷⁴⁹ Gould, 2004, 249-50, 413, n. 69, n. 77.

6.3. Wattsian Principles of Form and the New Sculpture

Where does this sit in relation to the New Sculpture? In an 1888 article on Harry Bates, Walter Armstrong attempted to argue that this sculptor had managed to maintain his individuality despite having studied in Paris:

The artists turned out by the regular Parisian studio are, as a rule, far too much of a pattern. They are apt to say, not what Nature has put into them, but as much of it as the hard-and-fast system of their teacher will give them voice for. Square painting is very well in its place, but you cannot get the infinity of Leonardo with it; modelling in planes is expressive, but there are subtleties over which a sculptor may rightly linger that it will not give; and so, for an artist with energy, originality, persistence, and a touch of modesty, no better plan of work than that on which Mr. Bates spent his year abroad could, perhaps, be chosen.⁷⁵⁰

Beattie quotes this passage approvingly, but without commenting on the apparent contradiction, also recognises that it was to Watts above all that Bates looked for guidance upon his return to London in 1885, borrowing and adapting motifs from the elder artist's paintings.⁷⁵¹ There is some irony in the fact that, even if *Physical Energy* would only be cast a number of years later, Watts was at this point already advocating something very like the 'square drawing' and expressive simplification of planes that Walter Armstrong saw as run-of-the-mill tricks of the Parisian *atelier*.

⁷⁵⁰ Armstrong, 1888, 171.

⁷⁵¹ Beattie, 1983, 35, 155-6.

The elder artist might have spoken of ‘form that carries the suggestion of greater form’, but he was not particularly interested during the later 1880s in the quieter ‘infinity of Leonardo’.

If Watts’ ‘theory of curves’ seems a trifle clumsy, it was, all the same, taken up enthusiastically by sculptors of the younger generation, most particularly by Thornycroft and Bates, without whose *Teucer* and *Hounds in Leash* – both produced under Watts’ influence – the elder artist’s *Physical Energy* would be almost inconceivable; as early as November 1880 Watts had attempted to explain his ideas to Thornycroft, who jotted them down in a sketchbook and certainly sought to apply them in his practice.⁷⁵² The idea was, however, probably also taken up by Gilbert by the end of the decade, who, it is said, told Mary Watts around August 1888 that ‘Mr. Watts tells me things that are of such infinite value, and they are so simple!’ Gilbert was at the time working on his bust of Watts, which was commissioned by Mary and completed over the course of eighteen sittings during which the two could presumably discuss ‘principles of form’ and other subjects at length.⁷⁵³ It is significant that Thornycroft had sought to put Gilbert and Watts in close contact three years earlier by commissioning a bust of the elder artist from his peer (the sittings did not then take place, and some subsequent misunderstanding existed between the sculptors over whether or not the commission was still standing in 1888, when Mary asked Gilbert to model her husband’s likeness); perhaps, among other motivating factors, Thornycroft had believed that Watts might be able to act in part

⁷⁵² Notes dated 17 November 1880 in a sketchbook of Hamo Thornycroft at the Henry Moore Institute and Archive; Gould, 2004, 138, 395 n. 78.

⁷⁵³ Watts II, 134.

as a restraining influence on Gilbert's budding medievalism and increasingly ornamental tendencies, knocking some sound principles into his sometime rival regarding the concept of monumentality and the sculpturesque handling of form. In the event, the interaction with Watts seems rather to have encouraged some of Gilbert's more attenuated and flyaway impulses, as well as experimentations with diverse materials and, to an extent, with lofty symbolic abstractions, though it has rightly been noted that actual correspondences in subject matter between Watts and Gilbert were not necessarily dominant in the younger man's work during the 1890s.⁷⁵⁴ The elder artist's encouragement must, however, have been accompanied by certain criticisms, since Barrington records that Watts, referring to the many bare feet he had seen and studied during his 1887 trip to Egypt, came to the conclusion that Gilbert was 'wrong, [...] about his feet, certainly wrong.'⁷⁵⁵ During the 1890s Gilbert adapted his portrait of Watts for one of the saints in the grille of the Duke of Clarence Memorial, later telling Joseph Hatton that 'Edward the Confessor, through the type I have chosen, is an embodiment of an indulgence which I permitted myself as my own personal recompense for my labour, by portraying a suggestion of a contemporary existence of the greatest poet-painter of our era. The head is actually a portrait, and I have not thought it impertinent to dress my hero as a King in his art and a Confessor in his modesty of purpose.' Convenience was also a consideration, evidently, because all the saints created for the grille during this period were recomposed from earlier studies: the 'St George' and 'St Michael' are, in a sense,

⁷⁵⁴ Dorment, 1986, 119.

⁷⁵⁵ Barrington, 1905, 170. If the observation is taken from a letter in Barrington's possession, as seems to be the case, then Watts must already, by 1887, have noticed Gilbert's work by 1887, Gilbert's supposed error is presumably one of modelling rather than stated opinion.

only *Icarus* in armour,⁷⁵⁶ while the ‘St Elizabeth of Hungary’ was based on Gilbert’s 1894 bust-length study of Nina Cust, with the other female figures also bearing a ‘family likeness’;⁷⁵⁷ it has hitherto escaped notice that the ‘working model’ illustrated in Hatton’s article and there identified as Edward the Confessor⁷⁵⁸ – an 1899 model which never made its way onto the monument but which is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, catalogued as ‘A Bishop Saint’⁷⁵⁹ – was in fact a reprise in ivory, bronze, and copper foil of the sculptor’s earlier *Study or Head of a Capri Fisherman* (1884), reset on the shoulders so as to impart a new and more overtly paternal aspect to the otherwise unaltered facial expression, but the graver figure in position within the grille is indeed a portrait of Watts, and one, moreover, that to all appearances had been modified by further sittings post-1888, perhaps in September of 1894.⁷⁶⁰ Around that time, Watts painted the sculptor’s portrait in a somewhat heroic attitude (1894-5, exhibited RA 1895, untraced) – an honour that was not given to Thornycroft. That the Watts portrait seems to have been modified between 1888 and 1899, when the figure for the tomb was cast, suggests that Gilbert was not simply looking to recycle an old study out of expedience or weariness with direct observation, as might be suspected in the case of the ‘Bishop

⁷⁵⁶ Even the ‘Bishop Saint’ is modelled around a core formed by a cast of the ‘St. George’.

⁷⁵⁷ Gilbert told Hatton that this was deliberate and that the ‘study for the heads was made from the same living being, and with the same ideal prompting’: Hatton, 1903, 32. McAllister records that one of the later figures, ‘St Catherine of Egypt’, was given the features of Violet, Duchess of Rutland: McAllister, 1929, 223.

⁷⁵⁸ Hatton, 1903, 27.

⁷⁵⁹ This is Dorment’s suggestion: Dorment, 1986, 165-6, Cat. 74. Both Dorment and Cecil Gilbert have proposed that the bishop might have been intended for St Boniface, though the latter identifies the ‘St Patrick’ as St Boniface: Dorment, 1986, 157; Gilbert, 1987, 23, 3.

⁷⁶⁰ Gilbert, 1992 I, 23-4, 34, 71.

Saint', though there the reuse involved the translation of the model into an entirely different medium, and therefore no small amount of work. It would be a mistake to suppose that the inclusion of a portrait of Watts was motivated only by a desire to save the inconvenience of finding and studying a new type for the saint.



Fig. 107. Alfred Gilbert, *Head of a Capri Fisherman*, (first cast) 1884, Bronze, 37cm, Private Collections.



Fig. 108. Alfred Gilbert, 'A Bishop Saint, 1899, Bronze with copper foil and ivory, 29.5cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 109. Alfred Gilbert, 'Edward the Confessor', detail from the Clarence Memorial, c. 1899, Bronze, 48.2cm, Albert Memorial Chapel, Windsor.

Some confusion has remained about the identification of the Watts figure on the tomb despite Gilbert's clarity on the matter. According to an article published in the *Times* on 4 August 1898, Edward the Confessor was to have been accompanied on the eastern face of the grille by Edmund King and Martyr, both personages

referring, as ‘name saints’, to the Duke of Clarence and his father, Albert Edward, soon to be King Edward VII.⁷⁶¹ In the event, however, the empty place intended for Edmund King and Martyr would be taken by St Catherine of Siena during the 1920s.⁷⁶² Still, Jason Edwards, for example, refers to the Edward the Confessor figure as *Edward, King and Martyr*, apparently appreciating neither that there are three distinct saints conflated in the literature, nor that Edward the Martyr died before the age of twenty, nor, indeed, that Edward the Confessor was not martyred. The only indication that an ‘Edward the King Martyr’ statuette might have been considered at any point is George Gilbert’s note, dated 21st April 1904 (within in the sculptor’s Bruges period), that his father had that day begun an eighteen-inch figure in clay of that saint;⁷⁶³ there is every reason, however, to suppose that this was little more than an error on George’s part, and that ‘Edmund’ was meant; either way, this cannot have been an aged, bearded figure of the kind for which Watts’ features were appropriate. Nor is the iconographical treatment of Edward the Confessor so impenetrably esoteric as to render identification impossible. The figure on the tomb given Watts’ appearance holds an architectural model that Richard Dorment and Barbara Bryant have both identified as the Albert Memorial Chapel at Windsor (part of St George’s Chapel), in which the monument is situated, but it does not actually resemble the building in the slightest; more likely, it is an imaginary structure intended to evoke the eleventh-century Westminster Abbey and to commemorate

⁷⁶¹ This article is quoted in Gilbert, 1987, 10. Gilbert later told McAllister that Edward the Confessor was ‘name-saint of the builder of the chapel and of Edward the Third’: McAllister, 1929, 131.

⁷⁶² See Dorment, 1986, 157.

⁷⁶³ Gilbert, 1987, 11.

Edward the Confessor's role as its founder, and therefore as a figure of major importance for the history of the arts in Britain.⁷⁶⁴ At the same time, there is a certain implication that Watts, too, should be regarded as a leader and, in a sense, the founder of the British school.

Gilbert never ceased regarding Watts as a leader in the shaping of the new movement; in 1903 he told students at the Royal Academy that '[i]n our Renaissance we owe a great deal to a man who [...] as a child went to study the Elgin marbles and learnt his art from them—a man who [...] influenced more English artists than any man ever did before.'⁷⁶⁵ As late as the 1920s, when Gilbert returned from his exile in Bruges, he was still making inquiries about the mural cycle, apparently representing *The Elements*, that Watts had produced for 7 Carlton House Terrace during the mid-1850s while it was the London residence of Lord and Lady Somers, and it was, as Nicholas Tromans has documented, the sculptor's interest that led to its rediscovery, partial in 1927, and more complete in 1936.⁷⁶⁶ Gilbert's claims about Watts' influence are bold, and yet the elder artist's formal theories have been thought to have had no immediate effect on Gilbert's sculpture during the last two decades of the nineteenth century – Dorment, for instance, says that he 'more or less ignor[ed] Watts's bold, monumental style' – but the sculptor, for all his enthusiasm for the comparatively miniscule art of the goldsmith, actually remained very much concerned with the problem of how to convey an impression of magnitude, or at very

⁷⁶⁴ Edwards, 2007, 200-201. Edwards is following Dorment's initial misidentification of the figure, changed to Edward King and Martyr in his catalogue of the Royal Academy exhibition the following year: Dorment, 1985, 173, 175; Dorment, 1986, 157; Bryant, in Bills – Bryant, 2008, 302.

⁷⁶⁵ Whitley, 1903, 544.

⁷⁶⁶ Tromans, 2016, 313.

least a kind of expansiveness that would enliven the imaginative impact of his work; it may be that this was true regardless of the scale at which he was working, large or small, but nowhere is it more apparent than in those productions designed for monumental purposes. The American painter John McLure Hamilton remembered asking Gilbert, while he was working on the Preston Mayoral Chain (1887-8), ‘if he did not fear that the jeweller’s art, that then seemed to fascinate him, would interfere with his hand and eye, and tend to diminish the loftiness of his conception of great monuments.’ The sculptor answered that ‘the study of small things would enlarge his vision and improve his technical ability to deal with big work.’⁷⁶⁷ A different response was given to the blustering Cecil Rhodes when he visited Gilbert’s studio to discuss plans for some projected monumental sculpture for South Africa and, upon seeing the sculptor’s small-scale models in wax, announced that he ‘was not out to furnish a toyshop’ and wanted ‘something big! Big!’ Gilbert, it is reported, took Rhodes and his companions straight to the door and said ‘I know exactly the kind of thing you want, and you’ll find it in the Euston Road... Good day!’⁷⁶⁸

In reaching for a solution to the problem of monumental form Watts’ ideas about ‘largeness of character’ and his ‘theory of curves’ were inevitably of some relevance,⁷⁶⁹ and it would seem that the sculptor sought to apply his own interpretation of these ideas in a number of works produced after the two men came into contact, albeit not necessarily in quite the way in which Thornycroft or even

⁷⁶⁷ McLure Hamilton, 1921, 123.

⁷⁶⁸ Ward, 1923, 255.

⁷⁶⁹ Dormont, 1986, 119.

Watts might have foreseen. From the late 1880s onwards, Gilbert's use of the human figure, which had been at the outset of his career so explicitly inward-looking, internally coherent, and even closed off from engagement with its surroundings, began in a fairly literal fashion to branch out into broader avenues, frequently rejecting sculptural compactness in favour of a new openness more comparable, in a sense, to that which characterises many of Thornycroft's best known works. The *Anteros* in particular, which crowns the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, engages more with an imaginary space outside of itself than the *Perseus* or *Icarus* had maybe even dreamed of doing, and the sculptor made ample use of the graceful radiating lines formed by the long wing-feathers in this and other works of this period to create large incomplete arcs that extend well beyond the immediate bounds of the figure, implying not only forward movement but also a vivacious sense of 'spring' and a 'suggestion of greater form'. '[S]uggestion' Gilbert later told his students at the Royal Academy, could be produced in a design by the inclusion of forms capable of being '*imitated or repeated*' throughout, but also essential for the ornamental designer were qualities of '*scale, balance, and organic growth.*' Having drawn a circle on a blackboard, Gilbert set about looking to demonstrate these principles by adding 'a smaller circle and other half-circles drawn on the first outline at tangents, [...with] a variety of running lines connecting these geometrical forms.'⁷⁷⁰ The circle, he observed, possessed great symbolic importance, representing at once 'the sun and the globe on which we live', and it was, moreover, a form characteristic of

⁷⁷⁰ Ganz, 1908, xxi-xxii.

Donatello, whose work ‘was always confined in’ the *tondo*.⁷⁷¹ Could the ‘theory of curves’ have been one of the principles gleaned from the study of ‘Graeco-Roman’ and ‘Renaissance’ art for which Gilbert had seen some corroboration and ‘similarity’ in Japanese artistic practice as early as December 1888?⁷⁷² In Gilbert’s ambitious and largely thwarted scheme for the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain these qualities would have been greatly amplified by the jets of water propelled upwards from the fountain to create a restless and shimmering display of crisscrossing arcs, perhaps even an atmospheric and rainbow-tinted haze through which the polychromatic effects of the sculpture would be modulated in various ways; in an overtly Watts-inspired touch, the sculptor had intended that the god himself, in silvery aluminium, should appear to hover above the green bronze of the fountain on ‘a glassy dome of water’.⁷⁷³ The practical difficulties involved in obtaining such an effect having been found insurmountable, the real interplay between the sculptural and watery elements of the monument that the sculptor intended has remained beyond the reaches of all but the imagination, and yet still the fountain and the figure which crowns it carry a

⁷⁷¹ Paraphrased in Whitley, 1903, 547-8. The meaning of the last remark is not altogether clear. Gilbert might have been referring only to Donatello’s works in low relief, or alluding to imaginary bounding circles as well real ones, whether complete or otherwise. If accurately reported the claim, however it might be interpreted, must be regarded as an exaggeration.

⁷⁷² Gilbert, 1888, 101.

⁷⁷³ Sheppard, 1963, 110. A number of Watts’ later compositions, including *Hope* (first version, c. 1885-6), situate their relevant personages on an inexactly drawn globe that extends beyond the limits of the picture. Gilbert tended to mount casts of his *Victory* (originally 1887) on diminutive orbs of marble or agate, following the conventional iconography derived from diverse classical sources. A crystal orb was included in the reedos executed for St Albans (1890-1903), and he had also included a sphere of rock crystal in his Jubilee epergne of 1887-90, a work in some respects closely related to the *Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain*, and one which also made use of the watery element: the epergne celebrated British naval power, and in its original state evoked the sea via both the variegated green-patinated silver of its body (now gilt) and the clear rock crystal enclosed within. Gilbert must surely have connected the projected ‘glassy dome’ of the fountain with the solid but aqueous orb of the piece for the table. The ornamental scheme devised for Daly’s Theatre in the early 1890s included the blowing of illuminated bubbles in conjunction with playful sailing imagery, though it is not absolutely clear how far this innovation might have been due to Gilbert’s involvement.

suggestion of another setting than their actual one, and of an invisible but implicit whole of which the monument as it stands is merely a fragment.

Incidentally, the *Anteros* has been seen as ‘eccentrically’ owing something to the impetuously vaulting god of wine in Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*,⁷⁷⁴ a figure that had inspired Watts when working on his *Earth* mural at Carlton House Terrace decades earlier; Tromans calls one of the principal figures in that work – actually seated but certainly springy – ‘an honest, unconcealed plagiarism’ from Titian’s picture, which had been acquired for the nation in 1826.⁷⁷⁵ If in the early 1890s Gilbert had not yet seen the mural, could he possibly have seen Watts’ beautiful preparatory study in coloured chalks of Arthur Prinsep? In this the descent from Titian is clear. Burne-Jones – at a time (1862) when he had been firmly under Ruskin’s influence and patronage – had made a comparable study of the head of Bacchus from Tintoretto’s *Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne* (1576-7) in the Sala dell’Anticollegio in the Ducal Palace in Venice, a figure that is, again, directly modelled on Titian’s Bacchus, but perhaps even closer in some respects to Gilbert’s *Anteros*.⁷⁷⁶ Ruskin had given this study to Oxford University in 1875 (it is now in the Ashmolean Museum); it is quite possible Gilbert did not see it, though he was in touch with Burne-Jones throughout the 1880s and the two might plausibly have discussed Venetian painting together as, indeed, the sculptor must surely have done

⁷⁷⁴ Dorment, 1986, 142.

⁷⁷⁵ Tromans, 2016, 309.

⁷⁷⁶ Veronese, too, can be seen as having adapted the god’s leap for the jubilant archangel Gabriel in his *Annunciation* in the Uffizi collection (c. 1550-5), though a comparable sense of urgency – if, perhaps, a little less gymnastic – had already been present in some earlier treatments of the theme, as Benedetto da Maiano’s highly pictorial altarpiece of the Annunciation in Sant’Anna dei Lombardi in Naples attests (c. 1489).

with Watts in the course of their numerous meetings from 1888 onwards; it is also probable, of course, that Gilbert had seen Tintoretto's original himself when he first visited Venice and there found, as he put it to Isabelle McAllister, 'a closer sympathy with my aspirations and aims in art than I ever gained, even in Florence.'⁷⁷⁷ Titian's picture was readily accessible in London. In Paris, on the other hand, he might have known Paul Lemoyne's marble group in the garden of the Palais-Royal, *Le pâtre et la chèvre*. This group, which dates to as early as 1830 – perhaps even to the Salon of 1827 in the plaster – is strikingly advanced for its time, presenting the viewer with a highly pictorial composition which balances its outward straining impulses by pitting them against one another. The effect is wonderfully buoyant rather than tense. The off-balance shepherd is, moreover, alarmingly reminiscent of Titian's Bacchus, now partly stabilised by the counterthrust of his obstinate goat; this clever device turns the limitations of the material to an advantage and even a leading motif. Both his feet remain on the ground, though Lemoyne resorted to a sloped, ramp-like base that simultaneously suggests a natural, pastoral setting for the man-goat tussle, and allows the figure to lean precariously downhill. Watts would later employ a similar ascending plinth – a device rarely seen on such a monumental scale – for his equestrian groups, *Hugh Lupus* and *Physical Energy*, as a means of throwing the horse and rider into a more dynamic posture. Gilbert's *Anteros*, of course, has no such luxury in terms of foothold, and instead follows a plethora of alternative flighty antecedents in the lighter and more ductile medium of bronze, forced to balance on one leg instead of two.

⁷⁷⁷ McAllister, 1929, 71.

Neither Titian's nor Tintoretto's figures are winged, of course. Nor, for that matter, are Lemoyne's or Watts' but then none of these – however infused *with* love in at least the first two instances – represents the god of love, for whom such a means of transportation is conventional, and then there is the fact that Gilbert's use of the device relates, in any case, most closely to ideas that Watts had not yet formulated in the 1850s. *Anteros* is, however, crowned, in an unmistakable echo of the giddy Bacchuses of the Venetian painters, but in place of the Dionysian ivy or grapevine given to the god of wine by Titian and Tintoretto, respectively, *Anteros*' brow is shaded by what has been described as an 'eccentric helmet',⁷⁷⁸ in reality a wreath of wings suggesting the flight of the intellect and the liberated imagination, and, in the duplication of the wings themselves – a thoroughly medieval touch that recalls the four-winged cherubim and six-winged seraphim of traditional Judeo-Christian scripture and iconography – signifying the quick motion of the mind and of the god;⁷⁷⁹ visor-like, the extended pinions at the front have the potential to act as the blinkers that partially justify Gilbert's own curious description of the god as

⁷⁷⁸ Dorment, 1986, 138.

⁷⁷⁹ In Isaiah 6:2-3, the wings of the seraphim are placed over the face and over the feet as well as at the back. Gilbert's *Anteros* has three pairs in total, though none about the feet as had the underequipped *Perseus*, borrowing the sandals (or rather sandal) of Hermes. Disembodied heads of putti nestled among overlapping wings remained, of course, a fixture in fifteenth-century and later Italian art, and it is worth noting, though the wings come there in single pairs, that Joshua Reynolds' cluster of angel's heads (1786-7, Tate Britain) was considered during this period an icon of the English school of painting. At some point before 1903 (a plaster sketch is illustrated in Hatton, 1903, 18) Gilbert experimented with – one might almost say attempted to rationalise – the crisscrossing wings seen in medieval and early Renaissance art in a mysterious small-scale relief of *Christ Supported by Angels*, of which a few, probably later, bronze casts are known; here a compact figural group takes the place traditionally given to the putto's head, and the wings emanate in a more or less symmetrical arrangement from two sources rather than one, allowing for a charming play between the visual pairing that is immediately apparent and the actual pairing that emerges on closer study, both mismatched doubles being produced by the harmonious attitude of the two angels: see Dorment, 1986, 185 Cat. 100.

‘blindfolded’.⁷⁸⁰ The great wings at his back, meanwhile, which crest the whole monument with springy but interrupted curves, are no more like a real animal’s wings than those of the *Nike of Samothrace*, but combine characteristics of the bird and the butterfly, alluding directly to the union of Cupid and Psyche, and representing in as concrete a form as possible that myth’s fusion of physical and spiritual love.



⁷⁸⁰ Hatton, 1903, 16.

Fig. 110. George Frederic Watts, 'Study of a Youth', 1854-5, Sanguine and grey chalk, 51×35cm, Watts Gallery, Guildford (COMWG2007.328).



Fig. 111. Edward Burne-Jones, 'Study of the Head of Bacchus in Tintoretto's "The Marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne in the Presence of Venus"', before the picture was restored', 1862, Graphite and black chalk on wove paper, 27.1×41.5cm, Ashmolean, Oxford.



Fig. 112. Alfred Gilbert, *Anteros*, from the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain, 1886-93
Aluminium, Piccadilly Circus, London.

Wings were employed to similar effect in Gilbert's extraordinary 1904-6 sketch model for what he hoped would be an over life-sized war memorial featuring an equestrian St George and the dragon together by a jubilant Victory. It was about the plaster model, shown at the Royal Academy in 1906, that Lorado Taft, used to a rather different kind of classicism, wrote the following condemnatory description:

The sad culmination [of what Taft regards as the sculptor's taste for wrought-iron effects] is reached in his group of "Saint George and the Dragon" [...], where the actors have become almost indistinguishable in the general mix-up. The result is a comic-supplement dog fight—a pinwheel effect of broken lines.⁷⁸¹

Broken lines were precisely the point. Even Dorment, however, comments that the wings of the figure representing Victory were in the plaster 'so extravagantly large as to be positively lethal in appearance.'⁷⁸² Gilbert himself later removed them, drastically reducing also the dragon and the combat element, along with the exuberant and elastic lines that dominated and expressed so much of the force of the composition, but it appears that Watts' ideas about grand, incomplete circles, and the imaginative connotations that wings always bore for him had initially converged in the visual *mêlée*. It is noteworthy that the *St George and the Dragon* group was intended as a sketch for a monumental sculpture and no mere household ornament; how would it have worked on a monumental scale? For Taft, the 'malady' that attacked Gilbert's sculpture was one of purely Gothic origin, contracted from 'the

⁷⁸¹ Taft, 1921, 77.

⁷⁸² Dorment, 1986, 186 Cat. 101.

ancient tombs of the Scala family' in Verona 'or somewhere at any rate',⁷⁸³ but the reality was of course rather more complicated.



Fig. 113. Alfred Gilbert, *St George and the Dragon, Victory Leading: Sketch Model for a Proposed War Memorial*, 1906, Plaster, Untraced.

Gilbert's connection with Watts produced another result. While the sculptor was liberated by the strong and ductile bronze for which he was largely designing – famously, in the case of *Anteros*, for the lighter and more novel medium of aluminium – and could therefore afford, within reason, to employ a certain number of attenuated forms and flyaway effects, a much more compact fusion of Gilbertian and Wattsian styles and motifs appeared in the humbler medium of clay, discernible

⁷⁸³ Taft, 1921, 76-7. This may be a dig at Ruskin, who had heaped liberal praise upon these monuments in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice*, seeing in that of Dante's patron, Cangrande della Scala, in particular 'the consummate form of the Gothic tomb': Ruskin, *Works XI*, 87.

in many of the moulded statuettes and reliefs produced by the Compton Pottery from 1899 onwards under Mary Watts' leadership.⁷⁸⁴ A few figures produced by the pottery, including a St Cecilia, had been derived from Burne-Jones, while adaptations of pictures by Botticelli and Bernardino Luini were also created on a small scale in low relief; in such company, the influences that come directly from Gilbert are conspicuous. Figures of St George and St Michael, clad in armour and accompanied by their respective attributes, were available in different sizes and (unfired) colours well into the twentieth century and bore an obvious relationship with the iconographical scheme Gilbert had drawn up for the *Clarence Memorial* during the 1890s. The Archangel Michael had also been represented on an elaborate relief plaque, holding a flaming sword and the scales of justice, and surrounded by the souls of the departed, all enclosed in the great sweeping lines formed by their vast shield-like wings, which resemble those in such Wattsonian compositions as – among others – *Death Crowning Innocence* (1886-7) and *The All-Pervading* (1887-90). St Elizabeth of Hungary, whose inclusion on the *Clarence Memorial* had been suggested by Queen Victoria as a way of commemorating the late Prince Consort's Hungarian ancestry,⁷⁸⁵ appeared on another Compton plaque, where the incident chosen by the sculptor for the tomb – the saint lets fall from her garments a torrent of miraculous roses – was combined with an overt reference to a very late picture by Watts, the 1904 portrait of his adopted daughter Lilian Chapman (née Mackintosh), holding a basket of roses, simply entitled *Lilian*; it is possible that the painting, also,

⁷⁸⁴ See Calvert and Boreham, 2019, esp. 136-46.

⁷⁸⁵ Hatton, 1903, 31; Gilbert, 1987, 10.

had been partly inspired by the story of the saint as conveyed to the Wattses by Gilbert.



Fig. 114a. Compton Pottery, *St George*, Terracotta, 30cm, Private collection.



Fig. 114b. Compton Pottery, *St Michael*, Terracotta, 38.5×10.5 cm, Private collection.



Fig. 115. Alfred Gilbert, 'Saint Elizabeth of Hungary', c. 1890s, Bronze and ivory, 45.7cm, Kippen Parish Church, Stirlingshire.



Fig. 116. George Frederic Watts, *Lilian*, 1904, Oil on canvas, 152.4×101.6cm, Watts Gallery, Guildford (COMWG 123).



Fig. 117. Compton Pottery, *St Elizabeth of Hungary*, Terracotta 19×12cm, Private Collection.

The principal achievements of the so-called New Sculptors were surely practical rather than theoretical, and the same applies in great measure to Watts, whose Phidianism and Phidias-inspired doctrines about curves could be interpreted in very different ways by Thornycroft and Gilbert, producing in the process widely dissimilar results. Leighton was the most hands-on of the painter-sculptors, and should be credited as the real initiator of the movement, but it was to Watts that both ‘wings of the army of conquest’, as Gosse put it, looked above all others for guidance and direction, and through him, to Phidias, despite the general – and by no means erroneous – association of so much of their work with the early Italian Renaissance; and yet in Watts’ own work and career numerous other influences had

come together to produce a more varied and eclectic type of classicism than that for which he is sometimes given credit, or which he himself was able to recognise.

Conclusion

Contrary to Beattie's view of the New Sculpture, the British branch of the broader 're-renaissance' that also touched sculptural practice in France and America in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, was strongly characterised by a more attentive observation of nature, which, however, by no means precluded a sense of 'spirituality' in their work, the evocation of which was accepted and even demanded as a fundamental part of the sculptor's task. This idea was not new to the so-called New Sculptors, but it was one that was explored – at least in Britain – with unprecedented delicacy and richness of modelling towards the end of the nineteenth century, whether the final medium was bronze, marble, or another substance.

The aim here has been to bring the work of these sculptors together and to draw connections between them, as well as to place British sculpture within an international and particularly French context that does not omit figures like Paul Dubois, Falguière, or Mercié, whose names have been largely eclipsed during the twentieth century by the immense popularity of Rodin and other figures seen as anti-academic. In reality, academicism in France was not during the 1870s what it had been a few decades earlier, and it allowed for much more variety in sculptural practice than is commonly realised. Variety, also, might be seen as a characteristic of the new movement in Britain, and this is partly what has made its characterisation difficult in the past. To make too limited a selection would require us to resort to unsustainable generalisations about the aims of the movement, when really the transformation of British sculpture during this period was led by individuals who shared practices, principles, and an appreciation for the past, but who were free to interpret the art in the light of their own experiences.

The sculpture produced was, on the whole, intensely human in its appeal, even when treating animals or seeking to borrow something from the landscape to aid in its expression. Truth of appearance was prioritised over a rigid truth of form, and in this qualified sense only did the New Sculpture abandon material reality; it is in this same respect that the sculptors associated with the movement also brought the art closer to that of painting, though they never completely lost sight of its origin in architecture. The concept of monumentality was approached in very different ways by the individual sculptors of the movement, with Thornycroft maintaining something of the grand manner while Lee sought to reinvent the antique with a new and intensely pictorial management of relief; Gilbert, meanwhile, while thinking of the figure in architectural terms and retaining always a constructive approach to the art, became more concerned over time with the relation of the figure to its environment, never abandoning the former, but branching out as an ornamentalist to increase the theatricality of his productions. His classicism, or ‘Greek spirit’, as Quilter thought to call it, was expressed largely in his devotion to ancient mythology, which remained central to his private symbolism, but his Gothicism was also informed by a knowledge of and admiration for antique sculpture, which could now be reinterpreted in the light of the Renaissance; sometimes softened, and sometimes vigorously reanimated. In more than one way a sense of *ποικιλία* was joined to the lofty serenity for which sculptors had previously aimed, to produce a more direct and passionately expressed tension between restraint and uncontrollable energy. Polychromy sometimes assisted with this expression while remaining subsidiary to the first art of modelling, through which the most radical departures were effected.

The choices available to the sculptor were informed by a great awareness not only of fifth-century and Hellenistic example, but also of fifteenth-century Italian – and especially Tuscan – art, which had been so spectacularly revived in Paris during the 1870s, alongside a new awareness of the art of other times and places. The Florentine, Praxitelean, and Phidian idioms – if they can be so called – coincided in the movement and contributed to the variegated picture of classicism that emerged against the background of the earlier part of the century, though there was also a Gothic element dictated, in part, by the requirements of certain commissions and the immense authority of Ruskin, the relevance of whose ideas to the new movement has not been sufficiently recognised. We have only begun here to draw attention to some of the ways in which this ‘activity’ of the period – as Thornycroft called the reading of Ruskin – found expression.

Both the Florentine and Greek elements were central to the movement, and while it would be easy to resort to a simple story about Gilbert as the representative of one and Thornycroft of the other – the former transposing French discoveries in picturesquely colouristic modelling to British soil while the latter established a Wattsian tradition of almost proto-modernist archaising sculpturesqueness, the truth was more complex: Gilbert the ornamentalist sang Watts’ praises and took something of the painter’s Venetian affinities too, and Thornycroft, though resoundingly ‘Greek’ and more inclined to a pronounced chiaroscuro seemingly at odds with the intimate, evanescent relief carving of a sculptor like Lee or the dynamic Gothicism of Gilbert, was nevertheless a leader of the British School whose work was not of the ‘one note’ variety. He played a crucial role with Brock in the acceptance of the other men’s productions, and could be pictorial in his own way.

We have stressed that the New Sculpture was chiefly practical in its aims and achievements; technique was for these individuals a means to an end rather than the sole reason for their success and, while it has been argued that they were ‘not so much against industrialisation as against neo-classical conservatism and its denial of the contemporary material reality that connected sculpture to the modern world’,⁷⁸⁶ it must be acknowledged that they did not accept all of the industrial processes available to them. Something similar is true, generally, of their attitude towards theory, which was appealing only if framed in simple, practical terms. Watts did precisely this, and so his ideas about Phidian principles of form and flattened curves found adherents, albeit – as with Ruskin – of widely differing kinds, among the members of the new movement, even as Leighton exerted a powerful and varied influence on its development both behind the scenes and in his own (public and semi-private) sculptural interventions.

It was, however, Gilbert who best encapsulated the movement’s objectives regarding the past, at least as far as this was expressed in words. This was in his Liverpool address of 1888, to which we have referred at the beginning of this thesis and throughout, since it was in this moment that the new movement seemed to be under the greatest pressure to clarify its aims and to identify itself. ‘Art is an old republic,’ he claimed, and ‘[i]ts existence is [...] at once retrospective and progressive. Its every movement forward is a reflection sent back from the mirror of the past. Its life is a constant reflection, backwards and forwards, in this mirror of ages.’ This was no empty rhetoric, designed merely to deflect criticism, but a

⁷⁸⁶ Droth, 2004a, 223.

statement borne out in the sculptural productions of this master and shared to a great extent with his immediate contemporaries, who were never more united than at this significant moment. Over the course of this thesis we have explored many ways in which the movement engaged with antiquity and its various rebirths and revivals, emphasising that artistic creation in the present always involved a recreation of the past, which was at no point wholly fixed but ever a shifting and variegated pool in which reflection back and forth could be complicated by ripples on the surface and movements in the deep.

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