

Lanterns and Lamps: Symbolism and Cultural Diversity in William
Holman Hunt's Painting

The paper will examine the relevance of lamps and lanterns as symbols in some of William Holman Hunt's most acknowledged paintings, and how they relate to the artist's personal ideology, as well as to his religious conversion. The study will concentrate on three of Hunt's major works: *The Light of the World*, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, and *The Lady of Shalott*. It will begin with a brief overview of both Hunt's journey to the East and his metaphorical journey towards inner enlightenment. A fresh viewpoint on Hunt's tolerance for differing religions as well as his changing relationship with faith may be gained by examining these images in light of the Eastern-style lamps and lanterns that they incorporate.

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1. Introduction

William Holman Hunt, regarded as one of the most prominent religious painters in England, had completed a number of paintings that centre around Biblical themes and spirituality. His most famous religious pieces have often been reproduced, and prints of them still circulate among the devout believers of the present. Owing to his well-known depictions of Biblical figures, the painter is heavily associated with religious art, however, Hunt had an ambiguous attitude towards the church and institutional religion. Moreover, his own relationship with faith and his tolerance for Non-Christian religions provides a curious outlook on the views of an artist whose convictions did not echo the unrelenting Victorian sentiments. Additionally, Hunt's fascination with the East and his inclination to paint settings as true to nature as possible proved to greatly affect his style of depiction. .

The research focuses on William Holman Hunt's utilization of lamps and lanterns in his paintings, and the significance they hold if linked to the artist's personal beliefs. After a brief overview of both his figurative journey towards inner enlightenment and Hunt's voyage to the East, the paper will focus on three of Hunt's major artworks: *The Light of the World*, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, and *The Lady of Shalott*. Analysing these pictures through their inclusion of Eastern-styled lamps and lanterns provides a new perspective on Hunt's religious tolerance as well as his evolving connection to faith.

1.1 Religious Journey

Among the seven founding members¹ of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Hunt was one of the only artists who was a non-believer at the time of the brotherhood's establishment in 1848.² Furthermore, the group's original objectives did not consider religion as a main source of motivation for their revolutionary movement, despite the fact, that Jesus Christ was the first name on their 'List of Immortals'.³ According to Landow, before his encounter with

¹ The members: John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson, Frederic George Stephens

² Éva Péteri. *Victorian approaches to Religion as Reflected in the Art of the Pre-Raphaelites*. Vol. 19. Akadémiai Kiadó, 2003. p. 16.

³ It is intriguing that in his autobiography, Hunt states that choosing Christ to be the prime immortal was due to his great importance: "on this account, we were obliged to extend our purpose, and place four stars after the name of Jesus Christ, that He might stand supreme above all others" (William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelites and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, p. 160.). However, in the biography of her grandfather, Diana Holman-Hunt surmises that choosing Christ was merely an

Ruskin's ideas, Hunt was an "unbeliever",⁴ however, *Modern Painters*⁵ inspired him to incorporate religious themes into his painting. Upon writing about her grandfather's status as a renowned religious artist, Diana Holman-Hunt states that his (artistic) conversion was not entirely spiritual:

I knew that he had not decided to become a religious painter for religious reasons, but because the subject of Christianity appealed to him historically and satisfied not only his passion for the Orient, but his obsession with the intense study of natural appearances, and the representation of detail in different *lights*. The Bible and the Holy Land enabled him to apply these to popular themes.⁶

Considering the religious background of the Victorian era, the clash of Tractarian and Evangelical principles was at the centre of public interest, thus the religious affiliation of artists was considered in the process of their evaluation by the critics and the general public as well. Amidst the rise of anti-catholicism, the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood submitted paintings that were accused of deliberately conveying Tractarian notions through the characters and symbols in the works.

Hunt's piece, *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*,⁷ was criticised for its alleged support for the High Churchmen, albeit his intention ever since the establishment of the Brotherhood was to avoid "clericalism".⁸ Due to the criticism of *Druids*, Hunt gained the support of the influential Oxfordian High Churchman, Thomas Combe with whom the painter formed a lifelong friendship. Combe introduced him to leading members of the Tractarian movement, and while Hunt did not share their ideology, his art was partially affected by the New Oxfordian symbolism.⁹ Aside from his aim for realism, Hunt's typological symbolism is another prominent feature of his style.¹⁰ He believed that the Old Testament was filled with premonitions for the life of Jesus Christ, and Hunt often implemented this type of symbolism into his religious paintings. The use of these figures in a subtle way complimented his realism

afterthought on the Brotherhood's part (Diana Holman-Hunt, *My Grandfather, His Wives and Loves*, p. 50).

⁴ George P. Landow. *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge, 2015. p. 6.

⁵ John Ruskin. *Modern Painters*. Vol. 1. G. Routledge, 1857.

⁶ Diana Holman-Hunt, *My Grandfather*, p.18.

⁷ William Holman Hunt. *A Converted British Family Sheltering a Christian Missionary from the Persecution of the Druids*. 1849/1850, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.

⁸ Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelites*. p. 140.

⁹ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 59.

¹⁰ See Landow, *Typological Symbolism* for an extensive analysis of Hunt's typological symbolism in his major works.

as well.

Despite considering himself to be a non-believer, Hunt experienced a change of heart in the 1850s: one of his well-known paintings, *Light of the World* (the first version completed in 1851) served as the visual manifestation of Hunt's conversion according to the painter. Contrary to this change, Hunt did not choose to join any parties, as he shared Ruskin's belief that the violent disagreement between religious sects would have collided with Christ's ideals.¹¹ His relation to individuals such as Henry Wentworth Monk¹² further indicates his tolerance for differing religious views.

1.2 Fascination with the Middle East

As a consequence of British colonization, Victorian England developed a fascination with the Middle East, which resulted in the tendency of including exotic elements in artworks to sensationalise Oriental culture. *Arabian Nights* amused children and adults alike, as such was the case for William Holman Hunt as well.¹³ Additionally, his father entertained him with stories from the New Testament, and the setting, in particular, impressed the young Hunt.¹⁴ His enthrallment with the Middle East would motivate Hunt to incorporate fragments of it into his art throughout his career, as well as to visit the Holy Land as an artist seeking to paint realistic images from the Bible.¹⁵

In his influential work, *Orientalism*, Said lists Ruskin as one of the thinkers of the nineteenth century whose ideas contributed to the widespread appropriation of Middle-Eastern culture.¹⁶ Ruskin, considered to be one of the most significant art critics of Victorian England as well as a close friend of Pre-Raphaelite artists, inevitably connects the aforementioned painters to Said's narrative. Indeed, painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti did not hesitate to include Orientalist details in their works to please the public, even if their

¹¹ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 89.

¹² Monk was a supporter of Zionism and world peace. Hunt and Ruskin decided to help Monk in his pursuit of publishing a new version of Revelations, even though they could not entirely agree with his ideology. Hunt painted Monk's portrait, implementing Jewish symbolism and risking his reputation as a religious painter. (Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, pp. 79-81)

¹³ It is worth noting, that Hunt chose *Recollections of the Arabian Nights* as one of Tennyson's poems to illustrate in *Moxon Tennyson (Poems by Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet Laureate*. London, E. Moxon, 1857).

¹⁴ Diana Holman-Hunt, *My Grandfather*, p. 32.

¹⁵ Inspired by *Modern Painters*, one of the main principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was to strive for realistic portrayals. Painting as true to nature as possible was also a source of motivation for Hunt to embark on his journey to the Middle East.

¹⁶ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, New York, 1979. p. 228.

themes did not fit the Middle-Eastern setting otherwise. It is clear that Hunt intended to distance his approach to Orientalist painting from his contemporaries. He writes the following criticism to differentiate his way of Pre-Raphaelitism from Rossetti's:

Rossetti treated the Gospel history simply as a storehouse of interesting situations and beautiful personages for the artist's pencil, just as the Arthurian legends afterwards were to him, and in due course to his younger proselytes at Oxford.¹⁷

Researchers of Orientalism, such as Sasso, also make a distinction between Hunt and Rossetti in terms of appropriation. According to Sasso, unlike Hunt, who was interested in real contact with the Holy Land, Rossetti "did not experience the alien, simple, and beautiful world of the Middle East, but nevertheless shared Hunt's fascination."¹⁸

Personal letters compiled in his biography,¹⁹ attest to Hunt's evolving appreciation of Middle-Eastern culture and religion, which might have gone against the conventional Orientalist standpoint of Imperialist Britain. His self-portrait²⁰ which he painted for the Uffizi Gallery serves as another indication of Hunt's abiding dedication to the Middle East. In the portrait, Hunt is wearing Eastern-inspired garments, signifying the fact that for the painter, the adornment of said clothing style was a quintessential part of his identity. Hunt might have been a self-proclaimed "Oriental maniac"²¹ yet his art was heavily inspired by the admiration he held for the Holy Land.

2. Enlightenment: *The Light of the World* - first version (1851)²²

As mentioned before, *The Light of the World* is not only one of his most recognized works but Hunt's representation of his conversion to religious beliefs as well. According to Péteri, Hunt regarded this work as the "manifestation of his own, personal experience of divine revelation, so much so that only in the case of this picture did he think self-expression more

¹⁷ Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*. p. 172.

¹⁸ Eleonora Sasso. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018. p. 11.

¹⁹ Diana Holman-Hunt retells a number of stories from Hunt's travels, confirming that while Hunt had his own fair share of prejudices about the people from Middle-Eastern countries, after encountering their customs and living among them for a longer period, he grew to respect them to a greater extent than his contemporaries. (Diana Holman-Hunt, *My Grandfather, His Loves and Wives*)

²⁰ William Holman Hunt. *Selfportrait*. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1867.

²¹ George P. Landow. *William Holman Hunt's Oriental Mania and his Uffizi Self-Portrait*. The Art Bulletin 64. 1982.

²² William Holman Hunt. *The Light of the World*. Keble College, Oxford, 1851.

important than public interest.”²³ The painting was completed in 1851, and the title was taken from the Bible²⁴: “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” said Christ as he healed the blind man.²⁵ There is another instance in which “light of the world”²⁶ is used to describe Christ, yet Hunt did not specify which section was the exact source of his title. Light is used in different contexts in the quoted verses, in one of them it is a metaphor for salvation (John 8:12) and in the later verse, it is used in a general sense, as in bringing light and faith to his believers (John 9:5). Even though Hunt did not join any churches formally, nor did he indicate that his *The Light of the World* was made with any religious institution in mind, the painting became an important example of Protestant iconology. The fact that Protestants claimed the piece is intriguing in hindsight, as it was first accused to be a “papistical fantasy” by Thomas Carlyle.²⁷ Carlyle believed that the way Jesus was portrayed and how he “walked about bedizened in priestly robes and a crown, and with yon jewels on his breast, and a guilt aureole round His head”²⁸ was signifying Catholic ideas. Indeed, it is not coincidental, that it was the Tractarian Thomas Combe who purchased the painting, and after his passing, its permanent residence became the Keble College in Oxford. Nevertheless, its universal message of Christ bringing light to those who are willing to accept him into their lives justified the painting’s position as a Protestant picture.

In the painting, Christ is pictured knocking on a door, which is overgrown with fern, weed, and ivy. If likened to Hunt’s own religious epiphany, the door symbolises his previous existence as a non-believer, it is withered and desolate, yet it is not too late for him to choose a religious path. Critics believe that Hunt’s aim was to be inclusive with the message of the painting, as elements such as the breastplate or the clasp hint towards Hunt’s ideology of acknowledging more than one true church.²⁹ However, what provides the primary symbol of the painter's open-mindedness, is the lamp in Jesus Christ’s hand.

The lantern was designed by Hunt, who penned an elaborate pattern, and from his

²³ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 64.

²⁴ The original title was *Christ at the Door*, which Hunt eventually changed to *Light of the World* as he was amazed by the quote from the Bible. Diana Holman-Hunt, p. 145

²⁵ John 9:5

²⁶ “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

²⁷ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 68.

²⁸ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelism*, p. 355.

²⁹ The breastplate is thought to be referencing Urim and Thummim, while the clasp, which is made out of three parts hint towards the notion that the light of Christ is accessible for all. Bronkhurst, p. 153.

layout, a brass model was made for the model to pose with.³⁰ The shape of it resembles the Middle-Eastern *fanous* lamp. The *fanuos*, or the Ramadan lamp is a frequently recognized object of the Islamic world. While it is not a religious symbol, it is heavily associated with customs connected to Ramadan and Hunt's later works from the Holy Land, such as *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker's Courtship*,³¹ show that he was interested in painting the Eastern-styled lamps. The heptagonal lantern has seven different sides, and the motifs on the apertures led to differing interpretations from both critics and biographers. In his pamphlet, Hunt professed his request for the painting to be left without explanations:

The Light of the World must first be judged as a work of art, and glossing the symbolism rather summarily as follows: 'physical light represented spiritual light - a lantern, the conservator of truth; rust indicated the corrosion of the living faculties; weeds, the idle affection; a neglected orchard, the uncared for riches in God's garden; a bat, which loveth darkness, ignorance; a blossoming thorn, the glorification from suffering - a crown, kingly power; the sacerdotal vestment, the priestly office.'³²

Nevertheless, Hunt did write about the "diversity of designs of the openings of the lantern being essential to the spiritual interpretation of the subject"³³, though he did not specify their exact purpose. As Landow states, the painted elements in the picture must have held a deeper meaning for the painter, as *The Light of the World* is one example of the Hunt striving to connect religious symbolism with realism.³⁴ and that it "recorded a vision that took form in his own mind, thus creating a pictorial emblem of that spiritual experience".³⁵ One of the possible readings proposes that the seven sides meant to represent the seven churches of Revelations,³⁶ Ruskin believed that the lamp itself is the light of consciousness, while Hunt's daughter, Gladys, wrote about the lantern's perforations being an indication of the different forms and sources of truth.³⁷ As only three sides can be seen in the painting, Hunt's choice of

³⁰ What Hunt did not take into account was that the metal model would become unbearably hot when lit, and so the model could hardly hold the lantern which the artist designed with painstaking precision. (Diana Holman-Hunt, p. 84.)

³¹ William Holman Hunt. *A Street Scene in Cairo: The Lantern-Maker's Courtship*. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham. 1854-1861

³² Hunt 1865, p. 2, quoted in Tate 1984, p.119.

³³ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné* vol 1., p.153.

³⁴ George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (Routledge Revivals). Routledge, 2015. p. 34.

³⁵ Landow, *Typological Symbolism*, p. 125.

³⁶ "Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." Revelations 1:11

³⁷ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné* vol 2., p.. 39.

said three out of the seven apertures is no coincidence. By opting to include the Star of David, Hunt's objective to represent Judaism in his picture concerning the all-encompassing nature of faith coincides with his tolerant nature. Yet the Keble College argued against the possibility of the painting suggesting the existence of more than one legitimate churches³⁸, a criticism Hunt would later respond to, through his modified version of *The Light of the World*. Appropriately, Sarah Carr-Gomm's *The Dictionary of Symbols in Art*³⁹ features the lantern from *The Light of the World* to exemplify the entry for lamps, lanterns, and light, which demonstrates that Hunt's *The Light of the World* is acknowledged for its use of the lamp symbol.

3. Flickering light: *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854/1855)⁴⁰

After the completion of *The Light of the World*, Hunt could finally pursue his dream of travelling to the East. The painting, which he first started to work on upon his arrival in Jerusalem, titled *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, is a precise example of Hunt's most favoured element: the use of typological symbolism in a realist setting. *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* was inspired by Luke 2:48-50⁴¹, and the following excerpt from Hunt's memoir perfectly encompasses his ambitions for the painting:

When I began to determine the composition of my picture, I was continually checked by discovery of my ignorance of Jewish ordinances, and I had to turn to Exodus, Leviticus, and the accounts of the building of the Temple; this led me to the Talmud, Josephus, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the more I felt disposed to reject tradition, religious as well as artistic, not convincingly true. My course necessitated increasing independence of will as I proceeded, and I could not escape the fear that with my fast diminishing purse I might be unable to overcome all the difficulties.⁴²

It is evident that the artist was keen on the details of his painting, and the fact that he immersed himself in Jewish culture in order to create *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple* as realistically as possible is a testament to his loyalty to the fundamental

³⁸ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné* vol 1, p 153.

³⁹ Sarah Carr-Gomm. *The Dictionary of Symbols in Art - the Illustrated Key to Western Painting and Sculpture*. Duncan Baird Publishers, London, 1995. p. 277.

⁴⁰ William Holman Hunt. *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, 1854/55

⁴¹ 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." 49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 "But they did not understand what he was saying to them."

⁴² Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, p. 406

Pre-Raphaelite characteristics. Hunt wished to only use models for the figures in his work who were actually Jewish, which led to a delay in the painting process.⁴³

The painting is set in the Temple, where the young Christ is portrayed with the Pharisees. The two sides are in a heated debate about religion when Mary and Joseph arrive. *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple* is a work that is filled with typological symbolism, which results in a painting that requires the reading of meticulous pamphlets and analyses for those who are not familiar with religious symbols. According to Péteri, through these images, Hunt's intention was to highlight the conflict between the Old and the New Testaments:

The Finding basically concentrates on the clash between the old and new religious laws; Christ is shown as the bearer of new faith facing the stiff opposition of the Pharisees, the representatives of the old one. The main theme of rejection - the rejection of Christ and the new law he stands for - is underlined by parallel background scenes.⁴⁴

The details in the background, such as the doves being chased away, and the potential rejection of the headstone, signify the mentioned conflict of old and new, while the sacrificial lamb is an obvious premonition of Christ's fate. The characters in the foreground have been analysed in various research,⁴⁵ and for the purpose of this paper two characters, in particular, will be further discussed: the blind beggar and the lamp-lighter.

The presence of the blind man on the right side of the painting is another acknowledgement of the Biblical story of Christ giving sight to the man who was born blind. In the case of *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple*, this serves as a typological symbol, a prefigured image of the man similar to the one Christ would save in his later life. The blind beggar is the antithesis of the blind Rabbi, and their difference lies not in the physical blindness that they both experience, but in the spiritual sight they have for the new teachings of Christ. For his faith, the beggar will be rewarded with his forthcoming miraculous healing. In her book, Diana Holman-Hunt shares an anecdote that gives further evidence of Hunt's infatuation with the aforementioned story.⁴⁶ : apparently, during his travels in the Holy Land,

⁴³ Diana Holman-Hunt, *My Grandfather*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Caroline Kaye, for example, writes extensively about the clothes, the positions, and the facial expressions of the Pharisees and the Holy Family. Kaye, Caroline. *The Disputation: The Enduring Representations in William Holman Hunt's "The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple," 1860*. Diss. Manchester Metropolitan University, 2022.

⁴⁶ An amusing addition to this anecdote, is the fact that upon visiting the Pool of Siloam, Hunt was attacked by the Sheik of Siloam and his men. Hunt was experienced in boxing, so he could eventually defeat his enemies, and this fight was not the only one he had to win during his travels. Diana Holman-Hunt, p. 145.

Hunt was desperate to visit the Pool of Siloam, the location where the blind man was miraculously healed, and where Christ uttered “I am the light of the World”.⁴⁷ By including the man in *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple* as well, Hunt created a pattern of using John’s story and the title, Light of the World.

The lamp-lighter, perhaps the smallest background character in size, is a figure that is overlooked in most analyses of *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple*.⁴⁸ Lamp-lighters were an integral part of the urban setting of Victorian England, and aside from their primary function of lighting and extinguishing the streetlamps, due to the nature of their profession, lamp-lighters were figures of safety as well. In general, as a result of their cyclical task of putting out and lighting lamps day by day, lamp-lighters can symbolise the ever-changing nature of existence, and the circle of life. In *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, the lamp-lighter is holding an object, with which he is in the process of dealing with the ornate chandeliers that are hanging from the ceiling of the lavish building. However, it is not known whether the lamp-lighter is lighting or extinguishing the candles on the lamp. In context of the painting’s theme of clashing ideas, the ambiguity of the lamp-lighter’s actions can be interpreted perhaps as the suspended state between old and new, or the periodic change between concepts. Like most, Hunt had his fair share of doubts about religion as well, and the lamp-lighter might be symbolising that in a subtle way. An intriguing detail while discussing the lamp-lighter originates from the colour plate which Hunt completed after finishing the original.⁴⁹ The colour plate is smaller in size, but it is the exact replica of *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* except for one detail: the lamp-lighter. The figure is the only missing character from the original, and there are no records of the intention behind omitting the lamp-lighter, only theories which indicate that it was due to the monotony of replicating the intricate painting.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, one could argue that the decision not to include the small figure when all else was reproduced might carry more depth than mere convenience.

A significant difference lies between the reception and the message of *The Light of the World* and *The Finding of the Saviour of the Temple*:

The Finding served as a kind of reassurance for the Christian congregations about the validity of their faith, it has a similar message to the earlier *The Light of the World*. The

⁴⁷ John:12

⁴⁸ The figure is also missing from the *Key Plate to Holman Hunt’s Picture of the Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, which was published by E. Gambart & Co., the copyright owner of the painting at the time.

⁴⁹ William Holman Hunt. Colour plate XXV. National Museums Liverpool, Liverpool, 1862-1866

⁵⁰ Bennett, *Artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Circle*, p. 79.

difference is, though, that the imaginative, visionary character of *The Light of the World* made it less readily accessible to its audience than the more realistic nature of its successor.⁵¹

This difference between the fantastic *Light of the World* and the realistic *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* can be taken into account when considering them as works that are reflecting Hunt's own relation to religion. If the *Light of the World* is the explosive realization of religious beliefs being attainable, then *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* is the more subdued version of living with faith: the quiet assurance of religion can naturally be questioned throughout one's life, and the ambiguity of the lamp-lighter represents the ever-flickering doubt that people can never fully extinguish.

4. Completeness: *The Lady of Shalott* (1890-1905)⁵²

Alfred Tennyson was one of the few contemporaries of the Pre-Raphaelites who they believed was important enough to be included in their *List of Immortals*,⁵³ and surely, the members of the Brotherhood often illustrated Tennyson's poems. One of the most popular topics among them was the story of the Lady of Shalott. Hunt completed three versions of the *Lady of Shalott* throughout his life, and for the purpose of this paper, the third version will be further analyzed, as it is his most elaborate take on the poem, and once again, an Oriental-inspired lamp has an important place in the painting's web of symbolism. The ageing Hunt had almost completely lost his eyesight by the time he finished the painting, thus the Lady of Shalott is his last major work.

Hunt's take on Tennyson's poem interprets the story of the Lady in a unique way.⁵⁴ In Hunt's rendition, the Lady is not a damsel in distress, rather she is portrayed as an artist, thus by painting the exact moment her fate is sealed, Hunt likens her destiny to the failure of the artist. The fact that Hunt returned to this concept repeatedly throughout his career shows how significant the allegory was to him. The Lady is the "embodiment of the artist, entrusted with a sacred mission"⁵⁵ and in order to encourage her, motivational illustrations showing scenes

⁵¹ Péteri, *Victorian Approaches to Religion*, p. 75.

⁵² William Holman Hunt. *The Lady of Shalott*. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. 1890-1905

⁵³ "Alfred **" in Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*. p. 159.

⁵⁴ It is worth mentioning, that Hunt did not wish to explain the complex symbolism of the painting. Even though it is known, that most of Hunt's brushstrokes were laden with hidden meaning, the painter wanted to leave the interpretation to the individual viewers. Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné*. vol. 1, p. 271.

⁵⁵ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné*. vol. 1, p. 272

of devotion are painted on the frescoes behind the Lady. The roundel representing Heracles is perhaps the most intriguing instance of this. Bronkhurst summarises the significance of this mythological hero in the subsequent way:

Hercules is depicted plucking apple from a tree in the garden of the Hesperides. The halo around his head suggests that Hunt regarded him as a type of Christ. This classical subject symbolizes valour but also suggests a refusal to be cowed by challenges, however great. In that sense, it can stand as an exhortation to the lady [...] ⁵⁶

Hercules then, is parallel to the resilience of the Lady, who is eager to face challenges, even if it would result in her own demise. If the Lady is the metaphor of the artist, then the internal conflict of remaining a constant observer and outsider of events and the desire to leave the paint and exist as a part of life outside the canvas is the real test for an artist.

The lamp stands out as the only Eastern-influenced object among the plethora of artefacts scattered around in the Lady's room. Bronkhurst implements Gladys Holman-Hunt's reading of the painting, and writes the following section about her interpretation of the lamp:

It is a symbol of "the light of learning" ⁵⁷. The Theban Sphinx at its base has been interpreted by a recent commentator as a symbol of the Lady in terms of threatening female sexuality, but it is perhaps more likely that the artist included it as a symbol of superstition, to suggest the "light of wisdom triumphing over mystery and fear. The expanded version of Hunt's 1905 pamphlet, published in 1913, states that once the Lady breaks her vow, "the doves of peace which have nestled in her tower find refuge from turmoil in the pure ether of the sky, and in their going extinguish the lamp that stood ever lighted" ⁵⁸. The fact that the lamp has been violently snuffed out suggests the desecration of a holy space and hints at the Lady's upcoming death. ⁵⁹

The lamp has several parts, and from the excerpt above, it is evident that it is overflowing with symbolism. The top part of it incorporates Middle Eastern oil lamps, which aside from being known from the stories surrounding the Jinns, are also featured in the Torah as prominent symbols of completeness. ⁶⁰ Hunt familiarized himself with Jewish theological texts, so it is entirely possible that he was aware of the oil lamps' significance. Owls are the symbol of wisdom in many countries, so it is not surprising that Hunt choose to incorporate them in his creation of a cross-cultural lamp. Even though during his stay in Egypt, Hunt

⁵⁶ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné*. vol. 1, p. 272

⁵⁷ Gladys Holman-Hunt. *The Lady of Shalott by W. Holman-Hunt*, Manchester Gallery Files, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Hunt 1913, II, p. 402. as quoted in Bronkhurst

⁵⁹ Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné*. vol. 1, p. 272.

⁶⁰ Matthew Berkowitz. *The Lamp and the Oil*. Jewish Theological Seminary, Jun 5, 2004.
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-lamp-and-the-oil/>

became familiar with the presence of the Great Sphinx of Giza,⁶¹ the motifs on the lamp portray the Theban Sphinx instead, as the symbol of mystery and riddles, which shows that the painter was knowledgeable in the difference between the different types of this mystical animal. The lamp is positioned to be the fourth loom post, signifying fire among the four elements⁶², however, as the lamp is suddenly extinguished, the harmony of the four elements of nature is broken. As one of the main themes of the painting is completeness, the abrupt disruption of said state by the lamp, which stands for passion, knowledge, and the “light of learning”, can be interpreted in a way that is relevant when discussing Hunt’s philosophy. By placing the Oriental lamp into a significant position among the otherwise culturally European objects, Hunt creates a synthesis between Eastern and Christian cultures. As the theme of the painting is the challenge and failure of the artist, a personal dilemma of Hunt as well, the incorporation of the lamp once again elevates the cross-cultural significance of the work.

5. Religious Tolerance: *The Light of the World* - third version (1900-1904)

Hunt was not satisfied with the treatment of his work, the first version of *The Light of the World*, at Keble College as they charged fees from visitors who wished to see the artwork, and as a result, he decided to paint a larger picture in hopes that it would become accessible for rich and poor alike.⁶³ He finished his third version of the painting in 1904, and ever since 1908 it has been exhibited in St Paul’s Cathedral. Hunt did not wish to merely replicate the original, therefore certain alterations were made to the painting, most notably to the lantern. Having travelled the Holy Land for years, Hunt came across an assortment of people with different religious and cultural beliefs. One encounter, in particular, prompted Hunt to add a crucial detail to his third edition of *The Light of the World*. According to Bronkhurst, a learned Muslim man said the following to Hunt:

You have wrongly named your picture as the *Light of The World*, as you have only represented Christ as the “Light of Christianity”, which is by no means the “world”. We Moslems far outnumber you, and while denying His divinity, we have always recognized Him as a great Prophet and Teacher, equal to Moses, and even Mahomet. Why thus

⁶¹ William Holman Hunt. *The Sphinx at Gizah*. Harris Museum, Preston, 1854.

⁶² The loom posts represent the remaining elements in the following way: “To the left water is symbolised by a shell at the top of the loom post and waves at the base. In the middle, a tightly furled flower at the top and leaves at the base represent earth; while for air Hunt has decorated the right-hand loom post with stylized clouds and sun rays.” Bronkhurst, *A Catalogue Raisonné*, p.272.

⁶³ Bronkhurst, vol 1, p. 154.

ignore us?⁶⁴

Since the painter was affected by the man's speech, he decided to add a noticeable crescent moon to one of the lantern's front apertures, which functions as an indisputable hint towards Islamic culture. Additionally, the incorporation of the symbol served as a reprimand for Keble College's criticism of the original *The Light of the World* for its acknowledgement of religions other than Christianity. Even with the first edition of the painting, Hunt's intention was to portray the diversity of different churches in a subtle way with the lantern's apertures, and heeding the suggestion of a man from the Middle East serves as yet another case of inclusivity from the artist through the usage of the lantern symbol.

6. Conclusion

The paintings discussed in this research are not related thematically, however, there are noticeable common motives which suggest that there are connections to be made while discussing *The Light of the World*, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, and *The Lady of Shalott*. The Biblical story of the blind man for example is evidently important to William Holman Hunt, as is the quote "the light of the World" which originates from the same chapter. Hunt associated sight with both physical light and spiritual illumination and his use of lamps and lanterns strengthen the symbol in the aforementioned artworks. The blind beggar listening to the new laws, Christ carrying the lantern of enlightenment, and the Lady suffering from the consequences of choosing to *see*, are all manifestations of the painter's own experiences with religion. Through the application of light, lanterns and lamps into the paintings, Hunt also fulfilled his lifelong appreciation of the Middle East and the Holy Land. Incorporating these objects into pieces that are both deeply personal and would otherwise not be associated with the East, is a sign of William Holman Hunt's tolerance for churches other than Christian, and cultures that are not European.

⁶⁴ Judith Bronkhurs. *A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vols. New Haven & London, 2005. p. 290 .

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