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*'Twixt Two Worlds:
The Visions of James Tissot*

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VOLUME 1: TEXT

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Melissa E. Buron

01/09/2021

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Abstract

James Tissot (1836–1902) is typically remembered for his compositions of fashionably dressed women and debonair men, which seem to celebrate materiality over spirituality. Yet Tissot's most ambitious artistic effort was as a visionary religious painter. From 1885 until his death, in 1902, he was consumed by an extraordinary campaign to meticulously research and illustrate the Bible, ultimately creating hundreds of watercolours depicting scenes from the Old Testament and the New Testament, the latter under the series title *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* or *The Life of Christ* (ca. 1886–1894). This thesis presents a new understanding of the *Life of Christ* illustrations, for which the artist is least well known today, although they brought him more fame and commercial success than any other work during his lifetime.

While Tissot committed to this project of painstakingly researching his illustrations for *The Life of Christ*, he did not hide his simultaneous enthusiasm for Spiritualist mediums and séances. This thesis examines how and to what extent the visual languages of two systems of belief—Spiritualism and Catholicism—informed Tissot's *Life of Christ* watercolours. By interpreting the *Life of Christ* illustrations through these dual lenses, this thesis presents an entirely original assessment of these works of art that fully reveals their complexity and originality. Reinterpreting key images in Tissot's *The Life of Christ* with this fresh perspective provides a new understanding of their historical context and a critical reappraisal of their significance, thus demonstrating the extent to which Tissot was an artist perpetually "'twixt two worlds.'

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Beata Beatrix, ca. 1871–1872
Oil on canvas
34 7/16 × 27 1/4 in. (87.5 × 69.3 cm)
Art Institute of Chicago, Charles L. Hutchinson Collection,
1925.722

CHAPTER 4

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Oil on canvas pasted on wall
Dimensions unknown
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Oil on unknown support
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Private collection

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Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Thomas E. Kirby, 06.39
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Photograph
Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France

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Photograph
Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Photograph
Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon, France, Ph2255 2
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Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Photograph
Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France

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Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France
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Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of R.B.F. Barr, Esq., Q.C., 1966, 65/28

Introduction

*Not only is [Tissot] deeply religious in his daily life, but he is something beyond that: he is a mystic and seer of visions.*¹

—Cleveland Moffett (1899)

*We readily accept that common sense has little to do with art making. So why is it that spiritualist art has been belatedly acknowledged by the art institution?*²

—Lars Bang Larsen and Marco Pasi (2016)

The name James Tissot (1836–1902) is usually associated with paintings of elegant women and debonair men, images that seem to celebrate materiality over spirituality and suggest the artist's interest in fashion rather than faith. Yet Tissot's most personally meaningful and ambitious work was as a visionary religious artist. His approximately 365 watercolour interpretations of scenes and subjects from the New Testament, published under the series title *La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* or *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (hereafter *The Life of Christ*), commonly known as the 'Tissot Bible,' represent the majority of his oeuvre in the final two decades of his career, and they reveal his concentrated engagement with religious imagery.³ Today, these illustrations are among the artist's least-known creations, although they brought him more fame and commercial success than anything else during his lifetime. These works fell out of favour in the twentieth century, despite the declaration in the artist's obituary in *The Times* that 'the immensity of his effort ... and ... the superiority of the workmanship, make Tissot's "The Life of Christ" a masterpiece that stands

¹ Cleveland Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ,' *McClure's* 12, no. 5 (March 1899): 387.

² Lars Bang Larsen and Marco Pasi, 'Spectres of Art,' in *Georgiana Houghton Spirit Drawings*, exh. cat. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016), 25.

³ James Tissot, *La vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (Tours: Alfred Mame, 1896); James Tissot *The Life of Our Saviour Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings* (New York: McClure-Tissot Co., 1899); James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, 3 vols., notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903). For more bibliographic information on the French, English, and American editions, see Willard Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot: A Bio-Critical Study* (PhD Thesis, Washington University, 1971), 272n21.

by itself and is likely to keep the painter's name alive.¹⁴ The obituary concludes with the assertion that 'it was not until [Tissot] turned his attention to the great work of his life [*The Life of Christ*] that he became widely known or that he was recognized as a painter of exceptional and striking achievement.¹⁵ Despite being underappreciated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the biblical illustrations' legacy endures in popular culture, most notably in the world of film. A greater appreciation of these images' historical context, meaning, and influence can be attained by interpreting them through the framework of trends in late nineteenth-century occult spirituality and orthodox religion. Tissot's attraction to Spiritualism at the same time as the Catholic Revival in France provides the fundamental structure for this thesis's re-examination of *The Life of Christ*.

Raised and educated in the Roman Catholic tradition, Tissot publicly expressed a renewed interest in this religion as well as in the occult philosophies of Spiritualism after the untimely death in 1882 of his companion Kathleen Newton (née Kathleen Irene Ashburnham Kelly), at age twenty-eight. Three years later, in 1885, Tissot claimed that he witnessed a spiritual vision during Mass in the Parisian Church of Saint-Sulpice. He shared the revelation that he allegedly beheld in a painting titled *Inner Voices* (also known as *Christ the Comforter* or *The Ruins*, 1885, see Fig. 2.1). This experience inspired Tissot to travel through the Holy Land between October 1886 and March 1887, and then again from October 1888 to April 1889 as well as from February/March to November 1896. In 1894 he exhibited 270 watercolours and sketches from *The Life of Christ* at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars in Paris. Approximately 350 New Testament watercolours were also exhibited at the Lemer cier Gallery, London, from 1896 to 1897, where they caused a public sensation. In total, Tissot

⁴ 'Death of M. James Tissot,' *The Times*, 11 August 1902.

⁵ 'Death of M. James Tissot.'

made nearly five hundred religious watercolour illustrations for the New and Old Testaments, to which his life and career were almost exclusively devoted from 1885 until his death, in 1902.⁶

Prior to the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ,'* which ran from 23 October 2009 to 17 January 2010,⁷ critics broadly derided Tissot's religious illustrations period as representing the collapse of his talent and the reason his fame diminished after his death. The late nineteenth-century author Arnold Bennett described this time as a ruinous, guilt-fuelled period: 'Tissot was deeply affected and regarded himself as [Kathleen Newton's] murderer and became *dévo*t. This was really the origin of his journey to Palestine and the ruin of his art.'⁸ Art historian and Tissot specialist Willard Misfeldt declares that 'it is from this point onward that one is justified in referring to Tissot as a man whose actions are not fully explainable in rational terms.'⁹ Another preeminent twentieth-century Tissot scholar, Michael Wentworth, issued perhaps the most scathing assessment in his monograph *James Tissot* (1984):

Tissot's religious pictures proved detrimental in their effect on his posthumous standing as an artist. Their success in the nineties had the effect of forcing his earlier *mondaine* pictures into the background where they were soon forgotten. ... The *succès fou* of the Bible illustrations was of extremely short duration. ... With their mediocrity looming monolithically in the immediate historical background, they continued to exert a baleful influence, and earlier pictures which might have been appreciated for their own considerable merits were viewed with the same jaundiced eye. Their sanctimonious dullness antagonised the admirers of his earlier work beyond all patience, and their only lasting effect was to create a confusion about

⁶ Tissot completed approximately 365 New Testament watercolours, dated ca. 1886–1896, with 345 now held at the Brooklyn Museum. His Old Testament watercolours, dated 1896–1902, are located in the collection of the Jewish Museum, New York. Ninety-five illustrations of the Old Testament book of Genesis were exhibited in two galleries at the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts exhibition, Champ-de-Mars, Paris, in April 1901. More Old Testament illustrations, although it is not known how many, were finished between April 1901 and August 1902, the year of Tissot's death.

⁷ Judith F. Dolkart, ed., *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ,'* exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2009).

⁸ Arnold Bennett is cited in James Laver, *Vulgar Society: The Romantic Career of James Tissot* (London: Constable, 1936), 48–49. Tissot is mentioned in Arnold Bennett's diary entry from Sunday, 9 April 1905. See Arnold Bennett, *The Journal of Arnold Bennett* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), 214.

⁹ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 238.

Tissot's aims and qualities as an artist which has persisted to this day, resulting in an aesthetic disrepute and diminished historical standing which is undeserved.¹⁰

Given that such disdainful appraisals were levied by Misfeldt and Wentworth, two leading twentieth-century Tissot scholars, it is not surprising that the artist's biblical illustrations have received limited scholarly attention. This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance by highlighting the importance of *The Life of Christ* in the artist's oeuvre as well as in the context of the late nineteenth-century revival of Catholicism—the orthodox religion that he was educated in—and contemporary ideas about Spiritualism—the occult mysticism that Tissot was attracted to. He ultimately created a highly original series of biblical illustrations that aestheticised both of these interests through the syncretism of established orthodox religious iconography and motifs from Spiritualism's visual lexicon.

Tissot did not hide his enthusiasm for Spiritualist mediums and séances during the nearly two decades that he painstakingly researched his illustrations for *The Life of Christ*. Two of his compositions provide especially strong visual evidence of his occult curiosities at this time. One is *The Apparition*¹¹ (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885, see Fig. 1.1), an oil painting that scholars long presumed was lost but which was recently discovered in the course of research for this thesis.¹² This painting depicts the materialisation of Newton's spirit, which Tissot thought he witnessed during a séance led by the renowned

¹⁰ Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 196.

¹¹ English titles are used throughout this thesis, with French titles in parentheses only when the work is commonly known or referred to by this title.

¹² A painting titled *L'Apparition* appears in the sale catalogue of Tissot's belongings after his death (accessed in the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, 15 September 2015). The accompanying description, however, seems to refer to *Inner Voices*: 'Le Christ revêtu sacerdotaux, au milieu des ruines de la Cour des Comptes, vient au secours d'un malheureux abusé de la Commune.' (Christ clothed as a priest, in the midst of the ruins of the Court of Auditors, comes to the aid of an unfortunate victim of the Commune.) *Hôtel Drouot, Paris, L'Atelier de J. James Tissot, 9–10 July 1903*, 3. English translation mine. Tissot's early biographer George Bastard says the painting was not in the artist's studio after his death. George Bastard, 'James Tissot: Notes Intimes,' *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*, 2nd ser. 36 (November 1906): 278. Michael Wentworth 'supposes' that Tissot destroyed it. Wentworth, cited with no page number in Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot: Prints from the Gotlieb Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1991), 157. In 2001 Christopher Wood listed the painting in a private collection in London. See Christopher Wood's biographical entry 'Kathleen Newton,' in Jiminez, *Dictionary of Artists' Models*, 397.

medium William Eglinton. Tissot also subsequently created mezzotint print versions of this painting (see Fig. 1.2). The other work that offers compelling proof of his Spiritualist interests is the etching, *Portrait of William Eglinton* (1885, see Fig. 1.6). This rendering was eventually used for the frontispiece of *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of The Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1890), a biography of Eglinton written by John Stephen Farmer.¹³

In light of Tissot's interest in Spiritualism, a reconsideration of key images in *The Life of Christ* uncovers a fresh perspective. Although overtly religious at first glance, when also viewed through the lens of Spiritualism's visual vocabulary—especially against the backdrop of the Catholic Revival—the images reveal themselves to be more complex and multivalent than has been previously considered by scholars.¹⁴ The approach of using this framework to reinterpret the biblical watercolours is newly employed in this thesis. Spiritualism was barely mentioned in the catalogue published on the occasion of the Brooklyn Museum's comprehensive exhibition. Although that publication was the most complete modern scholarly assessment of *The Life of Christ* at that time, its omission of Tissot's Spiritualist interests as they relate to the watercolours is conspicuous. The effect of Spiritualist theories on Tissot's visual vocabulary in *The Life of Christ* has not yet been sufficiently considered. The objective of this thesis is thus to examine how and to what extent the visual languages of both Spiritualism and Catholicism informed this body of work, and how, concurrently, they influenced the artist's lifestyle and working environment during his final years.

¹³ John Stephen Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of the Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886; 2nd ed., London: E. W. Allen, 1890).

¹⁴ A wider exploration of the visual language of Spiritualism in later nineteenth-century British and French paintings is beyond the scope of this thesis. It would be rich territory for future scholars to develop, however. For more on the Catholic Revival, see Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

Tissot spent much of the last two decades of his life, from his return to France in 1882 until his death in 1902, at his family estate in eastern France, the Château de Buillon. Archives now held as part of a private collection at the estate provided incomparable primary documentation during the course of research for this thesis, including documents, photographs, letters, paintings, furniture, and even Tissot's boots and paint box. Tissot often retreated to this property while working on the biblical illustrations, and he is buried in his family's private chapel on the estate. Select photographs from albums compiled by the artist open a new window onto Tissot's world. That Tissot emblazoned his monogram across the grounds of the Château de Buillon—from metal gates to riding saddles to silverware—demonstrates that he was a man keenly aware of marketing himself, even in this remote location.¹⁵ The extensive upgrades that Tissot made to the estate (inherited from his father in 1888) and the elegance of its furnishings confirm that even though he made public claims about devoting himself to spiritual isolation and holy pilgrimages after 1885, he was also a man of refined taste who preferred to live in luxurious environments surrounded by select visitors. Photographs of Tissot taken across the estate reveal the importance of this place and document the care that he took to maintain it in the final two decades of his life. The site and its archives, from the chapel to the occult and religious volumes in the library inventory, also provide evidence of his blended spiritualities. Buillon itself therefore embodies the paradoxes of an artist who was constantly weaving a complex tapestry of seemingly contradictory interests.

The archival material in Buillon supplemented research conducted using primary sources located in the Harry Price Library of Magical Literature (Senate House Library, London) as well as the archives of the Society for Psychical Research (London and

¹⁵ The château collection even includes a branding tool with the 'JTJ' monogram.

Cambridge University Library), all of which hold rich resources related to nineteenth-century Spiritualism. Terminology employed regularly in these materials, including the Spiritualist journal *Light: A Journal Devoted to the Highest Interests of Humanity both Here and Hereafter*, helped shape the lexicon for the visual language of Spiritualism that is used throughout the following chapters, which facilitates discussion of Spiritualism's role in Tissot's compositions. Access to these publications was also aided by the digitised resources of the International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals.¹⁶ Descriptions in these sources of otherworldly occurrences at séances—especially those conducted by Tissot's preferred medium, Eglinton—provide critical details about the phenomena that Tissot was exposed to when experimenting with Spiritualism. These details, it will be shown, informed the artist's depictions of ethereal subjects, such as the spirits in *The Apparition* and select images from *The Life of Christ*.

These primary sources supported the methodological framework of this thesis, which examines Tissot's biblical illustrations through the dual lenses of Tissot's simultaneous belief in Spiritualism and Catholicism. The secondary literature around nineteenth-century religion and Spiritualism also facilitated a contextualised interpretation of Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations. A close reading of these images as primary sources was also essential, and is complemented by contemporary commentary on the works. In addition to Spiritualist periodicals, research for this thesis included other primary sources such as exhibition reviews, poetry, and literature as well as artists' memoirs and letters. The approach is not simply biographical. Rather, nineteenth-century Western narratives concerning perceptions about death and the afterlife are situated within complex contemporary debates about religion and Spiritualism. Tissot's biography *is* relevant for the discussion about his attraction to

¹⁶ These can be viewed at <http://iapsop.com>.

Spiritualism, which intensified after the death of Newton, and in relation to his three pilgrimages to the Holy Land after his religious vision in Saint-Sulpice.¹⁷

The methodological approach and new contributions of this thesis topic were tested and refined by my participation in several peer-reviewed scholarly symposia. At both the 33rd Annual Nineteenth Century Studies Association conference, 'Spiritual Matters/Matters of the Spirit' (Asheville, North Carolina, 22–24 March 2012), and the conference 'Visions of Enchantment: Occultism, Spirituality and Visual Culture' (University of Cambridge, 17–18 March 2014), papers presenting aspects of ongoing research into the visual language of Spiritualism provided a distinctive framework for scholarship on this generally overlooked subject.¹⁸ These conferences also signal a growing network of scholars and forthcoming publications on the subject, which will augment the growing depth and breadth of research on the intersection of orthodox religion, occult spirituality, and visual culture in the late nineteenth century.

One of the main challenges and exciting opportunities offered by this research is the complete absence of a definitive publication that traces the visual languages and narratives of the Victorian Spiritualist movement as they relate to the art of the period.¹⁹ The visual analysis presented in this thesis is therefore situated within existing histories of Spiritualism,

¹⁷ The most comprehensive biographical accounts of Tissot's life have been previously cited: Wentworth, *James Tissot*, and Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*.

¹⁸ Additional participation in the following conferences further developed the original ideas presented in this thesis: 'The Arts and Feeling in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture' (Birkbeck, London, 2015); 'Biblical Imagery in the Age of Spectacle' (College Art Association, New York, 2016); 'Consuming [the] Victorians' (Cardiff University, Wales, 2016); and 'Crossing the Channel: French Refugee Artists in London (1870–1904)' (Paul Mellon Centre, London, 2018).

¹⁹ For more on interdisciplinary theoretical approaches to the 'spectral turn,' ghosts, and haunting, see María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds., *The Spectralities Reader Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). On the framework of 'occulture,' see Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006).

artist biographies, and thematic texts. Secondary literature about late nineteenth-century religion and Spiritualism as well as primary theological and occult texts are central to this analysis and support the interpretation of select compositions by Tissot. Scholarship that highlights an individual artist's interest in Spiritualism appears intermittently in nineteenth-century studies, as will be discussed. The tracing of Spiritualist theories as a visual language across the latter half of the century, however, remains a lacuna in scholarship. Tissot's unique combination of two systems of belief, Spiritualism and Catholicism, which manifested in his religious illustrations, establishes his particular contribution to late nineteenth-century visual culture. This thesis restores a level of meaning to the interpretation of Tissot's late works of art, and contributes to a more complete understanding of his oeuvre by repositioning him as part of a network of artists whose interest in Spiritualism and its effect on their art has yet to be explored.

Victorian Spiritualism and its French counterpart, *Spiritism*,²⁰ were complex systems of belief that were not comprised of a singular and homogenous discourse.²¹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a full account of nineteenth-century Spiritualism, but it is useful to address the fact that the movement drew from sources such as scientific attempts to

²⁰ The Anglicised term 'Spiritualism' is used throughout this thesis, since Tissot's documented Spiritualist activity occurred in London under the guidance of an English medium, William Eglinton. Spiritualism is also capitalised throughout (with the exception of quotations in which the original usage is lowercase) to signal its standing among believers with other orthodox systems of faith. For more on *Spiritism*, see Sophie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853–1931* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).

²¹ There is extensive secondary literature on nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the occult. See, for example, Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Antonio Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of the Victorian Mind* (London: William Heinemann, 2008); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Susan Owens, *The Ghost: A Cultural History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2017); Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers: the Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004); Colin Wilson, *The Occult: A History* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1995).

prove life after death and Christian doctrines that describe heavenly afterlife. This socio-religious movement sought to provide confirmation that the soul survives and continues to progress through stages of development after bodily death. Spiritualism took this belief further than Judeo-Christian doctrines of the hereafter by presenting direct communication between the living and the dead as proof of this theory. These ideas about life after death were explored in Spiritualist meetings and in a variety of periodicals, such as *Light*. The movement's pervasive popularity in Western cultures transcended class, gender, and creed. Its ideas were attractive to some of the period's most accomplished and notable cultural celebrities, including the prominent evolutionary scientist Alfred Russel Wallace; the critic and author John Ruskin; poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson; and artists George Frederick Watts, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Holman Hunt. Spiritualism is thus best considered as part of the wider scientific, cultural, and social discourses around nineteenth-century practices of mourning the dead and perceptions of life after death.

Tissot's enthusiasm for the occult was well known during his lifetime. He even was listed 'among men of intellect in France who have embraced the truths of Spiritualism' by the American doctor, author, and Spiritualist proselytiser James Martin Peebles in his book *What is Spiritualism, Who are These Spiritualists, and What has Spiritualism Done for the World?* (1903), which was published the year after Tissot's death.²² In a roster of notable proponents of the movement, Tissot is described as the 'author and painter of the life of Christ.— Spiritualists, however, will remember M. Tissot best for his exquisite picture entitled "Apparition Medianimique" [*sic*], representing two spirit forms which showed themselves

²² James Martin Peebles, *What is Spiritualism, Who are These Spiritualists, and What has Spiritualism Done for the World?* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Peebles Institute Print, 1903), 102.

through the mediumship of Mr. Eglinton, one of them that of Mr. Eglinton's spirit friend "Ernest," and the other that of M. Tissot's departed fiancée.²³ In an 1899 magazine article advertising Tissot's biblical illustrations, the reformist rabbi Clifton Harby Levy claimed, 'It is true that up to this time M. Tissot had been a Catholic more by courtesy than by conviction, that he had been interested deeply in the problems of spiritualism, hypnotism, and thought transference.'²⁴ This is an especially interesting observation regarding Tissot's occult interests, given the article's purported objective to promote *The Life of Christ*. It was even reported in an article titled 'Parisian Medical Chit-Chat,' in the American trade periodical *Cincinnati Lancet-Clinic*, that 'at present day the spiritualistic movement increases in innumerable ways. Ordinary painters, usually so material, use spiritualism to produce miracles—Odilon Redon, in his lithographs, for instance, and James Tissot in his precise designs, that are materialised by phantoms.'²⁵ The comment that Tissot's art was 'materialised by phantoms' suggests that he was under the control of spirits, possibly engaged in a practice like the automatic drawing performed by mediums while in a trance. This practice is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, in correlation with Tissot's alleged channelling of images for *The Life of Christ*.

Tissot probably believed in Spiritualism, but, as an artist who was keenly aware of current trends, it is possible that he also intentionally capitalised on its popularity. Much of the previous scholarship on this topic nevertheless treats Tissot's interest in Spiritualism and even his orthodox religious interests with biased judgment. Not only has Tissot's Spiritualism distracted scholars from addressing his late career, but the religious focus of these final

²³ Peebles, *What is Spiritualism*, 57. Indicative of how this image has been misunderstood in Tissot scholarship, some scholars have even suggested that Tissot represented *himself*, rather than Eglinton's spirit guide Ernest, reunited with Newton in *The Apparition*. See Jill Berk Jiminez, "'The Eternal Vision' Representations of Age and Posthumous Imagery,' in *Dictionary of Artists' Models* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 35.

²⁴ Clifton Harby Levy, 'James Tissot and His Work,' *New Outlook* 60, no. 16 (17 December 1898): 3.

²⁵ T. C. M., 'Parisian Medical Chit-Chat,' *Cincinnati Lancet-Clinic* (1899): 589.

decades also negatively affected his posthumous reputation. As art historian Richard Thomson explains in *The Troubled Republic* (2004):

Religious art produced in nineteenth-century France has attracted few historians. There are many reasons for this. Among them must be the increasing secularism and materialism of the twentieth century, and Protestant-educated art historians' anxiety about being ill-equipped to handle Catholic art. Another would be prejudice about the quality of the art, at its worst slick, sentimental, overdemonstrably pious.²⁶

All of these biases have affected the critical treatment of Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations, which are reconsidered in this thesis accompanied by new attention to the religious and cultural climate in which they were produced. Critical assessments of these late works have typically aligned with art historian Malcolm Warner's description of the artist as having a 'rather ludicrous devotion' coupled with 'a religious fervour that strains credibility.'²⁷

Wentworth suggests that the watercolours for the *Life of Christ* represent 'a fanatical blend of mysticism, empathy, pseudo-science, and vulgarity.'²⁸ Misfeldt offers a similar opinion of Tissot's Spiritualist art: 'To sceptics who do not possess the determination to see such marvellous manifestations of the mysterious the print [*The Apparition*] seems little more than a picture of two figures dressed in bedsheets.'²⁹ In the catalogue for a 1984–1985 Tissot exhibition (Barbican Art Gallery, London; Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester; Musée du Petit Palais, Paris), Ian Thomson states in his chapter 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' 'A relatively brief incursion into Spiritualism, in an attempt to re-encounter Kathleen Newton met no lasting satisfaction.' Thomson provides no further evidence, however, to support his suggestion that Spiritualism did not bring Tissot fulfilment on a personal or professional level.³⁰ By refraining from such definitive and charged language, this thesis restores a level

²⁶ Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 118.

²⁷ Malcom Warner, 'The Painter of Modern Love,' in Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner, eds., *James Tissot: Victorian Life / Modern Love*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 19.

²⁸ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 174.

²⁹ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 244.

³⁰ Ian Thomson, 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' in Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (Oxford: Phaidon Press; London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1984), 91.

of scholarly perspective on the subject of Tissot's spiritual interests. Only Serena Keshavjee's essay on Tissot and Spiritualism in Katharine Lochan's edited volume on the artist, *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (2009), addresses his occult interests with serious scholarly sensitivity, thereby laying a critical foundation for approaching the subjects presented in this thesis.³¹ It is not possible to know what Tissot actually saw or even what he truly believed that he saw at the séances he attended. It is possible, however, to reconstruct the context in which he created works of art that demonstrate his awareness of Spiritualism and, by doing so, restore a level of meaning to them that has been previously overlooked or intentionally ignored due to scholarly or aesthetic biases.

The exact dates and impetus for Tissot's first encounter with the occult are not known.³² Misfeldt suggests:

It was not until in the 1880's ... that James Tissot resorted to spiritualism, and then it might have been due to the smarting from one or two unsuccessful romances and having himself experienced a mystical vision at St. Sulpice [that] he began to give credence to the idea of establishing contact with someone beyond the grave.³³

Misfeldt also references a suggestion from one of Tissot's earliest biographers, George Bastard, that it was the death of Tissot's brother Marcel in 1877 that initiated the artist's Spiritualist predilections and that Marcel himself studied religious mysticism (although according to Bastard, his descendants denied this allegation).³⁴ Bastard indicates that Tissot 'spar[ed] neither time nor effort to study the occult.'³⁵ Misfeldt also refers to letters that point

³¹ Serena Keshavjee, 'The "Scientization of Spirituality," in Katharine Lochnan, ed., *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 213–244. See also Serena Keshavjee, 'Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in *fin-de-siècle* France,' *Aries* 13, no. 1 (2013): 37–69.

³² Although it may not be possible to definitively date the origin of Tissot's interest in Spiritualism, there are several important contacts who are known to have professed their affiliation to its ideologies, which could have created the contexts in which Tissot encountered practicing Spiritualists. Tissot's first introduction to Spiritualist circles may have originated via his close friend Thomas Gibson Bowles. Bowles's stepmother, Arethusa Susannah Milner Gibson, was, like Tissot, Catholic and also an ardent enthusiast of Spiritualism.

³³ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 240.

³⁴ Bastard, 'James Tissot': 26.

³⁵ Bastard, 'James Tissot': 26.

to Tissot's interest in the supernatural a decade prior to Newton's death, but he does not clarify the location of these documents. He notes that correspondence from Frances Countess Waldegrave written from 1871 to 1872 refer to 'books on "mysterious subjects" that Tissot had [lent] her,' and that after the 1964 death of Tissot's niece Jeanne Tissot at the Château de Buillon, which she inherited from the artist, 'a large number of books on spiritualism were found in Tissot's library at the château.'³⁶

It is important to contextualise Tissot's interest in Spiritualism within Victorian society's attitudes toward death and mourning. There is a rich variety of extant literature on Victorian mourning rituals,³⁷ so this thesis does not revisit an already systematically explored topic. A brief analysis is necessary, however, to clarify why the link between Spiritualism and the visual arts is a significant and fertile subject to explore. Death was a familiar aspect of nineteenth-century Britain's metropolitan life. Prince Albert's death in 1861 left the British Empire with four decades of governance under the spectre of Queen Victoria's perpetual mourning. Accordingly, the Victorian commodification of mourning resulted in complex social rituals for burying and honouring the dead and established guidelines for sanctioned behaviour and dress during bereavement. Death was a lucrative industry; it produced customs like wearing black-crepe mourning clothes and hiring 'mourners' who were paid to enhance the spectacle of funeral processions. While individual deaths may have occurred within the privacy of a home, rigid social structures and public rituals regulated bereavement.

Spiritualism was an alternative system within this atmosphere of commodification. One of

³⁶ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 157n2. This statement is corroborated by documentation discovered in the Buillon archives, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. This private collection is referred to in this thesis as both the Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France and as the Buillon archives.

³⁷ See, for example, James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000); John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971); John Wolfe, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

the key approaches within this thesis has been to perform a close reading of the primary and secondary literature around the history of Spiritualism in nineteenth-century England and France, where Tissot encountered these ideas.

As discussed by Pat Jalland in her book *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996), it was not uncommon for the average Victorian man or woman to experience the loss of a parent, child, spouse, or friend by early adulthood.³⁸ Consequently, this period also fostered alternative belief systems, like Spiritualism, which was especially popular in England and France. Death permeates canonical Victorian literature and visual culture. Further complicating Victorian perceptions of death and the afterlife was the widespread existential anxiety generated after Charles Darwin introduced his theory of evolution in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and after the new translations of the King James Bible were published in 1881 (New Testament) and 1885 (Old Testament). These sources provoked complex debates regarding the infallibility of previously sacrosanct scientific and religious assertions about life, death, and an afterlife. Historian Michael Wheeler provides an excellent analysis of these themes in *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (1990).³⁹ Using such foundational texts for historical context, this thesis traces how the visual language of visions in Spiritualism and Christianity manifested in select paintings and works on paper by Tissot.

This thesis does not address other aspects of the supernatural in the Victorian era that have been amply examined in works about literature, art history, and cultural history. There are a number of scholarly publications in this rich and interdisciplinary field on topics

³⁸ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁹ Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

ranging from fairies⁴⁰ to vampires.⁴¹ A comprehensive source for an overview of these subjects is *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004), edited by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell.⁴² This publication illuminates the ways that encounters with the supernatural—or experiences that mirrored supernatural occurrences—were present in nearly every facet of Victorian culture. From the perspective of scientific history, for example, various modern technologies produced supernatural-like experiences, such as disembodied voices on a telephone line or instantaneous communication with unseen bodies. These experiences could be understood as mirroring Spiritualist encounters, such as those had at séances. While myriad aspects of supernatural experiences in the Victorian era provide rich research material for other scholars, and are peripherally related to Spiritualism in that they fall under the umbrella of Victorian occultism and esotericism, these subcategories of the supernatural are beyond the scope of my research. This thesis focuses specifically on Spiritualism's relationship with visual media. Although mesmerism, alchemy, and claims of fairy sightings were common, the framework for the visual analysis presented in this thesis is Spiritualism's tenets concerning the afterlife and how they relate to a visual language found in late nineteenth-century art, specifically Tissot's paintings and works on paper.⁴³

Beyond the interdisciplinary aspects of the Victorian supernatural, there are also several international projects that signal the increasing interest in research related to the interpretive lens employed in this thesis. One significant example is the research project

⁴⁰ Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2008).

⁴¹ Matthew Gibson, *Dracula and the Eastern Question: British and French Vampire Narratives of the Nineteenth-Century Near East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴² Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, eds., *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴³ Psychical research is also a related aspect of the supernatural during the Victorian era, although beyond the scope of this thesis. Psychical research developed as one method for Spiritualists to prove their theories, and psychical researchers still practice these sorts of experiments today. The Society for Psychical Research is a robust organization with an active membership. For more on this topic, see John J. Cerullo, *The Secularization of the Soul: Psychical Research in Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982).

'Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism and the Arts, c. 1875–1960,' started in November 2012. The art-historical components of the project, led by Elizabeth Prettejohn (University of York) and Sarah Victoria Turner (Paul Mellon Centre, London), address theosophy and the arts rather than Spiritualism. In 2014 the project sponsored an exhibition of 'theosophically inspired visual art' titled *Enchanted Modernities: Mysticism, Landscape and the American West* (The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, 14 April 2014–10 December 2014).⁴⁴ While the research in this thesis relates to this project in its exploration of an esoteric belief system and the visual arts, it differs in its specific focus on the visual language of Spiritualism. The catalogue published in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's 1986 exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Paintings 1890–1985*, edited by Maurice Tuchman, is also similar in spirit to the nature of my inquiry.⁴⁵ My research begins about a decade earlier and looks primarily at paintings with figural representations rather than abstract imagery. The exhibition *Georgiana Houghton: Spirit Drawings* (Courtauld Gallery, London, 16 June–11 September 2016) also raised questions about Spiritualist visual languages.⁴⁶ The connection between Houghton and Spiritualism is much more direct, however, since her art was the result of automatic drawing purportedly channelled through the intervention of spirit guides, whereas Tissot's Spiritualist visual language draws on phenomena that he experienced at séances: illuminated bodies, shrouded figures, and transparent manifestations.

⁴⁴ Christopher M. Scheer, Sarah Victoria Turner, and James G. Mansell, eds., *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, The Arts and The American West* (Logan, Utah: Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, 2019).

⁴⁵ Maurice Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Paintings 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

⁴⁶ Simon Grant, Lars Bang Larsen, and Marco Pasi, *Georgiana Houghton: Spirit Drawings*, exh. cat. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016). See also Susan L. Aberth, Simon Grant, and Lars Bang Larsen, *Not Without My Ghosts: The Artist as Medium*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2020).

Since the relationship between Spiritualism and Victorian visual arts has yet to be fully explored, the significant gap in extant secondary literature on this subject is even more apparent when reviewing the many general histories of Spiritualism. Beginning in the late 1960s, and with increased frequency in the 1980s and 1990s, secondary literature on Spiritualism explored various facets of its social and historical contexts. Numerous biographies of mediums provide excellent insight into the lives of the protagonists and antagonists of the movement's history.⁴⁷ Biographies frequently refer to artists' interest in Spiritualism, yet no further explanation is given regarding how these theories connect with the artists' work at the time. Although these biographies offer important data on the key figures in the development and popularity of Victorian Spiritualism, the methodological framework of this thesis is not strictly biographical. Biography is relevant, however, when Tissot is documented encountering a specific medium or attending a séance. Katherine Harriet Porter's *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (1958) reveals one of the challenges encountered in such research.⁴⁸ Porter notes that in many cases, such as that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, proof of attendance at séances or accounts of beliefs are sometimes difficult to trace due to secrecy around occult practices and relevant documents being destroyed. Porter nevertheless investigates the Brownings' Spiritualist network, which included both enthusiasts and sceptics. This idea of networks sharing ideas about Spiritualism relates to the argument that Spiritualist theories were widely available to artists, even if their personal beliefs on the topic are not known or if documentation is limited.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007; Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Trevor T. Hall, *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes*, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1962).

⁴⁸ Katherine Harriet Porter, *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1958).

There are so many surveys on the history of nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the occult that it may be recognised as a serious topic for scholarly research rather than a bizarre footnote in the histories of Victorian religion and belief systems. The author Arthur Conan Doyle's *The History of Spiritualism* (1926) provides one of the first attempts by a late Victorian to document the movement.⁴⁹ Conan Doyle's perspective is not without bias, however, since his own enthusiasm for Spiritualism is well known. Although he is not an impartial chronicler, his observations and recollections deliver an essential narrative on Spiritualism's role in Victorian society. Beyond this foundational survey, more recent key histories include Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1983); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (1985); and Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers: the Victorians and the Occult* (2004).⁵⁰ These historical surveys are essential sources for understanding the Spiritualist phenomenon in Victorian England. They also provide important references to primary materials that further inform the interpretation of the visual language of Spiritualism in Tissot's oeuvre.

Biographies and historical surveys offer straightforward approaches to nineteenth-century Spiritualism, but perhaps the most important contribution to this subject is through a feminist-historical lens.⁵¹ Historian Alex Owen's gendered reading of Victorian Spiritualism, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (2004), is a

⁴⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1926).

⁵⁰ Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers: the Victorians and the Occult* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004). See also Simeon Edmund, *Spiritualism: A Critical Survey* (Letchworth: Aquarian Press, 1966); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁵¹ For more general publications dealing with women, literature, and the supernatural or occult, see Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1992); Vanessa Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

seminal source for this perspective.⁵² Her tracing of Spiritualism's influence on women's roles in society highlights how women were uniquely positioned as leaders in Spiritualist circles. Since women's bodies were considered to be more receptive vehicles for receiving and transmitting communication from the spirit world, the authoritative feminine presence and stewardship over the proceedings at séances was widely accepted. Owen's pioneering scholarship on the role of female Spiritualists—in particular, the perception that certain bodies were more conducive to Spiritualist messages—is critical to my reading of Tissot's descriptions of his body as a vehicle for communication from otherworldly sources. Owen's research demonstrates how the understanding of Spiritualism's history has expanded to include interpretations of the Victorian Spiritualist movement through alternative lenses that are not broadly historical or strictly biographical, such as feminist history. This thesis uses an art-historical approach to build on the foundation established by Owen.

Existing scholarship on the intersection of Spiritualism and the visual arts has predominantly focused on spirit photography. These images were often cited as recordings of the purported manifestations and ectoplasmic emanations of mediums and spirit apparitions. Two exhibition catalogues stand out among general histories of photography and the occult: *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840–1900* (2008), edited by Corey Keller, and *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (2005), edited by Clément Chéroux.⁵³ Both titles provide excellent contextualisation and interpretation of such images. Since spirit photography has been extensively written about in various publications, this thesis includes

⁵² Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁵³ Corey Keller, ed., *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840–1900*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2008); Clément Chéroux, ed., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). See also Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow. The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey*, trans. Timothy Bill and John Gledhill (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1995).

only select images that support my interpretation of Tissot's compositions. There are references, however, to the visual elements of spirit photography that relate to relevant works. For example, the radiant aura around the spirit figures in Tissot's oil painting and mezzotint versions of *The Apparition* and in select watercolours, such as *Jesus Walks on the Sea* (ca. 1886–1894, see Fig. 2.4), resembles the light that emanates from the figures captured in certain examples of spirit photography.

While examples of visual analysis through a Spiritualist lens are limited beyond spirit photography, Charles Colbert's *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (2011) represents an exception in its focused exploration of the relationship between Spiritualism and American visual art.⁵⁴ That Colbert's publication treats American, not British or French, art differentiates it from this thesis, as does my identification of Spiritualism's visual vocabularies through religious illustrations. Nevertheless, Colbert's visual analysis helped shape my approach to this subject. His chapter on the American expatriate artist James McNeill Whistler, 'Ghostly Gloamings,' was particularly helpful by providing a useful framework for establishing a visual language of Spiritualism in Victorian paintings.⁵⁵ It has been suggested that Whistler introduced Tissot to Spiritualism, although there is no known documentation to prove that Tissot 'found Spiritualism through Whistler.'⁵⁶ Whistler was known to have participated in séances with other artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Colbert argues that the dark backgrounds in many of Whistler's portraits resemble the

⁵⁴ Charles Colbert, *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Certain frameworks for interpreting paintings by the practicing Spiritualist artist Evelyn de Morgan have also influenced the approach to visual analysis deployed in this thesis. See Judy Oberhausen, 'Evelyn De Morgan and Spiritualism,' in Catherine Gordon, ed., *Evelyn De Morgan: Oil Paintings* (London: De Morgan Foundation, 1996), 33–52; Lois Jane Drawmer, *The Impact of Science and Spiritualism on the Works of Evelyn De Morgan, 1870–1919* (PhD Thesis, Brunel University, 2001).

⁵⁵ 'Ghostly Gloamings,' in Colbert, *Haunted Visions*, 122–152.

⁵⁶ Laura K. Hoeger, 'The Artist as Medium: Tissot's Spiritualist Translation of the Catholic Image,' in Christopher M. Moreman, ed., *The Spiritualist Movement*, vol. 3 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 232. Hoeger cites Colbert's chapter on Whistler, but Tissot is not mentioned in this chapter. Despite the title, there is limited visual analysis of Tissot's biblical images in Hoeger's essay.

atmosphere of a spirit materialising at a séance. This resonates with my reading of the mezzotint versions of *The Apparition*, which actually *did* represent spirits materialising at a séance. My interpretation takes this visual analysis a step further by linking the material process of creating a mezzotint with Tissot's experience of witnessing a séance, which is an original approach to understanding the visual language of Spiritualism and its relationship to art making.

Rachel Oberter's PhD dissertation *Spiritualism and the Visual Imagination in Victorian Britain* (Yale University, 2007) comes close to addressing the gap in scholarship on Spiritualism and Victorian visual culture. Her research focused on 'automatic' drawings, however, made by artists who considered them to be unmediated transcriptions of their communication with spirits. Oberter suggests that works that 'passively reflected Spiritualist theories' are less worthy of consideration than automatic drawings because the former 'were executed in the cool, detached professional realm of the studio.' The works by Tissot that are discussed in this thesis are anything but passive or detached. Rather, they are highly *active* responses to complex contemporary Spiritualist debates that incorporate the artist's beliefs into his unique visual vocabulary.

This thesis is presented in two parts—Part I, 'The Visions of James Tissot,' and Part II, *'Twixt Two Worlds'*—consisting of two chapters each. Chapter 1, 'Spiritualist Visions,' focuses on the visual vocabulary of nineteenth-century Spiritualism and Tissot's active translation of his occult experiences into his art. It centres around descriptions of the séances that Tissot attended where the spirit of Kathleen Newton allegedly materialised.⁵⁷ It

⁵⁷ It would be interesting to know whether Newton had any interest in Spiritualism during the years she shared with Tissot. A complete biographical picture of Newton is beyond the scope of this thesis. A more nuanced representation of her will hopefully materialise with future scholarship.

establishes Tissot's access to Spiritualism, his known participation in its practices, and the visual associations between its theories and select examples of Tissot's work preceding his *Life of Christ* illustrations, especially *The Apparition*. Contemporary accounts of séances, both written and visual, and especially Tissot's own aesthetic response to a séance, the painting and print versions of *The Apparition*, also provide revealing, if sometimes conflicting, details about the event and what may have transpired. The chapter builds on this primary material to offer an interpretation of Newton's dematerialisation from his oeuvre as she succumbed to tuberculosis.

Following the discussion of Tissot's Spiritualist visions, Chapter 2, 'Spiritual Visions,' explores Tissot's religious visions in the context of the Catholic Revival and the prevalence of mystical visions at the end of the nineteenth century. The period when Tissot painted his Bible illustrations (ca. 1886–1902) is often characterised as representing his dramatic return to Catholicism, but, in fact, there is no evidence to suggest that he had ever lost his faith. According to Tissot, he went to the Church of Saint-Sulpice in 1885 where he witnessed a divine vision at the moment of transubstantiation—a sacred point in the Roman Catholic Mass when it is believed that bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. At this point in the sacrament of the Eucharist, Tissot claimed that he saw a vision of Christ consoling an impoverished couple huddled together, which he depicted in *Inner Voices*. This chapter also features an analysis of Saint-Sulpice's art and architectural features, which is critical in order to understand how specific locations inspired certain ideas that informed Tissot's late career.

Building on the foundations established through the contextualisation and interpretation of Tissot's visions, Chapter 3, '*The Life of Christ*,' continues the theme of the development of his visual iconography by providing a deeper evaluation of *The Life of Christ*. It presents a visual analysis of Spiritualist themes in Tissot's biblical illustrations and,

more specifically, how select images combine the two visual vocabularies outlined in the previous chapters. This chapter explores the connections between Tissot's fine art, such as *The Apparition*; Spiritualist imagery, such as illustrations by J. G. Keulemans for *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, including *A Spirit Hand* (ca. 1884–1885, see Fig. 1.11); and works from Tissot's biblical series, which combine Spiritualist and traditional Christian iconographies. *The Apparition*, which features shrouded figures surrounded by glowing auras, represents an important bridge between the visual language of Spiritualism and Tissot's religious illustrations, some of which directly recall these visual elements. The formal analysis of *The Apparition* in Chapter 1 reveals that it anticipates many of the mystical themes and motifs that appear later in Tissot's religious watercolours. The final image in the published version of *The Life of Christ*, which is also the artist's last self-portrait, *Portrait of the Pilgrim* (also known as *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1886–1894 see Fig. 4.3), situates Tissot in a dark room surrounded by ecclesiastic and mystical symbols. It presents a blend of mysticism and orthodox devotion that is especially evocative of Tissot's religious and occult interests.

The appearance of otherworldly beings in Tissot's *The Life of Christ* also resonates with visual records of a séance that Tissot attended, which is described in *'TwiXt Two Worlds*. The most important connections are the shrouded figures, the glowing auras around them, and that the dead can appear to and communicate with the living. Tissot later described receiving inspiration for the *Life of Christ* series as if he were a Spiritualist medium channelling images from a spirit source. Many of his biblical illustrations contain imagery associated with the Roman Catholic religious tradition and, more broadly, with the history of Christian iconography. Yet many also include visual cues and themes that resonate with leitmotifs in Spiritualist imagery and narratives: luminous auras around figures, supernatural incidents like the revivification of the dead and the dead appearing to the living, and

communication between the living and the dead. Whereas Chapter 1 establishes how the visual vocabulary of Spiritualism provided Tissot with an aesthetic language to express the intensity of supernatural visions, and Chapter 2 explores the context of his religious visions, Chapter 3 turns toward an examination of select works from *The Life of Christ* through the dual lenses of the Catholic Revival and nineteenth-century Spiritualist themes. This visual analysis reveals that Tissot depicted the invisible and the immaterial by limiting his range of colour and heightening shades of white to convey luminosity, suggest transparencies, and enhance supernatural radiance—similar to his method of depicting the spirits in *The Apparition*. Ultimately, Tissot's *The Life of Christ* demonstrates the artist's use of Spiritualism's visual vocabulary in concert with traditional religious iconography in order to express the power of both his religious and occult beliefs using one inclusive language.

Reconsidering Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations through the lens of Victorian Spiritualism suggests a significant new reading of Tissot's late religious works as a dual aestheticisation of both his orthodox Catholic and occult Spiritualist beliefs. Rather than being marked by a 'complete reappraisal' and 'radical revision of his life,'⁵⁸ as it is often characterised, this period represents a climactic assimilation of Spiritualist ideas and religious themes, which Tissot was attracted to much earlier in his career than is usually acknowledged. Negative perceptions of Tissot's biblical illustrations often echo Wentworth's dismissive and highly subjective opinion: 'It is difficult to believe that these overworked little pictures ever aroused particular interest: that they were met with hushed reverence and immense popularity on two continents is nearly incomprehensible.'⁵⁹ Wentworth does not hide his personal aversion to Tissot's *Life of Christ* and also declares, 'For modern taste, this

⁵⁸ Russell Ash, *James Tissot* (London: Pavilion, 1995), no page number.

⁵⁹ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 174.

'monographie réaliste de Jésus' is acceptable only in small doses. To spend an afternoon turning the pages of the Tissot Bible is a disheartening task.⁶⁰ Misfeldt's statements on the works are slightly more generous, but still far from unbiased: 'To modern eyes James Tissot's religious paintings are his least interesting and his least rewarding ... although they may be aesthetically unrewarding and even at times banal or dreary in their conception at other times they seem imaginative or inventive.'⁶¹ Since these trivialising summaries of *The Life of Christ* were set forth by two preeminent twentieth-century Tissot scholars, it is little wonder that subsequent analyses reiterate similar assessments: 'To modern eyes Tissot's religious illustrations are of little appeal, and to those familiar with his earlier paintings, this body of work must have come as something of a surprise.'⁶² In contrast, this thesis asks, 'What could be learned if Tissot's biblical watercolours were considered not with "modern eyes" but through the lens of nineteenth-century ideas about Spiritualism and Catholicism?'

Chapter 4, 'The Château de Buillon and Tissot's Final Years,' shifts to a different register and considers the site where Tissot claimed to have retreated to work on his biblical illustrations: the Château de Buillon. Rumours abounded during Tissot's final two decades of life after Newton's death, some even proposing that he had renounced his worldly associations and joined a monastery because of his anguish and even guilt over Newton's death. Tissot's contemporary and fellow *Vanity Fair* caricature contributor Leslie Ward proposed in his autobiography, *Forty Years of 'Spy'* (1915):

Tissot had a strong personality, and from the psychological point of view his story is extraordinary. The woman to whom he was devoted (and who figured so frequently in his pictures) died, and Tissot, overcome with grief, perhaps with remorse, left England and went to the East to seek distraction in foreign travel. ... He became at first extremely religious, and then the victim of religious mania. Later, he surprised his world by becoming a monk, driven by his devotion to the memory of the dead woman to the extremities which often arise when a strong character is suddenly

⁶⁰ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 188.

⁶¹ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 247–248.

⁶² Ash, *James Tissot*, no page number.

disrupted by great sorrow. Finally, he entered a monastery, where he eventually lost his reason and died.⁶³

Comments such as Ward's created confusion about Tissot's late career, portraying it as the product of dramatic emotional extremes and irrational religious fervour. While there is certainly a fair amount of truth to observations about Tissot's grief and religious conviction, it is crucial to separate the speculative biographical rumours from interpretations of his art. Although Tissot himself promoted Buillon as a place where he sought solitude so he could work on his religious illustrations, in reality he remained an artist who straddled two worlds, having never completely abandoned his fashionable life in Paris. The blend of Spiritualism and Catholicism that he cultivated in the *Life of Christ* illustrations is also evident in the character and architecture of the Château de Buillon as well as in the décor and the belongings he kept there. The ways in which the estate both contributed to and reflected Tissot's beliefs have not been previously considered to the extent that this thesis provides.

Conclusion

As a savvy businessman, Tissot capitalised on how his personal narrative and his Catholic and Spiritualist convictions dovetailed with the popular tastes of his time, resulting in a spectacular body of work that combines both Catholic- and Spiritualist-inspired visions. Although these visions were representational of Tissot's era, they resulted in aesthetic misunderstanding and critical bias in the years following his death. This scepticism is addressed by Misfeldt:

A great many people who function normally and whose religious beliefs fall well within the canons of orthodoxy are fascinated by the idea of communication beyond the grave. They may be looked at askance ... but they are not necessarily considered crazy because of it. ... Receiving visions is regarded by society as quite acceptable if the individual receiving the visions has achieved the status of a saint or mystic; if he has not been so elevated ... then the professing of such a proclivity is regarded as evidence of imbalance or incipient insanity. That is Tissot's position. Perhaps the

⁶³ Leslie Ward, *Forty Years of 'Spy,'* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1915), 102.

main argument in considering him somewhat insane, but one used subconsciously by his critics, is his insistence on directing major energies toward religious art when such subject matter for art was distinctly becoming unfashionable and hence could be considered abnormal.⁶⁴

Misfeldt elaborates, 'this account expresses something of the paradox of the artist Tissot, which can be drawn from the references made to him by various persons in the 1890s: on the one hand ... a congenial gentleman with an air of refinement and polish, and on the other, a strange, enigmatic, and inexplicable being whose tendency to mysticism and the occult could unnerve his associates.'⁶⁵ The merging of traditional Christian religious imagery with the themes of late nineteenth-century Spiritualism, especially on such an ambitious scale, was particularly unique to Tissot. Although later art-historical evaluations have dismissed the significance of the Tissot Bible, this work preoccupied the artist in the final years of his life, and it is more important to a thorough understanding of his career than previous scholarship has claimed.

The afterlife of Tissot's biblical images has been shrouded with misunderstanding, preventing them from being fully considered within the appropriate visual contexts. These works ultimately represent a highly personal culmination and consolidation of Tissot's interests in both Spiritualism and Catholicism. Re-examining the artist's *Life of Christ* watercolours, which he created during a period that included his simultaneous engagement with Spiritualism and Catholicism, reveals an essential and previously overlooked framework for understanding this significant component of his oeuvre.

⁶⁴ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 294–295.

⁶⁵ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 258.

Part One

Chapter 1: Spiritualist Visions

*Tissot, that mysterious forgotten figure, ill-judged for complex reasons.*⁶⁶

—Jacques-Émile Blanche (1938)

Introduction

This chapter introduces James Tissot's composition *The Apparition* (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885), which he created as both an oil on canvas painting (Fig. 1.1) and reproduced in mezzotint prints (Fig. 1.2) after attending a Spiritualist séance on 20 May 1885. At this séance, conducted by the English medium William Eglinton, Tissot purportedly made contact with the spirit of his deceased companion, Kathleen Newton, who was materialised by Eglinton along with one of the medium's spirit guides, called Ernest. Tissot's vision of Newton and the art that he created in the aftermath of that event—the versions of *The Apparition*—established a visual language based on the sensorial effects of Spiritualist séances that wielded a critical influence on the magnum opus of Tissot's final two decades, his biblical illustrations for *The Life of Christ* (1886–1894). The effect of this language on his late body of work has not been comprehensively treated in the existing literature on Tissot. In fact, these biblical illustrations, discussed at length in Chapter 3, are much better understood when examined through the lens of the artist's wider interest in Spiritualism. This chapter provides a context for the Spiritualist visual vocabulary that Tissot developed as a result of attending séances.

Victorian Spiritualism and its French counterpart, *Spiritism*, were complex socio-religious systems of belief that attempted to prove, through experiments and documentation,

⁶⁶ Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime, The Late Victorian Era, the Edwardian Pageant, 1870–1914* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1938), 25.

that the soul survives and continues to progress through stages of development after bodily death. The popularity of these enquiries in late nineteenth-century England and France (where Tissot encountered them) transcended class and attracted many notable personalities, including Tissot. His explorations into life after death led him to occult investigations, like séances, where he was exposed to a visual language of phenomena that he then channelled into *The Apparition*: glowing blue and white light, translucent manifestations, and shrouded otherworldly beings. This chapter draws parallels between Tissot's materialising of images and the practices of a Spiritualist medium at a séance. It also considers the interpretation of Newton, a frequent subject of Tissot's compositions, as dematerialising in the pictures while she was being physically consumed by tuberculosis in real life, only to rematerialise—first as a spirit at the séance and later as a subject in *The Apparition*. The material mediums used by Tissot also reveal important ways to understand his work—especially his limited use of the mezzotint print process, in which images are created by burnishing away ink to reveal light from darkness, similar to the visual experience of a dark séance.

A deeper look into the visual vocabulary of Spiritualism and Tissot's own Spiritualist visions is critical to understanding his transformative religious vision in 1885 while at the Catholic Church of Saint-Sulpice, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, and his subsequent New Testament illustrations, *The Life of Christ*, which are the focus of Chapter 3. Although they might seem like incongruous systems of belief, both Spiritualism and Catholicism espouse miraculous and transcendent states with otherworldly manifestations.⁶⁷ Tissot would combine these two visionary systems to create a unique visual vocabulary that individualises his late work and sets it apart from other examples of late nineteenth-century religious art.

⁶⁷ Catholicism acknowledged such manifestations as 'mysticism' but discouraged, and subsequently banned, trying to communicate with souls through mediums. This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

The Visual Language of Spiritualism and Séances

According to James Tissot's inscription on mezzotint versions of *The Apparition*, he attended a dark séance in London facilitated by the English medium William Eglinton on 20 May 1885.⁶⁸ Eglinton was well known for this type of demonstration in lowered light levels, at which 'spirits will manifest spontaneously, and in a variety of forms—solid, semi-solid or diaphanous.'⁶⁹ As the popular Spiritualist periodical *The Medium and Daybreak: A Weekly Journal Devoted to the History, Phenomena, Philosophy, and Teachings of Spiritualism* described in an 1886 profile on Eglinton, the dark séance was considered particularly optimal for certain materialisations because 'to obtain them [materialisations] in the most certain manner possible the sittings are held in darkness, as being the condition most suitable for procuring results. ... They are a necessity of the urgent demand for phenomena, and if properly conducted, as Mr. Eglinton's record gives many examples, they are just as satisfactory as [in the condition of light].'⁷⁰ The article further claims that although some might be sceptical of such experiments held in darkness, 'given true sitters ... darkness affords glorious results, as in the case of M. Tissot, and many others.'⁷¹ Tissot's visual representation of what he thought he witnessed on 20 May—*The Apparition*—demonstrates his first-hand experience with Spiritualism and the practices conducted by its adherents, specifically attendance and participation at séances.

Attesting to his enthusiasm and curiosity for Spiritualism, Tissot apparently attended more than one séance. The events that allegedly transpired at these occult experiences are

⁶⁸ Tissot's inscription on mezzotint versions of *The Apparition* reads: 'Dark séance d'Eglinton / du 20 May 1885 / Londres.' Also in John Stephen Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of the Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886; 2nd ed., London: E. W. Allen, 1890), 187.

⁶⁹ 'A Record of Spirit Manifestations Through the Mediumship of William Eglinton,' *The Medium and Daybreak: A Weekly Journal Devoted to the History, Phenomena, Philosophy, and Teachings of Spiritualism* XVII, no. 831 (5 March 1886): 146.

⁷⁰ 'A Record of Spirit Manifestations Through the Mediumship of William Eglinton': 146.

⁷¹ 'A Record of Spirit Manifestations Through the Mediumship of William Eglinton': 146.

preserved in several key written and visual sources: in *Portraits of a Lifetime, The Late Victorian Era, The Edwardian Pageant, 1870–1914* (1938), the memoirs of the artist Jacques-Émile Blanche, one of the attendees at another séance with Tissot, which was hosted by the artist Albert Besnard and his wife, the sculptor Charlotte Dubray;⁷² in John Stephen Farmer's biography of Eglinton, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of The Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886);⁷³ and in the art created in the aftermath by Tissot (Figs. 1.1–1.2) and Besnard (Fig. 1.3).⁷⁴ The specific details divulged in these versions differ slightly, but each account of Newton's spirit appearing alongside a spirit guide contributes to building a definition of the visual vocabulary of Spiritualism that Tissot was exposed to. Although these manifestations occurred on separate occasions, the reports are helpful to understanding the conditions and the Spiritualist visions that inspired Tissot to create *The Apparition*.

In the first installation of his autobiography, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, Blanche mentions his personal admiration for Tissot but surmises, 'My readers probably know very little about Tissot, that mysterious forgotten figure, ill-judged for complex reasons. ... Certainly Tissot had more fascination for me than anyone else in France; there seemed a mystery about his disconcerting personality.'⁷⁵ Blanche was not alone in this impression of Tissot's 'disconcerting personality,' and it was probably this perception that led some contemporaries to read signs of artifice in both Tissot's enthusiasm for Spiritualism and his professed religious convictions that inspired *The Life of Christ*. Similarly, the writer and critic Edmond de Goncourt commented in the 26 January 1890 entry of the *Journal des Goncourt* that Tissot was 'a complex being, a mix of mysticism and phoniness ... finding every two or three

⁷² Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 65–66.

⁷³ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 186–189.

⁷⁴ The image by Besnard was identified by Serena Keshavjee in 'The "Scientization" of Spirituality,' in Katharine Lochnan, ed., *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 215.

⁷⁵ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 25.

years a new *appassionement*.⁷⁶ While this opinion offers a very cynical estimation of Tissot's personality, de Goncourt's description also situates the artist's mysticism (probably insinuating his interest in Spiritualism) as evidence of an affected and perhaps insincere character.

It is impossible to determine whether Tissot truly believed in Spiritualism or if he capitalised on its popularity by using it as a savvy marketing ploy to create publicity. The comments by Blanche and de Goncourt may be no more than petty gossip, but they suggest that at least some of Tissot's contemporaries viewed his occult interests with cynicism, perhaps indicative of the broader scepticism regarding the efficacy and authenticity of Spiritualism. There were certainly many mediums who were exposed as frauds, such as 'Dr.' Henry Slade, and rampant deceptions by various mediums cast a negative light on the entire movement.⁷⁷ Such exposés fostered widespread doubt about the authenticity of Spiritualism's principles and its supporters. According to historian Alex Owen, 'Physicians ... were deeply critical of spiritualist phenomena and of those men and women who could believe that such tawdry tricks proved the existence of an ethereal world. ... New specialists in insanity were swift to categorise a belief in spiritualism as symptomatic of a diseased mind.'⁷⁸ Even the medium Eglinton claimed in regard to *The Apparition* that 'Paris is in a flutter as to what the

⁷⁶ 'Tissot, cet être complexe, mâtiné de mysticisme et de roublardise, cet intelligent laborieux en dépit de son crâne intelligent et de ses yeux de merlin cuit, passionné, trouvant tous les deux ou trois ans un nouveau bail de sa vie.' English translation mine. I am grateful to Tissot scholar Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz for confirming in email correspondence that the reference is missing from most published and variously edited versions, but that the original digitised manuscript for the 26 Jan 1890 entry can be found here: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b100851024/f20.item#>.

⁷⁷ For more on Slade's trial and conviction, see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22–23. The propensity for such trickery led to the passage of the Fraudulent Mediums Act of 1951 in England and Wales, which prohibited profiting from deception and false claims.

⁷⁸ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 139.

subject can mean, its weirdness prompting the kind suggestion that the artist had gone mad!⁷⁹ That Tissot's sanity would be questioned as a result of this mystical composition, certainly an anomaly in his career up to that date, echoes the pervasive suspicions about Spiritualism. Although there were frequent public Spiritualist gatherings in London and Paris, these types of concerns and critiques encouraged a spirit of secrecy around metaphysical experiments so participants and mediums could avoid scrutiny. Despite such criticism, however, Tissot does not seem to have concealed his interest in the occult; the séances he attended included a variety of participants, not just close friends or family.

Blanche provides perhaps the most colourful written account from one of the witnesses at a séance where Newton supposedly appeared.⁸⁰ Blanche and Tissot shared many mutual contacts in the art world, such as Edgar Degas, but it is still curious that Blanche was present at such an intimate moment as a séance at which Tissot would attempt to contact Newton. The two artists had a twenty-five-year age difference and were perhaps no more than expatriate artistic associates at this time. From Blanche's description, it seems that he was better acquainted with Albert Besnard, in whose home the séance took place. According to Blanche's eyewitness account:

Tissot even believed in the calling up of the dead and in the materialisation of spirits. The Besnards, though sceptics, were not at all disinclined towards making their studio the cynosure of smart society and arranged a séance. James Tissot had had a flame who had died and she was to be called up by a medium who later found time in prison to meditate on his trickery and practices. ... In utter darkness, essential for such a manifestation, we were breathless with excitement. An ethereal and vaporous form glided on to the scene. A voice uttered words and groans. Tissot hurried forward as if to seize this spirit from the tomb.⁸¹

⁷⁹ William Eglinton, "The "Apparition Mediunimique,"" *The Medium and Daybreak: A Weekly Journal Devoted to the History, Phenomena, Philosophy, and Teachings of Spiritualism* XVII, no. 831 (5 March 1886): 153.

⁸⁰ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 65–66.

⁸¹ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 65–66.

According to Blanche's description, Tissot believed—or at least led others to think he believed—in Spiritualism and that Newton's spirit had truly appeared at this séance.

Blanche's reminiscence also refers to the fashionable popularity of Spiritualism, such that the Besnards would want to make their studio the centre of social attention by hosting a séance. Blanche additionally provides key descriptive language about what the séance participants saw: 'An ethereal and vaporous form glided on to the scene.'⁸² Tissot would attempt to achieve these effects of ethereality in both the oil and mezzotint versions of *The Apparition*. Blanche's testimony is helpful, therefore, in establishing the visual vocabulary for what the séance participants observed at this alleged spirit manifestation.

Blanche also implies that it may have been the fraudulent Henry Slade who mediated the séance he describes, although no date is provided and the medium is not identified by name in his published memoir.⁸³ Blanche only offers, 'It would not be difficult to discover his name.'⁸⁴ He also mentions that 'the account of [the séance] aroused the curiosity of my friends ... who were fascinated by spiritualism and Professor Slade's experiments,' and claims that this medium 'later found time in prison to meditate on his trickery and practices, which had been of an exceedingly lucrative nature.'⁸⁵ Since the Besnards lived in London from 1879–1883, and since Eglinton was never convicted (although he was suspected) of fraud, it is probable that Blanche's description is of a séance other than the session mediated by Eglinton, which took place on 20 May 1885, according to Tissot's mezzotint inscription. The fact that Newton died in 1882 and was therefore still alive during this period further

⁸² Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 66.

⁸³ Blanche told Tissot's biographer James Laver that it was Slade in an unpublished letter. Blanche to Laver, 12 June 1936, Laver Papers, MS Laver B39, University of Glasgow Special Collections. Cited in Melissa E. Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2019), 332n80. See also James Laver, *Vulgar Society: The Romantic Career of James Tissot* (London: Constable, 1936), 51.

⁸⁴ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 66.

⁸⁵ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 65.

complicates Blanche's recollection. It is also possible that Blanche confused two separate séances conducted by different mediums. Or perhaps his retelling simply contains erroneous fabrications, as he was known to be quite a gossip. Blanche's contemporary Walter Sickert once remarked, 'Our friend [Blanche] is charming and so sympathetic and intelligent. I never can believe that I know [*sic*] he is liable to twist things he hears or doesn't into monstrous fibs and for no particular object, except, I think, a passion of curiosity.'⁸⁶ Rather than negating the possibility of the séance having happened, these inconsistencies point to both the popularity and prevalence of such gatherings, and the possible unreliability of indiscreet sources such as Blanche when it came to retelling the details of Spiritualist encounters.

Most importantly, Blanche's account suggests the likelihood that Tissot attended more than one séance—not only the 20 May session that he memorialised in *The Apparition* but at least one additional séance during the period when Besnard was based in London. In addition to attending séances with Eglinton and Slade, Tissot may also have had contact with another medium, Mrs. Thomas Everitt, since she once recalled having 'met many interesting people who visited ... through interest in her wonderful gifts, among others, John Ruskin, and the French painter, Tissot.'⁸⁷ The fact that Tissot probably met multiple mediums strengthens the argument that he was serious in his curiosity about Spiritualism and was exposed to a variety of visual phenomena associated with it. This interest probably increased in the years after Newton's death, since volumes of proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, dating from October 1882 to July 1884 and signed with Tissot's name on the front page of each volume, were found at his estate, the Château de Buillon.⁸⁸ Moreover, newspaper reports

⁸⁶ Letter from Walter Sickert to Anna (Nan) Hope Hudson, quoted in Wendy Baron, *Miss Ethel Sands and Her Circle* (London: Owen, 1977), 77.

⁸⁷ H. A. Dallas, 'Reminiscences of a Remarkable Medium,' *Quarterly Transactions of the British College of Psychic Science* VIII, no. 1. (April 1929): 40.

⁸⁸ Frédéric Mantion Archives, Buillon, France

detailing the contents of the sale of Tissot's Buillon library after the death of his niece Jeanne, his last surviving heir, document his extensive interest in the occult (discussed in Chapter 4), especially during the final two decades of his life.

Most sources suggest that Tissot first met Eglinton in Paris in 1885.⁸⁹ It is possible that they met even earlier, since scholars have pointed out that a man with very similar physical features to Eglinton appears in Tissot's composition *Two Friends* (1882, Fig. 1.4).⁹⁰ In this painting, a man who resembles Eglinton grasps the ropes of a ship on which he will travel in his left hand and clasps the hand of a man who looks like Tissot with his right hand. The female figure standing near them and seen from behind is Newton. Although there is no known documentation connecting the three as early as 1882, the resemblances in *Two Friends* provoke the question of whether they had met that year—the same year as Newton's death. If they all knew each other as early as 1882, this could account for why Tissot chose Eglinton to facilitate contact with Newton after her death.

An account heretofore uncited by modern scholars that was written by Eglinton in 1886 for *The Medium and Daybreak*, which had the largest circulation of any such periodical at that time, suggests that Spiritualism came to Tissot's attention in the winter of 1884. Soon afterward, the artist and medium began a correspondence that ultimately led to their first meeting in Paris.⁹¹ Eglinton recounts that he found Tissot to be 'a keenly intellectual and sympathetic man, ready to be convinced of the great facts of Spiritualism, if sufficient evidence were forthcoming.'⁹² He goes on to describe that the séances he gave for Tissot in

⁸⁹ See, for example, Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 186.

⁹⁰ Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner, eds., *James Tissot: Victorian Life / Modern Love*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 38.

⁹¹ Eglinton, "The "Apparition Mediunimique"": 153.

⁹² Eglinton, "The "Apparition Mediunimique"": 153.

Paris, beginning in 1885, satisfactorily encouraged a desire for the artist to know more. He also reveals that Tissot continued to pursue investigations with private mediums in Paris, which explains why so little is known about this period of Tissot's Spiritualist investigations. Eglinton recalls that he invited Tissot to pay him a visit the next time the artist came to London and that they held séances where, 'after several inconclusive attempts, the final séance of the series was crowned with most satisfactory results—the figure of the One, lost and loved, appearing so distinctly as to be recognised not only by all the sitters present from her portraits (with which they were quite familiar), but by M. Tissot himself; and so much was this beyond question that he instantly transferred the whole scene to canvas, that he might retain it in his memory.'⁹³ This statement corroborates the image that Albert Besnard created of Tissot standing next to an easel as the manifestation of Newton took place (see Fig. 1.3), which will be discussed later in this chapter. These recollections provide critical details about when Eglinton and Tissot became acquainted and how the conditions for *The Apparition* were achieved. The visual inspiration that Tissot would draw from *The Apparition* and the séances that inspired it would irrevocably change the course of his art. This can be considered a significant turning point in his career, since it signals the appearance of explicit metaphysical qualities in his work, which were then echoed in the biblical illustrations that followed (discussed in Chapter 3).

Eglinton's article confirms that the two men certainly knew each other by early 1885, and in the following year, Tissot commemorated their friendship by including Eglinton's name in a central place on a plaque he created that was probably part of a *cloisonné* mantelpiece (Fig. 1.5).⁹⁴ Anna Alma-Tadema remembered seeing the plaque during a visit

⁹³ Eglinton, 'The "Apparition Mediunimique"': 153.

⁹⁴ Jane Abdy, 'Tissot: His London Friends and Visitors,' in Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (Oxford: Phaidon Press; London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1984), 50.

with Tissot in Paris in the early 1890s.⁹⁵ She recalled that Tissot's design integrated the names of his English friends, including her father, the artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema. This must be the same or a similar plaque to the one that the artist George Percy Jacomb-Hood described seeing in Paris around 1897 or 1898, when he visited Tissot with fellow artist Paul Helleu: 'He had also constructed, and was still working on, an extraordinary *cloisonné* mantelpiece of great size, introducing into the design names of his friends and verses of Arabic.'⁹⁶ Jacomb-Hood's memory indicates that this piece remained with Tissot in his final years and that it was something Tissot proudly showed visitors to his home. Eglinton's name is not only prominently positioned in the central column but is also near the names of two other contacts with connections to Tissot and Spiritualism: Louise Jopling (top left) and James McNeill Whistler (second from the top in the righthand column). According to Tissot's plaque, Eglinton was situated in the midst of an important milieu of his distinguished English associates, and the artist was proud to include him among such notable friends.

As a well-known medium, Eglinton's séances attracted many prestigious Victorians, such as the politician William Gladstone, who joined the Society for Psychical Research after a 29 October 1889 session, although he never publicly professed himself a Spiritualist.⁹⁷ An interesting connection between Eglinton, Gladstone, and Tissot is that the English edition of *The Life of Christ* includes a facsimile of Tissot's dedication to the four-time prime minister following the title page: 'To you, Mr. Gladstone, whom your country has awarded in your lifetime the title the great man, I dedicated this translation of my book. Thank you for the great honour you have done my work in accepting this dedication. J. James Tissot / 15

⁹⁵ Laver, *Vulgar Society*, 60. Lawrence Alma-Tadema purchased Tissot's Grove End Road home in St. John's Wood, London, after Newton's death and Tissot's return to Paris. For more on Tissot and this property, see Charlotte Gere, 'Tissot's Houses in Saint John's Wood, London,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 52–53.

⁹⁶ George Percy Jacomb-Hood, *With Brush and Pencil* (London: J. Murray, 1925), 147.

⁹⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2 (London: Cassell, 1926), 51.

October 1897 / Abbey de Buillon.⁹⁸ Even with a roster of eminent contacts, Eglinton, like many other Spiritualist mediums, was accused of fraud on multiple occasions, as previously mentioned, although he is not known to have spent time in prison. Henry Slade was sentenced to prison in London in 1876, but he fled to America before he was incarcerated. Like Eglinton, Slade was famous for his experiments with slate writing, in which messages from spirits were scrawled on a chalkboard surface. Both mediums were also known for conducting dark séances, like the one where Newton allegedly materialised. Recalling Blanche's description of 'an ethereal and vaporous form,'⁹⁹ the mystery novelist and ardent Spiritualist Arthur Conan Doyle described that witnesses at an 1878 séance led by Slade in Australia saw a 'cloud-like, whitish grey vapour forming and accumulating, preparatory to the appearance of a fully materialised figure.'¹⁰⁰ Such accounts suggest the ephemerality and luminosity of these otherworldly manifestations. The similarity among the reports of ethereal appearances at séances conducted by Eglinton and Slade, such as Conan Doyle's, speaks to the common visual language that séance participants would have been familiar with. Descriptions of phenomena frequently described the appearance of cloud-like, vaporous, ethereal, and luminous manifestations. This visual vocabulary provides a key for decoding Tissot's representation of a séance experience through the glow and translucency of the figures in *The Apparition* and his later biblical illustrations.

Farmer also provides a highly detailed account of Tissot's Spiritualist experiments in *'Twiſt Two Worlds*, where he reiterates that Eglinton and the artist met in Paris in early 1885:

The *séances* [Tissot] had with Mr. Eglinton quite won him over to our ranks, and resulted in a determination on his part to visit England later in the year to go through a regular course of investigation. This he did with the most satisfactory results,

⁹⁸ 'C'est à vous, Monsieur Gladstone, auquel votre pays a décerné de son vivant le titre de grand homme, que je dedie cette traduction de mon livre. Je vous remercie du grand honneur que vous avez fait à mon oeuvre en acceptant cette dedicace. J. James Tissot/ 15 Octobre 1897/ abbaye de Buillon. ' English translation mine.

⁹⁹ Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, 66.

¹⁰⁰ Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 96.

obtaining clear and irrefragable evidence as to the identity of the spirits communicating with him through Mr. Eglinton's mediumship, both in connection with psychography and materialisation. At the last and culminating *séance* he had a touching and unique experience. The veil was lifted, and he saw one whose sweet companionship had been his joy and solace in years gone by.¹⁰¹

Farmer insinuates that although he cannot reveal all the details of 'such sacred experiences ... to an unsympathetic world,' he can share a significantly detailed description with readers:

After the usual preliminaries of a dark *séance*, Mr. Eglinton took his place in an easy-chair close to M. Tissot's right hand, and so remained the whole time. The doors were all locked, and the room otherwise secured. After conversing for a time two figures were seen standing side by side on M. Tissot's left hand. They were at first seen very indistinctly, but gradually they became more and more plainly visible, until those nearest could distinguish every feature. The light carried by the male figure ('Ernest') was exceptionally bright, and was so used as to light up in a most effective manner the features of his companion. M. Tissot, looking into her face, immediately recognised the latter, and, much overcome, asked her to kiss him. This she did several times, the lips being observed to move. One of the sitters distinctly saw 'Ernest' place the light in such a position that while M. Tissot was gazing at the face of the female form her features were 'brilliantly illuminated;' it also lighted M. Tissot's face. After staying with him for some minutes, she again kissed him, shook hands, and vanished.¹⁰²

According to Farmer's description, not only did Tissot see and touch his deceased beloved, but Newton's voice also announced, 'Peace, let it be. I love him still, and shall love him forever; the dead are not dead, but alive.'¹⁰³ In this account, Newton's spirit was more than a hallucination; in fact, the materialisation apparently engaged three out of the five senses: sight, touch, and sound. This was exactly the type of critical, direct evidence that Spiritualism's advocates championed as irrefutable proof of the movement's authenticity. Farmer does not discuss whether the participants accepted the spirits' legitimacy, but the *séance* was seemingly a success in his estimation, since the exact subject the participants wished to see, receive communication from, and interact with had appeared.

¹⁰¹ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187.

¹⁰² Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187.

¹⁰³ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187.

Eglinton's biography, in which this extremely evocative description of a séance where Newton supposedly materialised is described, also includes Tissot's etched portrait of Eglinton (Fig. 1.6), created for the frontispiece. Tissot's portrayal of Eglinton positions him resting his head in his right hand in a relaxed and casual pose, suggesting a level of ease and familiarity between the artist and his subject. A double slate with a Bramah lock—which was a type of latch alleged to be particularly tamper-resistant—sits on the table in the composition's foreground. Eglinton used this device to receive messages purportedly written on the locked tablet by spirits during séances. The author of an 1885 article in the Spiritualist periodical *Light* described one such séance experience:

I wrote on Mr. Eglinton's Bramah lock double slate a question. ... Mr. Eglinton was ignorant of the question. I myself put between the slates a bit of red chalk, locked the case, and taking the key out, kept it beside me in full view on the table. ... [Eglinton] began to breathe very heavily, and convulsive shudders ran through his frame, and at last we heard the writing. After three final taps Mr. Eglinton withdrew the case from under the flap, and handing it over to me, requested me to unlock it. I did so, and on opening it, inside, between the slates, I found ... [an] answer.¹⁰⁴

The slate box is the only accessory in Tissot's portrait of Eglinton. Despite the prominent placement, its contents remain inaccessible to the viewer. Only through an actual sitting with the famous medium could its internal secrets be revealed. Given the suggestions of their close relationship, it is plausible that Tissot met with Eglinton for a double-slate séance in addition to the dark séance, and that this object had a special meaning for both the artist and his subject as a symbol of their past encounters.

In Tissot's portrait of Eglinton, the medium confronts the viewer with a direct and unwavering gaze, which has been described in modern scholarship as signifying that he is in

¹⁰⁴ J. Mair Rolph, "Two Phases of "Spiritual Phenomena." Psychography: The "Passage of Matter Through Matter," *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* 5, no. 201 (10 January 1885): 20.

a state of trance.¹⁰⁵ Although the word *trance* is never used in *'Twixt Two Worlds*, this assessment of the portrait seems to be based on Farmer's visual analysis:

When made aware of the proposed publication of [*'Twixt Two Worlds*], [Tissot] very kindly offered to present Mr. Eglinton with a portrait etching to serve as a frontispiece, his idea being to impress his pencil and graver into the service of Spiritualism, by depicting from the life one of the ... aspects of mediumship. He, in common with other keen observers, had often noticed the change in the facial expression of the medium while under control, or when direct writing was being obtained. ... M. Tissot believed he should be doing a service to spiritual science, which few could render, if he placed on permanent record this strange feature of mediumship. ... M. Tissot has been singularly successful in his object.¹⁰⁶

Farmer constructs a persuasive argument about both Tissot's artistic intentions and Eglinton's appearance in the print. The idea that Tissot used his art in 'the service of Spiritualism,' as Farmer suggests, hints at the artist's motivations in creating the portrait. The flaw in this interpretation, however, is that Tissot's portrait does *not* seem to show Eglinton 'while under [spirit] control, or when direct writing was being obtained,' and he does not appear to be in the midst of any mediumistic activity. Rather, Eglinton appears to be more wistful or perhaps contemplative. The real significance of this candid portrait seems to lie in its familiarity, and its inclusion in *'Twixt Two Worlds* implies the artist's endorsement of the medium and his practices. Tissot also made a drawing for the portrait (1885, Fig. 1.7), likewise dated 1885, which shows Eglinton in the same position as the etching but with a more animated facial expression: his lips are parted as if he is about to speak, which renders him more affable than in the etching.¹⁰⁷ While the sitter's more relaxed pose in the drawing is also suggestive of a personal rapport between the two men, the publication of the etching reveals Tissot's comfort with being openly associated as an advocate of Eglinton's mediumistic abilities.

¹⁰⁵ It is mentioned, for example, in Abdy, 'Tissot: His London Friends and Visitors,' 52.

¹⁰⁶ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187–189.

¹⁰⁷ The drawing is identified in Willard Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot: Prints from the Gotlieb Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1991), 176. It was first accessed by this author in the Buillon archives on 26 July 2018 (Collection Frédéric Mantion). Misfeldt located the drawing in the private collection of Monsieur Gérard Mantion of Besançon, France, who was a twentieth-century owner of Tissot's Château de Buillon and the father of the current owner. Misfeldt does not provide the drawing's provenance, but it is possible that this work was still in Tissot's possession when he died at the Château de Buillon in 1902 and that it made its way into Mantion's collection with the property.

Interestingly, Tissot's portrait also does not align with the more animated description of Eglinton falling into a trance as portrayed in Yveling Rambaud's publication about metaphysical subjects, *Force psychique* (1889): 'The medium Eglinton begins to enter, according to the English expression, in trance: he comes and goes, walks, gets excited, like a dervish, marking time, and furiously rubs his hands and twists, then stops suddenly crosses his arms and becomes immobile.'¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the image by Besnard that accompanies Rambaud's description (Fig. 1.8) is of a contorted and agitated figure that looks nothing like Tissot's portrait. The instances of Tissot's representations of trance-like postures and expressions in the biblical illustrations, such as in his depiction of Mary in *The Magnificat* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 1.9), will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Even though Tissot is interested in Spiritualism and uses the visual tropes of trance later on, it is important not to forcibly impose this interpretation indiscriminately on his works. The reading of Tissot's etched portrait of Eglinton as in a trance is an example of how this interpretation can be misdirected.

In his two-volume chronicle *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), Conan Doyle recounts a description from Eglinton of his early practice as a medium, which is reminiscent of the way that Tissot describes his own experience when receiving inspiration for the *Life of Christ* watercolours. As Eglinton explains: 'I seemed to be no longer of this earth. A most ecstatic feeling came over me, and I presently passed into a trance. ... I felt a pleasure indescribable in knowing, beyond a doubt, that those who had passed from earth could return

¹⁰⁸ 'Ceci fait, le médium Eglinton commence à entrer, suivant l'expression anglaise, en trance: il va et vient, se promène, s'énerve un peu, à la façon des derviches, piétine sur place, frotte et tord furieusement ses mains, puis il s'arrête tout à coup, croise les bras et devient immobile.' Yveling Rambaud, *Force psychique* (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1889), 6. English translation mine.

again, and prove the immortality of the soul.¹⁰⁹ According to Conan Doyle, 'A feature of [Eglinton's] materialising séances was the fact that he sat among those present and that his hands were bound or held by other participants. Under these conditions full-form materialisations were seen in light which was sufficient for the recognition of those appearing.'¹¹⁰ At one such occurrence, Eglinton materialised a 'white-robed figure ... purported to be the [deceased] daughter [of the séance's hosts] who were fully convinced' by her appearance.¹¹¹ Conan Doyle's recollection of another séance mediated by Eglinton in London in 1885, in which he describes the medium 'in a state of trance,' resembles descriptions of the séance at which Newton's spirit appeared. Conan Doyle writes:

The mass of white material on the floor increased in breadth, commenced to pulsate and move up and down, also swaying from side to side ... and shortly afterwards the 'form' quickly and quietly grew to its full stature. ... Mr. Eglinton drew away the white material which covered the head of the 'form' and it fell back over the shoulders and became part of the clothing of the visitor. The ... 'form' advanced, ... shook hands ... and passed round the circle.¹¹²

This report of Eglinton materialising the white-looking substance of a spirit appears in Conan Doyle's chapter on *ectoplasm*—a term coined in 1894 by the French psychical researcher Charles Richet and used by Spiritualists to describe a spiritual substance—and, significantly, it is of an occurrence that took place in 1885, the same year as the dark séance where Tissot believed that Newton appeared to him. The behaviour of the manifested spirit also corresponds with other chronicles of Newton's conversation and embrace of Tissot. This account demonstrates that Eglinton was known for such materialisations, where white apparitions interacted with séance participants, and which Tissot memorialised in *The Apparition*.

¹⁰⁹ Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 44.

¹¹⁰ Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 47.

¹¹¹ Arthur J. Hill, *Spiritualism: Its History, Phenomena, and Doctrine* (London: Casell and Company, 1918), 86.

¹¹² Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 99.

The English author and actress Florence Marryat, whom Farmer credits with bringing Spiritualism to Tissot's attention after the artist read her description of a materialisation in a French newspaper, claimed she was a recipient of *The Apparition* as a gift directly from Tissot.¹¹³ In her 1891 Spiritualist publication, *There Is No Death*, Marryat asserts:

I derived great pleasure, a short time back, by receiving, through the goodness of M. James Tissot, the French artist, a lovely engraving [*sic*] of his picture, entitled 'L'Apparition Mediumistique' [or Médiunnique]. ... M. Tissot sat with William Eglinton, when on a visit to London, and was so charmed ... that he invited Mr. Eglinton over to Paris, and, whilst there, he painted, from their materialised forms, the portraits of both Madame Tissot and John King. The oil painting was, I understand, exhibited in the Paris Salon,¹¹⁴ and a favoured few of M. Tissot's friends have received an engraving of it. ... Both hold a spirit light, of the size and shape of an egg, in their hands. ... I prize this engraving more than any other spiritualistic memento I possess.¹¹⁵

Demonstrating the proliferation of confusion surrounding this picture, Marryat mistakes Newton as Tissot's wife and also calls the spirit 'John King,' although Farmer identifies him as 'Ernest,' a typical spirit guide for Eglinton. In fact, this error was noted by a reader in the pages of the London Spiritualist Alliance's influential journal *Light*, which was accompanied by an editorial response clarifying that the form was certainly 'that of Mr. Eglinton's spirit friend, "Ernest"—as nobody could doubt who had had materialisation séances with Mr. Eglinton.'¹¹⁶ The response also elucidates that 'there was no Madame Tissot at all, for M. Tissot was never married,' and 'Tissot himself called his picture "Apparition Médiunimique.'" This exchange does not address the location of the séance, but Marryat suggests that it took place in Paris, even though Tissot's own inscription on the mezzotint indicates that it took place in London. Despite Marryat's confusion, the most critical details in her description are of the spirit lights held by the two apparitions. These lights are important components of the Spiritualist visual vocabulary that Tissot absorbed at séances and translated into his later

¹¹³ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 186.

¹¹⁴ The exhibition of *The Apparition* at the Paris Salon is not documented.

¹¹⁵ Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* (Montreal: John Lovel and Son, 1891), no page number.

¹¹⁶ Kate Taylor Robinson and the Editor of *Light*, 'Florence Marryat's Inaccuracies,' *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* XXII, no. 1, 119 (21 June 1902): 299.

biblical illustrations, specifically his images of the glowing stigmata emanating from the resurrected Christ (see, for example, Fig. 3.15). As a frequent séance attendee and, coincidentally, a Catholic like Tissot, Marryat documented her observations in publications such as *There Is No Death* and *The Spirit World* (1894), and she unmistakably recognised these attributes of a materialised spirit.

In addition to Tissot's representations of *The Apparition* in paint and print, the only other known visual record of Newton's alleged appearance after her death is by the French artist Albert Besnard, who hosted the séance attended by Blanche and Tissot. Besnard's drawing (reproduced as a wood engraving by the French artist Frédéric Florian in *Force psychique*), titled *Seeing Her, He First Exclaimed 'It is Her!' (En la voyant, il s'écria d'abord 'C'est bien elle!')* (1887, see Fig. 1.3), depicts Tissot from behind, standing next to an easel, which he grasps with his right hand; his left hand clutches the top rail of a chair, which supports a palette, paint brushes, and maulstick. If we accept Besnard's visual description, Tissot attended this particular séance with a premeditated intention to record the occasion in paint. In the work, Newton and Ernest emit a shower of glowing light. The collapsed figure on the floor is the medium. A similar illustration reproduced in Conan Doyle's *The History of Spiritualism*, titled *William Crookes and the Ghost of Katie King or Professor Crooke's Test to Show that the Medium and the Spirit Were Separate Entities* (date unknown, Fig. 1.10), shows the medium Florence Cook collapsed on the floor with the materialised spirit hovering above her as well as the scientist and psychical researcher William Crookes, who shines a light on the spirit to verify that it is not the disguised medium.¹¹⁷ This type of verification was important for Spiritualists attempting to contradict claims of fraudulent mediumistic practices.

¹¹⁷ Reproduced in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1926), 239.

Both the 20 May séance at which Newton's spirit allegedly appeared and Tissot's artworks inspired by her manifestation were described as significant events in Eglinton's biography and in the official records of Spiritualist experiments. For example, in volume II of Conan Doyle's *History of Spiritualism*, he offers a description of this séance, which resembles the version provided by Farmer:

In Paris, in 1885, Eglinton met M. Tissot, the famous artist, who sat with him and subsequently visited him in England. A remarkable materialising séance at which two figures were plainly seen, and one, a lady, was recognised as a relation, has been immortalised by Tissot in a mezzotint entitled 'Apparition Medianimique'. This beautiful, artistic production, a copy of which hangs at the offices of the London Spiritualist Alliance,¹¹⁸ shows the two figures illuminated by spirit lights which they are carrying in their hands. Tissot also executed a portrait etching of the medium, and this is to be found as the frontispiece to Mr. Farmer's book, "Twixt Two Worlds."¹¹⁹

Like Marryat, Conan Doyle highlights the spirit light illumination represented in Tissot's rendition of the materialisation. This element seems to be a key detail that those familiar with séance proceedings highlighted as a distinguishing feature of Tissot's composition. Conan Doyle became the President of the London Spiritualist Alliance in 1925, so he was well positioned to know about the art hanging in the organisation's offices, and the pride of place given to *The Apparition* suggests that one of Spiritualism's most dedicated constituencies endorsed Tissot's interpretation of a spirit manifestation at a séance. Tissot himself may have seen the reproduction hanging there when he reportedly visited the London Spiritualist Alliance in January 1886, which was announced in the Spiritualist periodical *Light*:

We understand that M. Tissot, who arrived unexpectedly in London on Thursday last in time to attend the conversazione of the London Spiritualist Alliance, is engaged upon another and more important picture, illustrative of his recent Spiritualistic experiences. We have pleasure in announcing for publication, at an early date, a descriptive letter on M. Tissot's work from the pen of Mr. W. Eglinton. This will be accompanied by a pen and ink portrait of the distinguished artist.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ It is unclear from Conan Doyle's description if this is a painted copy or one of the mezzotint versions of the composition.

¹¹⁹ Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 45.

¹²⁰ Untitled, *Light, A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* VI, no. 264 (23 January 1886): 43.

It is unclear what work the author refers to in mentioning a 'more important picture, illustrative of his recent Spiritualistic experiences,' but the possibility that Tissot made Spiritualist compositions in addition to *The Apparition* is tantalizing, although unverified. Ultimately, it is significant that the Alliance featured *The Apparition* so prominently in their headquarters, since this signals that Tissot represented the visual language of Spiritualism according to the expectations of the movement's most devoted adherents.

The Medium's Message: *The Apparition*

In both the oil painting and the mezzotint versions of *The Apparition*, Tissot depicts the spirits of Kathleen Newton and Ernest draped with shrouds that cover their heads. They are perceptible against the indistinct darkness with a glowing luminescence that emanates from their figures. They are visible, but they also appear ethereal, as if their substance is light, not flesh and blood. The brightest intensity issues from their hands, which resemble the chromolithographs by the Dutch artist J. G. Keulemans in *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, particularly the illustration titled *A Spirit Hand* (ca. 1884–1885, Fig. 1.11). In Tissot's work, this light illuminates the subjects' faces, which are focused intently on the viewer with a tentative yet eager curiosity that is particularly evident in Newton's expression. She leans into Ernest's protectively enwrapped left arm, but the tilt of her head and the intensity of her gaze project a receptive familiarity, as if she recognises the viewer—similar to the expression on Eglinton's face in the drawing (see Fig. 1.7) for the etched portrait. Newton's features are clearly identifiable from Tissot's many other depictions of her, confirming that this is not the representation of a generic spirit. Although she is presented in a costume that is distinct from anything that she was depicted wearing before her death, the likeness was enough for Newton's own family to be drawn to the image. According to Eglinton, Newton's sister, Mary Pauline Hervey, once called on him to see the mezzotint and, without identifying herself,

recognised Newton particularly because of 'how faithfully [Tissot] ... caught the likeness of the lady in the picture.'¹²¹ Tissot also gave an inscribed copy of *The Apparition* to Newton's niece, Isabelle Hervey, on the occasion of her wedding in 1893.¹²² That Newton's family was so attracted to the image demonstrates the evocative emotional attraction that Spiritualism played upon in suggesting the existence of an afterlife to the bereaved.

Prior to the discovery of the oil on canvas version of *The Apparition* during the research for this thesis, the mezzotint reproductions were the only known records of Tissot's composition. Several of Tissot's contemporaries recall seeing the painting in his possession, however. George Bastard, one of Tissot's earliest biographers, claimed to have seen it in Tissot's Paris studio before the artist's death:

It [*The Apparition*] certainly suggested to the painter a very curious painting: the apparitions are near each other; the spirit and Kitty [Kathleen Newton] are a reddish tone, strangely contrasting with Kitty's diaphanous head, lit as if by electric rays that emerge from their hands. Their brown hands seem to hold a sort of luminous globe that reflected on the pale but smiling face of the pretty English woman.¹²³

It is curious that Bastard describes that 'the spirit and Kitty are a reddish tone' and that they have 'brown hands,' since this is not evident in the only known version of the painting (see Fig. 1.1). It is possible that Bastard saw an earlier, destroyed, or untraced oil version, or perhaps he misremembered a print version and describes it as the painting. Despite this confusion, Bastard's reminiscence is significant for its reference to the 'electric rays' from the 'luminous globe[s]' that illuminate the spirit pair, which suggests a way of understanding Spiritualism in the context of the modern industrial world. Spiritualism in late nineteenth-

¹²¹ Eglinton, 'The "Apparition Mediunimique,"': 153. Eglinton claimed that Hervey admitted her interest in the subject to him only after he noticed how deeply the image affected her.

¹²² Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 156n5.

¹²³ 'Il est certain qu'elle a suggéré au peintre un tableau très curieux: les apparitions sont l'une près de l'autre; l'esprit et Kitty est d'un ton rougeâtre, contrastant singulièrement avec la tête vaporeuse de Kitty, éclairée comme par des rayons électriques qui se dégagent de leurs mains. Ces mains brunes ont l'air de tenir une sorte de globe lumineux qui se reflète sur le visage pâle mais souriant de la jolie anglaise.' George Bastard, 'James Tissot: Notes Intimes,' *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*, 2nd ser. 36 (November 1906): 265–266. English translation mine.

century North America and Europe was part of a widespread inquiry into the limits of human perception and scientific understanding, which included technological discoveries. The luminosity of Tissot's apparitions, 'lit as if by electric rays,' positions them in contemporary terms.¹²⁴ The modern link between Spiritualism and technology manifested most explicitly in experiments around spirit photography, which is discussed further in Chapter 3.

In *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, this phenomenon of emitted electric rays is also explained as serving a practical function whereby 'the lights brought by the spirits ... enable [séance participants] to see them in the dark séances.'¹²⁵ Farmer describes them as 'if a gem—a turquoise or a pearl—three inches across, had become incandescent, full of light.'¹²⁶ The reference to a turquoise gemstone might explain the small dabs of blue paint used in Tissot's reproduction of spirit lights (Fig. 1.12). The light emanating from the spirits' hands in *The Apparition* foreshadows images from *The Life of Christ* of the resurrected Messiah with his incandescent stigmata (see, for example, Fig. 3.15), demonstrating how Tissot would later apply the vocabulary of Spiritualism to his biblical works.

This glow emanating from materialisations was a hallmark of séances, especially those mediated by Eglinton, including the 20 May 1885 dark séance where Newton's spirit appeared. In an 1899 interview that has been overlooked by modern scholars, Tissot allegedly recounted that Newton's 'face [was] blue, as if illumined by moon light.'¹²⁷ He continues, 'I saw then an admirable group lit by the same blue light, but more white, as if

¹²⁴ For more on late nineteenth-century lighting and modernity in London, see Lynda Nead, 'Daylight by Night' and 'Secrets of the Gas,' in *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 87–108. For a discussion about late nineteenth-century lighting and modernity in Paris, see Hollis Clayson, *Illuminated Paris: Essays on Art and Lighting in the Belle Époque* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

¹²⁵ Farmer, *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, 26.

¹²⁶ Farmer, *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, 27.

¹²⁷ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit: Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture,' *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* 36, no. 31 (3 August 1899): 1.

portions of the moon had been taken and put into the hands of the apparitions.¹²⁸ Similarly, in *Force psychique* Rambaud describes 'bright white patches ... which cannot be compared to the phosphorescence produced by the rubbing of a match on a wall in the darkness but rather to moon dust.'¹²⁹ Moreover, Tissot described, 'The two hands joined have the appearance of holding phosphorous, lit as if by electricity focused against the stomach.'¹³⁰ The luminous appearance of the figures in *The Apparition*—specifically the painting—was also mentioned in the *Journals* of the de Goncourt brothers, Jules and Edmond. Edmond de Goncourt reported that on 1 February 1890, he visited this work with the writer Julia Daudet, the wife of Tissot's friend and author Alphonse Daudet, in a room where Tissot performed rituals:

And in the twilight, with a voice which he made quite mysterious and a vague gaze, he showed us a rock crystal ball, and an enamel tray, which are used for evocations. ... Then he took notebooks from a chest of drawers, where he showed us many pages containing the history of these evocations, and finally showed us a painting representing a woman with luminous hands, whom he claimed had come to kiss him, and whose lips he felt on his cheek, her lips, like lips of fire.¹³¹

This phenomenon of bright light radiating from an otherworldly spiritual source is also conveyed in the illustrations by Keulemans in *'TwiXt Two Worlds*, such as *A Spirit Hand* (see Fig. 1.11), demonstrating its prevalence as an element of the visual language of Spiritualism.

While the existence of any notebooks detailing the history of Tissot's Spiritualist 'evocations' are currently unknown, the enamel tray described by de Goncourt may be a

¹²⁸ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit': 2.

¹²⁹ 'A ce moment, sur différentes parties des vêtements du médium, apparaissent des plaques lumineuses et blanches, qu'on ne saurait comparer à la phosphorescence produite par le frottement d'une allumette sur un mur dans l'obscurité, mais bien plutôt à de la poussière de lune.' Rambaud, *Force psychique*, 7. English translation mine.

¹³⁰ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit': 1.

¹³¹ 'Et dans le crépuscule, avec une voix qui se fait tout à fait mystérieuse, et des yeux vagues, il nous montre une boule en cristal de roche, et un plateau d'émail, qui servent à des évocations, et où l'on entend, assure-t-il, des voix qui se disputent. Puis il tire d'une commode des cahiers, où il nous montre de nombreuses pages contenant l'historique de ces évocations, et nous montre enfin un tableau représentant une femme aux mains lumineuses, qu'il dit être venue l'embrasser, et dont il a senti sur sa joue, ses lèvres, des lèvres pareilles à des lèvres de feu.' Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 8, 1889–1891 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, G. Charpentier & E. Fasquelle, 1895), 132. English translation mine.

recently rediscovered *cloisonné* enamel made by Tissot that conflates Egyptian, Christian, and Chinese symbolism relating to the afterlife (Fig. 1.13), indicating Tissot's knowledge of international and historical spiritual iconography.¹³² Each of the panel's corners features the symbol of one of the four Christian Evangelists. The standing winged protectors of the dead are the Egyptian goddesses Nephthys and Isis, sisters of Osiris; the central figure is their mother, Nut, goddess of the sky, who often appeared on Egyptian coffins.¹³³ Tissot has rendered the disk above Nut's head as the ancient Chinese yin and yang symbol, enhanced with his own monogram, 'JTJ.' In the background, stylised ankh signs represent both mortal existence and the afterlife.¹³⁴ This combination of diverse symbols reflects the late nineteenth-century European interest in alternative spiritualities, which borrowed concepts as well as iconography from a variety of belief systems. Tissot's curiosity about different religions and his proclivity for merging different spiritual iconographies continued throughout the last two decades of his life and in the works of art that he created in these final years. This blending of spiritualities reached its full expression at his estate, the Château de Buillon, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Tissot's Spiritualist investigations were not only shared with visitors to his studio but were also very publicly and widely disseminated through mezzotint versions of *The Apparition*. These prints represent an aesthetic experiment for the artist; *The Apparition* is a

¹³² I am grateful to Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz for the fruitful dialogue about Tissot and religion that prompted this suggestion.

¹³³ I wish to acknowledge colleagues in the Ancient Art Department at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Dr. Renée Dreyfus, Distinguished Curator and Curator in Charge, and Dr. Louise Chu, Associate Curator, for helping me decode these symbols.

¹³⁴ Appropriating a variety of complex symbols in *cloisonné* may already have been on the artist's mind when he created *Fortune* (ca. 1878–1882, see Fig. 2.27), a model for an unrealised fountain, which included zodiac symbols in bronze around a blue-enamelled globe flanked with writhing serpents and angels. See Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, "'Always in Search of the Exquisite in Art': Tissot's Cloisonné Enamels," in Buron, *James Tissot*, 232–237.

rare print that Tissot issued in multiple colours.¹³⁵ Art historian and Tissot scholar Willard Misfeldt posits that 'the impressions in blue-green perhaps [are] the most successful in conveying the gloomy, supernatural effects [Tissot] was trying to create.'¹³⁶ This is an interesting observation, since this is the same colour palette that Tissot used for the oil painting, although there is no documentation that Misfeldt ever saw this version of the composition. Misfeldt also mentions that another rare example of a colour print is Tissot's etching portrait of William Eglinton, in a hue he describes as 'sanguine.'¹³⁷ The etymological associations with this word—chiefly blood—suggest an interesting reading of the print as an evocation of corporeality. The mezzotint of Kathleen Newton and Ernest, by contrast, achieves a much more ephemeral effect. It is also significant that these rare colour prints are those that most closely relate to his Spiritualist experiences. Perhaps the aesthetic motivation behind Tissot's use of multiple colours for these specific prints stemmed from an attempt to recreate the atmospheric experience of the séance or, perhaps, because this subject matter is the most unconventional in his oeuvre, it thus received a more experimental treatment.

As art historian Serena Keshavjee suggests, 'Tissot may have chosen to reproduce the *Mediumistic Apparition* as a mezzotint for its luminous, clear effect, which imitates the early spirit images.'¹³⁸ It has also been noted that Tissot's engagement with the mezzotint process resulted in images with a 'haunting quality,' capturing 'moments [that] emerge as solemn and ghostly.'¹³⁹ This idea could be developed even further to consider the implications of the medium, its process, and the correlation to a séance. According to Alexandre Auguste

¹³⁵ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 27. It was printed in black, blue-green, and purple, and it is now represented in many public and private graphic art collections worldwide. See also Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints* (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1978), 344–346.

¹³⁶ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 27.

¹³⁷ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 27.

¹³⁸ Keshavjee, 'The "Scientization" of Spirituality,' 220.

¹³⁹ Marshall and Warner, *James Tissot*, 142.

Philippe Charles Blanc's *Grammar of Painting and Engraving* (1874), this printmaking process was considered 'more suitable than any other style of engraving to represent phantoms, incantations, artificial lights ... [and] all the effects of night.'¹⁴⁰ The process was so closely associated with the supernatural that the English scholar and author of numerous ghostly tales M. R. James published a story titled 'The Mezzotint' in his first collection, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904). The titular print features a moonlit scene, which becomes the setting for a macabre image that changes over time and effectively takes on a sinister life of its own. James most probably chose this medium as the focus of his eerie story for the same reasons that Tissot chose it to reproduce *The Apparition*: the luminous effects achieved through this printmaking process are particularly well-suited to nocturnal images and paranormal subjects, which makes mezzotint the ideal medium to illustrate the visual language of Spiritualism.

Creating a mezzotint entails working from dark to light, much like the experience of witnessing the gradual materialisation of illuminated spirits at a dark séance. In the case of *The Apparition*, Tissot enacted the same procedures as a medium at a séance—making the invisible visible from darkness to light. The creation of a mezzotint starts with a metal plate that is treated to catch ink. The image to be printed is revealed by burnishing away surface areas, which will not hold ink and will therefore print white. The particular printmaking process of mezzotint—working from dark to light—closely resembles bringing forth a luminous image from an unlit room during a dark séance. Tissot included a description on his print specifying that the manifestation occurred at a dark séance, as well as the date and

¹⁴⁰Alexandre Auguste Philippe Charles Blanc, *Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. Kate Newell Doggett (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1874), 281.

location ('Dark séance d'Eglinton / du 20 May 1885 / Londres'). Thus, the image serves as both art and documentary evidence of what allegedly manifested at this séance.

The similarities between the mezzotint process and the experience of a séance are important, since Tissot later described entering a trance-like state so he could receive the inspiration to compose his biblical compositions.¹⁴¹ Although these subsequent works were made in watercolour, not mezzotint, this is an earlier example of a link between Tissot's art-making techniques and Spiritualist practices. Tissot does not explicitly associate trance and mezzotint, however, the connection between this medium and a séance creates an interpretive link with the process through which he received inspiration for *The Life of Christ*. In his introduction to *The Life of Christ*, Tissot muses, 'Is not the artist, indeed, a kind of sensitive plant, the activity of which, when concentrated on a certain point, is intensified, and through a kind of hyperaesthesia, is powerfully affected by contact with objects outside of itself; this contact producing vivid images on the brain?'¹⁴² Somewhat self-consciously, he follows this reflection with a disclaimer: 'I will not enter here into the details of the brilliant light, almost amounting to divination, which was thrown on various points by the sight of certain stones, and certain apparently insignificant topographical details: to do so would be to risk being accused of mysticism.'¹⁴³ In this description of his working method, Tissot's language suggests that he has mediumistic powers—accessible through trance—to materialise the visions that he translated into biblical illustrations.¹⁴⁴ He elaborates that specific images

¹⁴¹ See the Introduction in James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 1, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), XI.

¹⁴² Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, XI.

¹⁴³ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, XI.

¹⁴⁴ It is important to differentiate Tissot's art from the automatic drawings and writing practiced by nineteenth-century mediums. His images are more realistic and narrative than the work of Georgiana Houghton and Anna Mary Howitt, for example. For more on these artists in context, see Susan L. Aberth, Simon Grant, and Lars Bang Larsen, *Not Without My Ghosts: The Artist as Medium*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2020).

would emerge in mysterious ways, through his 'powers of intuition,' by which 'scenes of the past rose up before [his] mental vision in a peculiar and striking manner.'¹⁴⁵ Just as Eglinton claimed to conjure messages from deceased spirits, often making their writing or their spirit visible, Tissot similarly claimed that his hyperesthesia—the abnormally intensified sensitivity to sensorial stimulation—could manifest images from the Bible.

In this sense, *The Apparition* can be seen as a harbinger of Tissot's experimentation with materialising visions through art making. Farmer called the mezzotint version 'the wonder and talk of the artistic world ... as a work of art there is no question of its merit. Powerfully conceived and happily rendered, the picture ... is a lasting monument of the artist's appreciation of the blessing bestowed by spirit communion.'¹⁴⁶ In Farmer's opinion, the composition achieved success as both a work of aesthetic merit and a demonstration of the artist's belief in Spiritualism. Eglinton himself was similarly positive:

Both unbelievers and those who are familiar with the higher phases of Spiritualism, recognise in the 'Apparition Mediunimique,' that which is beautiful in the extreme; perhaps its very simplicity is its attraction. But here it is, a monument to the abiding truths of Spiritualism, and of the genius of one of its latest converts.¹⁴⁷

Tissot's modern biographers have not been as sympathetic or effusive. Twentieth-century Tissot scholar Michael Wentworth comments:

It is difficult to be as positive as Farmer in any assessment of the aesthetic qualities of *L'Apparition Médiunimique*. In its impulse, it is clearly of the aesthetic tradition that inspired a work like Dante Gabriel Rossetti's picture of his dead wife, the *Beata Beatrix* [ca. 1871–1872, see Fig. 3.38], but its substance is entirely literal, as is shown by comparison with two plates from Farmer's book, which represent the same phenomenon with a somewhat more naive directness, *Phases of Materialisation No. 3* and *An Apparition Formed in Full View*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, X.

¹⁴⁶ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187.

¹⁴⁷ Eglinton, 'The "Apparition Mediunimique,"' 153.

¹⁴⁸ Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of his Prints*, 298.

Wentworth comes tantalisingly close to elaborating on the rich context of Spiritualist images, the 'aesthetic tradition' in which *The Apparition* must be understood. But he fails to explore the critical implications of considering images such as *The Apparition* and *Beata Beatrix* within a broader visual language of Spiritualism in nineteenth-century British art, a fascinating topic that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It is useful, however, to contrast *The Apparition* with a more literal nineteenth-century painting of a ghostly haunting. In *'Speak! Speak!'* (1895, Fig. 1.14), by Tissot's contemporary the Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais, the figure of a rather corporeal woman startles a very alive man, who implores her to address him. The woman's pale skin, white gown, and diaphanous veil give the impression that she is otherworldly, however she does not radiate a supernatural glow like the spirits in *The Apparition*.¹⁴⁹ The ambiguity of whether this woman is alive or has been revived was apparently intentional, as M. H. Spielmann, the Victorian critic and biographer of Millais, explained: "When I remarked that I could not tell whether the luminous apparition was a spirit or a woman he was pleased: "That's just what I want," he said; "I don't know either, nor," he added, pointing to the picture, "does he."¹⁵⁰ There is much less uncertainty in Tissot's *The Apparition*, where the luminous spirits are unlikely to be mistaken for anything other than otherworldly materialisations.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ My thinking about this painting was inspired by a paper presented by Nancy Rose Marshall at a 2017 College Art Association panel ('Haunted Modernity: Visions, Enchantments, and Apparitions in Nineteenth-Century European Art') convened by this author and co-chaired by Alison Hokanson, Associate Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art. See Nancy Rose Marshall, 'A Haunting Picture in Light of Victorian Science: John Everett Millais's *Speak! Speak!*,' in Nancy Rose Marshall, ed., *Victorian Science and Imagery* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021), 111–137.

¹⁵⁰ M. H. Spielmann, *Millais and His Works: With Special Reference to the Exhibition at the Royal Academy, 1898* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1898), 119.

¹⁵¹ This thesis refrains from referring to the subjects of *The Apparition* as ghosts to differentiate between manifestations conjured at a Spiritualist séance and the more general concept of hauntings by spectres. For more on ghosts in nineteenth-century culture, see Susan Owens, 'A Haunted Century,' in *The Ghost: A Cultural History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 185–212.

Wentworth is also dismissive of *The Apparition's* 'aesthetic qualities,' but only supports this argument with the suggestion that 'its substance is entirely literal.'¹⁵² In fact, it is the mezzotint's suggestion of non-literal substance and ethereal, immaterial, translucent luminosity that renders it so significant within the artist's oeuvre as a link with Spiritualist imagery and beliefs, as well as to his *Life of Christ* images, which would make use of these effects. While according to Wentworth, the 'naive directness' of the images from Farmer's *'Twixt Two Worlds* conveys a spontaneity that suggests the immediacy of viewing Spiritualist phenomena, Wentworth does not attribute these images to J. G. Keulemans, therefore implying that they are by Tissot. Thus, Wentworth's comparison of *The Apparition* with illustrations by Keulemans is inherently problematic if it is presumed that these works are all by Tissot.

By stating that 'its substance is entirely literal,' Wentworth also draws a connection between *The Apparition* and the use of photography in nineteenth-century Spiritualist experiments, which will be discussed further in relation to Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations in Chapter 3. The substance of spirit photographic images was supposed to be 'entirely literal,' since they were pseudo-scientific documentation of materialisations at séances and during other occult investigations attempting to prove the veracity of the spirit world. Unlike drawings or other artistic renderings, the medium of photography had the advantage of capturing materialisations in a manner that could be submitted as scientific documentation and proof of an otherworldly presence among the living. Spirit photography claimed to reveal the appearance of ghosts unseen to the naked eye—often in the presence of living relatives—and these photographs of materialisations also purportedly recorded other types of visual

¹⁵² Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints*, 298.

phenomena, like the appearance of spirits at a séance.¹⁵³ Although photography of materialisations was principally useful in counteracting claims of fraud or trickery on the part of the medium, it was not always the preferred method for capturing occult phenomena. As Keulemans writes:

It has been remarked that photography would be the best method to give life-like and trustworthy representations of these mysterious séance-room occurrences. I have ... tried the experiment and found it to fail. Small or moving objects, as can be imagined, never come out at all. Materialised forms do not invariably present themselves within the proper focus of the camera (and in the cases where they actually do so, they prove nothing, since they merely represent a 'human being' quite indistinguishable from an ordinary mortal), and this method was most deficient in the reproduction of coloured objects.¹⁵⁴

Contrary to Wentworth's argument that *The Apparition's* 'substance is entirely literal,' Tissot's mezzotint offers a more evocative image of luminous materialised spirits than in photographic images. The art-making process allows the artist himself to act as a messenger of the spirit world, using the same visual language, but manifested through art instead of Spiritualist practices. Through *The Apparition*, Tissot used the vocabulary of Spiritualism to represent an example of the visions allegedly experienced at séances, which achieved a more otherworldly effect than any other medium—even photography—offered.

Dematerialisation/Rematerialisation: Kathleen Newton and Tuberculosis

Kathleen Newton is highly recognisable in *The Apparition* from Tissot's many representations of her in his paintings and prints made between 1876 and 1882. None of these previous depictions show her in the costume that her spirit wears in *The Apparition*, however, where she is swathed in folds of white drapery devoid of any distinguishing marks or

¹⁵³ See Andreas Fischer, "'The Reciprocal Adaptation of Optics and Phenomena': The Photographic Recording of Materialisations,' in Clément Chéroux, ed., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 170–189.

¹⁵⁴ J. G. Keulemans, 'Phenomena Called "Spiritual" Illustrated by Chromo-Lithography,' *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* V, no. 218 (7 March 1885): 114.

patterns. This shroud-like costume, coupled with the glowing transparency of her robes, sets the image in stark contrast to Tissot's more corporeal images of Newton before her death, where she is pictured as a fashionable nineteenth-century woman.¹⁵⁵ From 1877 to 1880, Tissot also painted a sequence of pictures featuring Newton personifying the seasons, with the final image poignantly and symbolically suggestive of her physical decline: *Spring (Specimen of a Portrait)* (1877, Fig. 1.15); *July (Specimen of a Portrait)* (1878, Fig. 1.16); *October* (1877, Fig. 1.17); and *A Winter Walk* (1880, Fig. 1.18a). These pictures parallel the arc of Newton's health, gradually progressing from wellness to illness.

Newton appears at her most hale in *Spring* and *July*, while her literal and allegorical decline progresses through the seasons. In *Spring*, she is emblazoned with sunlight, presumably standing among the lush foliage of Tissot's garden at his St. John's Wood villa in London, where the couple lived. *July* presents her in the same white dress with yellow ribbons, but here she is seated indoors and the shadows under her eyes are darker.¹⁵⁶ There is a suggestion of weariness about her countenance in the way she is posed on the floral couch, with her left hand draped over an enormous ochre-yellow pillow. A view of the distant Ramsgate harbour lighthouse through the window behind her implies that Tissot and Newton travelled to the famous seaside resort on the Kent coast in search of a restorative setting to encourage her health.

In *October*, Newton is seen from behind. She is dressed in a frilly skirt of such deep purple that it appears almost black, which is paired with a fur-trimmed black jacket. The composition's sombre colour palette reinforces the painting's solemn mood. With a glance

¹⁵⁵ For more on these types of fashionable images, see Justine De Young, 'Tissot and Fashion,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 60–62 and pls. 73–85.

¹⁵⁶ For more on the symbolism of this dress, see Francoise Tétart-Vittu, 'A Summer Dress with Yellow Ribbons,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 63–65.

over her shoulder, Newton is exiting the scene, moving away from the viewer. This poised and elegant woman with a well-worn blue book under her right arm lifts her skirt slightly—perhaps as a matter of practicality as she traverses the ground's layer of foliage. She approaches a dense tapestry of horse chestnut leaves—a botanic curtain for her departure from the pictorial stage. Fallen leaves are strewn across other compositions from Tissot's London period,¹⁵⁷ but here they may have a specific resonance with Newton's illness. Author and chemical pathologist Thomas Dormandy suggests in *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (2001) that tuberculosis literature used the image of falling leaves as a metaphor for 'failing hopes [and] the destruction of young lives.'¹⁵⁸ *October* is dated to 1877, five years before Newton's death, but perhaps the signs of her ill health were already evident.

The picture that could be interpreted as the final image in this seasons series, *A Winter Walk*, is the only half-length portrait of the group. Here Newton's figure is truncated, and the perspective forces an intense focus on her face. In several states of this composition's print versions (Fig. 1.18b), Tissot includes lines from the Romantic poet John Keats's poem 'Fancy': 'She will bring, in spite of frost / Beauties that the earth has lost.'¹⁵⁹ Even in the depths of winter ('in spite of frost'), Keats proposes that one can imagine 'all delights of summer weather; / All the buds and bells of May.'¹⁶⁰ Keats's rumination on the transience of changing seasons, mortality, and the certainty of passing time is expressed further in the subsequent lines: 'Oh, sweet Fancy! Let her loose; / Every thing is spoilt by use: / Where's the cheek that doth not fade, / Too much gaz'd at? Where's the maid / Whose lip mature is ever

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, *The Reply* (also known as *The Letter*, 1874, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa).

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001), 85.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Cook, ed., *John Keats: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 248, lines 29–30.

¹⁶⁰ Cook, *John Keats*, 248, lines 32–33.

new?'¹⁶¹ By directing the viewer to this poem, Tissot intimates that if escaping to 'fancy' can restore that which has been lost in the imagination, it can ultimately defy suffering and the boundaries of separation—perhaps even counteract the inevitable mortality of a beautiful woman.¹⁶² This is suggestive of the way that Spiritualism challenged the separation between the living and the dead by creating forums for communication and interaction between the spiritual and terrestrial planes, such as séances and spirit writing.

In these seasonal compositions as well as in a number of other paintings, Tissot costumed the elegant Newton in contemporary, fashionable dresses. This is true even of works that portray Newton in deteriorating health, depicted through languid poses, ruddy cheeks, and eyes ringed with dark shadows, as in *Mrs. Newton Resting on a Chaise-longue* (ca. 1881–1882, Fig. 1.19) and *Summer Evening* (also known as *The Dreamer*, 1881–1882, Fig. 1.20). Newton's ill health is especially evident in the latter picture; her eyelids droop heavily and her body sinks into the frame of a wicker chair. Prior to meeting Newton, Tissot used the same furniture for an earlier painting of another generic image of a sick woman, *The Convalescent* (1875, Fig. 1.21). In this picture, however, there is no specificity to the symptoms of the woman's illness nor any clues to her identity. The setting is Tissot's St. John's Wood garden, and the convalescent's peignoir is similar to the white day dress with yellow ribbons worn by Newton in *Spring* and *July*, however this woman is not Newton. Although it establishes a precedent for the later images of Newton, *The Convalescent* lacks the familiarity of *Mrs. Newton Resting on a Chaise-longue* and *Summer Evening*, where the visible indications of tuberculosis are apparent in the heightened colour of the subject's cheeks and dark circles under her eyes.

¹⁶¹ Cook, *John Keats*, 248, lines 67–71.

¹⁶² In another connection of poetic resonance, Keats himself died young from tuberculosis. He perished in 1821, at age 25.

Tissot's images of Newton suggest an intimate awareness of her condition and its physical manifestations. These details conflict with Misfeldt's assertion that the print version of *Summer Evening* bears 'no indication of the hovering shadow of the illness that was to claim her life the following year.'¹⁶³ In fact, the version of the oil painting in etching and drypoint distinctly repeats the dark shadows contrasted against Newton's fair complexion, which are reminders of the taxing effects of tuberculosis. As the writer and philosopher Susan Sontag describes in her essay 'Illness as Metaphor' (1978):

TB is understood as a disease of extreme contrasts: white pallor and red flush, hyperactivity alternating with languidness. The spasmodic course of the disease is illuminated by what is thought of as the prototypical TB symptom, coughing. The sufferer is wracked by coughs, then sinks back, recovers breath, breathes normally; then coughs again.¹⁶⁴

These contrasts are evident in *Mrs. Newton Resting on a Chaise-longue* and particularly in *Summer Evening*. That Tissot was so acquainted with the horrifying manifestations of this progressive disease is an important part of understanding his bereavement and, consequently, his attraction to Spiritualism, with its promise of reuniting him with his beloved.

It is typically presumed, as suggested by art historian Nancy Rose Marshall and co-curator of the exhibition *James Tissot: Victorian Life / Modern Love* (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut; Musée du Québec; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, 1999–2000), that 'Tissot's illicit relationship seems to have affected his welcome in polite English society, for he withdrew to his own smaller, more tolerant Bohemian circles.'¹⁶⁵ Among Tissot's contemporaries, Newton's influence was likened to that of

¹⁶³ Willard Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot: Prints from the Gottlieb Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1991), 126.

¹⁶⁴ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 11–12.

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Rose Marshall, 'Transcripts of Modern Life': *The London Paintings of James Tissot, 1871–1882* (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1997), 20. See also Samantha Burton, 'Champagne in the Shrubbery: Sex, Science, and

Margarita Luti, who was known as *La Fornarina*, over Raphael,¹⁶⁶ and it was rumoured that Tissot kept the young divorcée so sequestered at his home in St. John's Wood that only the artist's friend Paul Helleu had seen her in person—an accident when he inadvertently opened the door to her room while she was undressing.¹⁶⁷ Alternatively, it is also possible that Tissot and Newton consciously refrained from an active social life because of her health. In the freely painted oil sketch *Mrs. Newton Asleep in a Conservatory Chair* (1881–1882, Fig. 1.22), which less explicitly shows signs of her tuberculosis, Newton is observed in the same wicker chair as *Summer Evening*, with plush cushions supporting her reclined head and closed eyes, alluding to her need for rest. In all three of these compositions (*Mrs. Newton Resting on a Chaise-longue*, *Summer Evening*, and *Mrs. Newton Asleep in a Conservatory Chair*), Newton enacts a similar pose to the staged dying young woman in Henry Peach Robinson's famous photograph *Fading Away* (1858, Fig. 1.23). Rather than surrounding Newton with mourning loved ones, as in Robinson's image, Tissot heightens the emphasis on Newton's isolation by eliminating any other figures. Sontag describes that 'TB was understood as a disease that isolates one from the community. However steep its incidence in a population, TB ... always seemed to be a mysterious disease of individuals.'¹⁶⁸ Instead of hiding from the world because of their illicit relationship, perhaps Tissot and Newton secluded themselves to avoid situations that might have exacerbated Newton's ill health or that could expose her to others. In a sense, Newton's retreat from society is another form of her physical dematerialisation.

Space in James Tissot's London Conservatory,' *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 3, Papers and Responses from the Twelfth Annual Conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association (Spring 2015): 478–479.

¹⁶⁶ Bastard, 'James Tissot,' 263–266.

¹⁶⁷ Reminiscence from Jacques-Émile Blanche, cited in Laver, *Vulgar Society*, 39–40.

¹⁶⁸ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 37–38.

Besides Tissot's visual records, there are no known written accounts of Newton's illness and death. There are literary examples, however, which dramatise the nineteenth-century consumptive's experience at the end of life. Indeed, the character of a romantic heroine dying from tuberculosis proliferated in the nineteenth century with such popular examples as Marguerite Gautier of Alexandre Dumas *fils*'s novel and subsequent stage adaptation *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), which was set to music in Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La traviata* (1853), with the heroine renamed Violetta Valéry. Additional examples from popular literature and opera include Henri Murger's *La Vie de Bohème* (1851), which Giacomo Puccini used as the basis for the opera *La Bohème* (1896), featuring the consumptive character Mimì, as well as Fantine from Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* (1862). The abundant models of nineteenth-century consumptive heroines provide many descriptive portrayals of the tubercular woman. One example that resonates strongly with the images of Newton is Fyodor Dostoyevsky's depiction of Katerina Ivanovna in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), which could very well apply to Newton's appearance in Tissot's paintings from the final years of her life: 'She was a rather tall, slim and graceful woman, terribly emaciated ... with a hectic flush in her cheeks. ... Her eyes glittered as in fever. ... And that consumptive and excited face ... made a sickening impression.'¹⁶⁹ Perhaps because of cultural associations like Dostoyevsky's narrative, Newton is typically described by modern scholars as 'clearly ... a frail and fragile young woman,'¹⁷⁰ although there is no primary evidence to support this.

¹⁶⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 20.

¹⁷⁰ 'Kathleen Newton semble de toute évidence avoir été une frêle et fragile jeune femme.' Rhea Block, *Un Univers Intime: Tableaux de la Collection Frits Lugt*, exh. cat. (Paris: Fondation Custodia, 2012), catalogue entry 91. English translation mine.

This line of thinking reinforces a point made by Sontag that 'tuberculosis provided a metaphoric equivalent for delicacy, sensitivity, sadness, [and] powerlessness.'¹⁷¹ Newton's psychological state during her decline was especially prone to speculation. In *The White Death*, Dormandy describes her as 'melancholic and neurotic, especially when her illness began to destroy her.'¹⁷² As Sontag explains, 'The TB-prone character that haunted imaginations in the nineteenth century was an amalgam of two different fantasies: someone both passionate and repressed.'¹⁷³ The dismissive correlations extend to Tissot's art, which similarly falls victim to Dormandy's pronouncements, with the author asserting, 'Her death in 1879 [*sic*] also shattered his talent: he returned to France to devote the rest of his life to barely mediocre (though profitable) religious paintings.'¹⁷⁴ Dormandy's assumption perpetuates the romantic fetishisation of a woman about whose personality little is known. Although neither Newton's mental state nor Tissot's artistic talents were immune from hearsay and speculation, the frequency of Newton's image in Tissot's oeuvre suggests the closeness of their relationship as she progressively declined from tuberculosis, which Tissot reflected in his compositions through the overt signs of her illness. Tissot thus drew details from personal experience while also tapping into the trend of portraying consumptive women. The union of personal reference and cultural trends is a hallmark of Tissot's art, seen also in his fusion of Spiritualism and Catholicism.

It is unclear how long Newton suffered with tuberculosis, but Tissot witnessed the final years of her decline firsthand. There is no question that it would have been difficult to watch his loved one suffer through the disease's final stages. Tuberculosis was often

¹⁷¹ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 61.

¹⁷² Dormandy, *The White Death*, 97. Dormandy mistakenly identifies her as 'Kathleen Irene Ashburton Kelly,' instead of Kathleen Irene Ashburnham Kelly.

¹⁷³ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 39.

¹⁷⁴ Dormandy, *The White Death*, 98.

colloquially referred to as 'consumption,' owing to the manner in which it seemingly consumed the body of the invalid. (It is also called the white plague, wasting disease, and phthisis.) In Sontag's words, 'TB is disintegration, febrilisation, dematerialisation; it is a disease of liquids—the body turning to phlegm and mucus and sputum and, finally, blood—and of air, of the need for better air.'¹⁷⁵ During Newton's lifetime there was no known cure for the disease, so Tissot was forced to watch Newton effectively dematerialise before him as she was consumed by tuberculosis. It is a poignant twist of fate that Newton died in 1882—the very year that the *tubercle bacilli* were identified by the German bacteriologist Robert Koch.¹⁷⁶ Following Koch's discovery, the disease was 'no longer a vague phantom. The heretofore unseen killer was now visible as a living object, and its assailants at last had a target for their blows.'¹⁷⁷ The language used in this description has a particular resonance with the themes of this chapter. Describing tuberculosis as an 'unseen' and 'phantom' killer made 'visible' by scientific discovery provides a useful link between the disease that killed Newton and the manifestation of her invisible spirit made visible at the séance depicted in *The Apparition*. Through microscopes, modern science made the cause of a previously invisible disease visible; through séances, modern Spiritualism made the apparitions of previously invisible deceased loved ones visible.

Kathleen Newton died on 9 November 1882, and according to her niece Lilian Hervey, Tissot was so deeply affected that he 'draped her coffin in purple velvet and prayed beside it for hours.'¹⁷⁸ Newton was buried on consecrated ground in St. Mary's Roman

¹⁷⁵ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 13.

¹⁷⁶ See Helen Bynum, 'Consumption Becomes Tuberculosis,' in *Spitting Blood: The History of Tuberculosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95–127.

¹⁷⁷ Jean and René Jules Dubos, *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man, and Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 102.

¹⁷⁸ Marita Ross, 'The Truth about Tissot,' *Everybody's* (15 June 1946), 7.

Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green, London.¹⁷⁹ Tissot left for Paris five days after Newton's death, following her funeral on 14 November at the Church of Our Lady, Lisson Grove, St. John's Wood, and he was recorded in Paris on 15 November, having apparently called on Edmond de Goncourt that morning after travelling from London overnight.¹⁸⁰ Tissot seemingly wasted no time escaping London, but as this chapter demonstrates, he could not—or would not—give up Newton's memory as quickly, which resulted in his attempts to make contact with her via Spiritualist séances.

It is curious that Tissot sought the company of Edmond de Goncourt immediately after returning to Paris, given the author's occasionally critical opinions about the artist. But perhaps Tissot was thinking about some of his final images of the ailing Newton, including a series of illustrations where she modelled for Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's novel *Renée Mauperin* (1864, with illustrations published in 1884), in which the beloved titular heroine suffers from a fatal illness—a 'haunting parallel' between the two women, according to Misfeldt.¹⁸¹ After Tissot called on him, de Goncourt recorded the following remarks: 'Visit this morning, from Tissot who arrived during the night from England and who told me, in conversation, that he is very affected by the death of the English Mauperin, who, already in great pain, had served as the model for the illustration for my book.'¹⁸² Tissot and de Goncourt had previously discussed the project during a May 1882 visit in Paris. David S. Brooke, a co-curator of the first retrospective Tissot exhibition in America (*James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1836–1902, A Retrospective Exhibition*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School

¹⁷⁹ Confirmed in an email to the author dated 15 December 2015 from Anna Humphrey, Superintendent, St. Mary's Cemetery. Verified in person by the author on 6 March 2016.

¹⁸⁰ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 15.

¹⁸¹ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 136.

¹⁸² 'Visite, ce matin, de Tissot arrivé dans la nuit d'Angleterre et qui me dit, dans la conversation, être très affecté de la mort de la Mauperin anglaise, qui, déjà bien souffrante, lui avait servi de modèle pour l'illustration pour mon livre.' Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Flammarion, 1956), 204–205. English translation mine.

of Design, Providence; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1968) suggests, 'The account of the effects of Renée's illness on herself and her family, and in particular the pathetic pretences of eventual recovery which she and her devoted father maintained, must have had a particular immediacy for Tissot.'¹⁸³ Newton had once accompanied Tissot on an 1879 trip to Paris, as evidenced by several paintings in which the artist depicts her at the Louvre.¹⁸⁴ His return to the city three years later may have prompted bittersweet memories of the couple's time there.

The staging for many of the ten etching illustrations that feature Renée Mauperin and her father for the de Goncourts' novel was based on photographs of Tissot and Newton in the garden of the Grove End Road home they shared in St. John's Wood. Arguably the most poignant of the *Renée Mauperin* compositions is *Renée Fainting after Her Brother's Death in the Duel* (1884, Fig. 1.24), in which Newton, posed as Renée Mauperin, is shown collapsed on the floor after reading a distressing letter. Although the title indicates that the figure is only momentarily incapacitated, without any context, a viewer might infer that the image depicts a dead woman. By picturing a possible scene when Newton's irreversible decline from tuberculosis has ultimately claimed her life, Tissot makes visible the eventual results of the unseen killer consuming his companion in the form of her lifeless body—the eventual and definitive result of the fatal disease that must have affected much of their final years together.

As she does in so many of the images made of her toward the end of her life, Newton also exhibits physical symptoms of tuberculosis in *Quiet* (ca. 1881, Fig. 1.25), a composition with her niece Lilian, who raises her arm above her head as if to ward off unseen danger. Posed against the familiar curtain of chestnut leaves, Newton's gaze confronts the viewer

¹⁸³ David S. Brooke, 'James Tissot and the "Ravissante Irlandaise": Reflections on an Exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario,' *The Connoisseur* (May 1968): 56.

¹⁸⁴ For example, *At the Louvre* (ca. 1879–1880, see Fig. 4.19b).

with a knowing, almost sad expression, and her eyes are again ringed with dark circles. It is possible that this was an indication of Newton's illness rather than signifying that Tissot 'intended to show his model's use of cosmetics, a controversial practice among members of the middle classes,' as some have claimed.¹⁸⁵ If Newton did use cosmetics, perhaps it was to mask the signs of her illness, even though many young upper-class women intentionally used cosmetics to lighten their skin tone so they could achieve a consumptive appearance.¹⁸⁶ Significantly, *Quiet* and *Goodbye* (also known as *On the Mersey*, ca. 1881, Fig. 1.26), both featuring Newton, are the final paintings that Tissot exhibited at the Royal Academy, in 1881. These late images of Newton suggest her ailing health as well as her inevitable death.

As Nancy Rose Marshall suggests:

Travel itself could occasionally represent death, prompting associations of the ferry for which the woman is waiting with that of Charon's service across the river Lethe into the underworld. And of course Kathleen Newton herself was literally slipping away from Tissot, wasting away from tuberculosis during this period of their life together.¹⁸⁷

The connection between Newton, travel, and death poignantly underscores the significance of the paintings that represented Tissot for his final participation at London's most prominent exhibition venue. They offer further evidence of her dematerialisation from his oeuvre in his representation of her worsening illness in *Quiet* and in the depiction of loved ones parting in *Goodbye*.

In response to Tissot's *Waiting for the Ferry II* (ca. 1878, Fig. 1.27), which also depicts Newton, Marshall further suggests that the picture benefits from approaching the disease through a biographical lens and that 'perhaps part of the haunting quality of Tissot's

¹⁸⁵ Marshall and Warner, *James Tissot*, 140.

¹⁸⁶ For more on this phenomenon, see Carolyn Day, 'Dying to be Beautiful: The Consumptive Chic,' in *Consumptive Chic: A History of Beauty, Fashion, and Disease* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 81–100.

¹⁸⁷ Marshall, *Transcripts of Modern Life*, 79.

image arose from his deployment of the outward gaze to signal the transience of life. The veil contributes to the sense of melancholy in its funereal connotations and the way it renders the woman's features indistinct, as if she is fading from view.¹⁸⁸ Newton's veil carries mournful connotations—perhaps even suggesting her own impending demise. As Marshall also notes, Farmer, in his biography of Eglinton, used the image of a veil to describe the barrier between the living and the dead at the séance where Tissot believed that Newton materialised: 'The veil was lifted, and he saw one whose sweet companionship had been his joy and solace in years gone by.'¹⁸⁹ Clothing Newton in a similar veil in the related *Study of Kathleen Newton* (ca. 1879, Fig. 1.28), Tissot provides only the suggestion of his subject's physical form with a black outline; her body is literally transparent with only her face filled in. She hovers in midair and seems to dissolve into the wash of background like a materialising or dematerialising spirit, reminiscent of Florence Marryat's description of the spirit Katie King: 'At last there was *nothing but her head* left above ground.'¹⁹⁰ Even the serpentine lines of brushwork used to articulate the back of Newton's cape fade into the lines of brown that Tissot sometimes used as an underlayer of paint to prime his canvas or panel.¹⁹¹ Consequently, she appears only partially visible—recalling both her fading from view as she 'wasted' away from tuberculosis and the subsequent descriptions of her materialisation as a spirit.

According to the twentieth-century art dealer and Tissot specialist Jane Abdy, 'What Tissot's work tells us about Mrs. Newton is that he was obsessed by her gentle beauty and made her the subject of almost every painting for the six years of their liaison. ... They were deeply in love, and this is borne out by Tissot's despairing attempts to find her again through

¹⁸⁸ Marshall, *Transcripts of Modern Life*, 78.

¹⁸⁹ Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 187.

¹⁹⁰ Marryat, *There Is No Death*, 143.

¹⁹¹ For more on this practice, see Sarah Kleiner, 'Tissot's Painting Techniques,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 238–245.

mediums and séances after her death, when he continued to paint her for two or three years as if she were still alive.¹⁹² The primary painting of Newton that applies to Abdy's description is *The Garden Bench* (1882–1883, Fig. 1.29), which is signed and dated 1882 but which Tissot may not have completed before Newton's death. In this intimate portrayal of familial affection, Newton is surrounded by her children, Cecil George and Muriel Mary Violet, as well as her niece Isabelle Hervey. Newton's gaze is completely focused on her son, who is perched on the edge of a bench covered in plush fur. The three children seem more aware of the artist and, consequently, of the viewer's presence. *The Garden Bench* is marked by a strange, almost caricatured look to Newton's features, which appear different than in other portraits. Her eyes are rimmed with the dark shadows familiar from *Summer Evening* and *Quiet*, but, as Wentworth describes, her skin has a 'waxen polish' and this 'curious elongation ... in combination with a highly animated yet strangely inexpressive quality of features gives these pictures the feeling of the waxworks.'¹⁹³ The discomfiting aspect of her face may also be an effect of her unusually broad smile, unique to this picture. Despite Newton's peculiar appearance, *The Garden Bench* probably reminded the artist of happier times, as it remained in his possession until his death and was apparently installed in the central stairway hall at his Château de Buillon until the death of his niece Jeanne Tissot, in 1964.¹⁹⁴

Wentworth suggests that Newton's face in *The Garden Bench* was 'drawn with no reference to the living model,' but this does not necessarily account for her appearance, since

¹⁹² Abdy, 'Tissot: His London Friends and Visitors,' 50.

¹⁹³ Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints*, 292.

¹⁹⁴ Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot*, 38. A painting titled *Le Banc de Jardin* appears in the sale catalogue of Tissot's estate after his death, but probably did not sell, since a painting of the same title was in the 1964 sale of the contents from Tissot's Château de Buillon. Although the titles of Tissot's paintings sometimes refer to different versions, Misfeldt is likely correct about it remaining with Jeanne Tissot until her death. See *Hôtel Drouot, Paris, L'Atelier de J. James Tissot, 9–10 July 1903*, 3, and for full provenance, entry 104 in the 'Catalogue Checklist' compiled by Krystyna Matyjaskiewicz, in Buron, *James Tissot*, 297–298.

the painting may have been started while Newton was alive.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, there were many images of Newton from which Tissot could have studied her features—whether his own paintings or photographs. He also could have consulted photographs of his paintings, which were exhibited in albums at the Dudley Gallery in 1882, and which were meant to represent a record of his entire career from 1859–1882.¹⁹⁶ It is more probable, given Tissot's artistic talents and his familiarity with Newton's features, that he purposefully reinterpreted her appearance when posthumously recalling her features. By presenting Newton in a frozen and idealised hyperrealistic manner, he removed virtually all traces of her disease and visually embalmed her in eternal youth. As he did in *The Apparition*, Tissot rematerialised Newton through his art.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

The visual language of Spiritualism that Tissot encountered at the séances he attended established an aesthetic framework for the versions of *The Apparition*. Glowing white light, translucent manifestations, and shrouded otherworldly beings are elements that also feature in *The Life of Christ*. As art historian and curator Mary Dailey Desmarais suggests about Claude Monet's portrait of his deceased wife in his painting *Camille sur son lit de mort* (1879), 'It is in the very real combination of life and death, presence and absence, possession and loss, that

¹⁹⁵ In a letter dated 11 January 1899, to an unknown recipient, Tissot writes that he started the painting in London in 1880, but he kept it because he liked it, although the letter indicates that he is trying to sell it and that he would like to see it in the museum of his city, presumably Nantes. A photocopy of this letter is held in correspondence files between Willard Misfeldt and Anne van der Jagt at the Fondation Custodia / Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, 1972-A.743/752. In a letter dated 5 August 1980, Misfeldt indicates that he owns the original. The current location of this letter is unknown.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Wentworth purchased three albums in 1982, and they are now in the archives of the Art Institute of Chicago. Michael Wentworth (1938–2002) Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, accessed by the author on 25–26 February 2019. Willard Misfeldt suggests that since these photographs are not accompanied by any identification (title, date, dimensions, or media), they are probably a duplicate set of the photographs exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1882. Willard Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 3.

¹⁹⁷ It is significant that *The Garden Bench* is also one of only four compositions that Tissot repeated in a mezzotint print. Three out of the four mezzotints he produced depict Newton and/or her children: *The Apparition* (1885, see Fig. 1.2), *The Garden Bench* (1883), and *A Little Nimrod* (1886).

... Camille becomes the shadow of something bigger than herself, opening on to the dialectics of Monet's ... particular historical moment.¹⁹⁸ Tissot's *The Apparition* can be understood in similar terms, as an image representing the pluralities of Tissot's particular historical moment, when the popularity of Spiritualism was pervasive. Spiritualism ultimately provided Tissot with a compelling and useful forum through which to address his grief and create art using a new visual language. Understanding Tissot's Spiritualist visions provides an essential foundation for considering his vision of Christ in the Catholic Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁹⁸ Mary Dailey Desmarais, *Claude Monet: Behind the Light* (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 2015), 142. Claude Monet, *Camille sur son lit de mort* (1879, Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

Part One

Chapter 2: Spiritual Visions

*Catholics live in God-Haunted houses and an enchanted world. In a world where grace is everywhere, the haunting and enchanting go on constantly. Clearly the world of the great Catholic artists and writers is enchanted.*¹

—Andrew Greeley (2001)

Introduction

The ongoing significance of visions in the final two decades of James Tissot's career is established by his claims of seeing two ethereal manifestations in 1885: the apparition of Kathleen Newton at a Spiritualist séance, which he represented in *The Apparition* (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885, see Figs. 1.1–1.2), and a vision of Christ consoling two peasants in the Parisian Catholic Church of Saint-Sulpice, re-presented in *Inner Voices* (also known as *Christ the Comforter* or *The Ruins*, 1885, Fig. 2.1). Although the two systems of belief associated with these alleged experiences—Spiritualism and Catholicism—might seem antithetical, their shared acceptance of otherworldly visions has not been previously explored as the impetus for Tissot's aesthetic interests in the late nineteenth century. Tissot's visions were also not unusual for this period, as art historian and Tissot scholar Michael Wentworth explains:

Visions were in the air, and each with its trappings of mystic innocence and magical revelation was usually recorded by its grateful recipient with the same hollow, if hysterical, sound. Tissot's mystic vision of Christ the Comforter was in the best theological company ... his mystical Catholicism went hand in hand with an apparently unshakable belief in spiritualism and the materialization of the dead.²

¹ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 169–170.

² Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 175. Although there are parallels in their mystical aesthetics, Tissot does not seem to have interacted with any protagonists of the Salon de la Rose + Croix, held between 1892–1897, such as Joséphin Péladan, although he owned seven volumes of Péladan's works, which are listed in the posthumous inventory of the Château de Buillon. See Hélène Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, vol. II: Volume d'annexes: Mémoire d'étude. (MA thesis, École du Louvre, 2018), 62. I am grateful to Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz for bringing this source to my attention.

At this time of religious revival, when reported incidents of visions were prevalent, as Wentworth suggests, Tissot allegedly experienced both Spiritualist and religious visions that profoundly affected the art he produced in their aftermath: the *Life of Christ* biblical illustrations (ca. 1886–1894).

The 1894 exhibition of *The Life of Christ* illustrations at the *Société nationale des Beaux-Arts* at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars, Paris, included 270 *Life of Christ* illustrations and *Inner Voices*, which was followed by the debut of 350 illustrations at the Lemercier Gallery, London in 1896. This period marked a public revival of Tissot's focus on religious subjects. In his introduction to the published volume of *The Life of Christ*, the artist pointed to his alleged visionary experience inside Saint-Sulpice as a direct inspiration. Nonetheless, some scholars have questioned the veracity of Tissot's claims. In 1984, Michael Wentworth cautioned rather cynically:

It will never be known how much of his vision in St. Sulpice he actually believed to have taken place and how much was fabricated, the creation of opportunistic self-dramatization and a thirst for publicity at the time of the exhibition of the illustrations to the Bible. ... Whether the Tissot Bible represents piety and pure faith, commercial exploitation, or a blend of the two, as seems most likely, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of Tissot in terms of rational behaviour after that afternoon in St. Sulpice in 1885.³

Regardless of the authenticity of the incident, the experience of having a vision inside a Catholic Church provided an ideal backstory for this extraordinary body of work, which demonstrates Tissot's distinctive blend of both Catholic and Spiritualist visual languages.

Wentworth's criticism reveals a patent misunderstanding of the significance of this work and the context in which it was produced. To a large audience of contemporary viewers, *this* was

Nor does he seem to have engaged with the associated Symbolist movement. For more on this, see Vivien Greene, *Mystical Symbolism: The Salon de la Rose + Croix in Paris, 1892–1897*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017).

³ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 196.

the art for which Tissot was best known. Irrespective of any twenty-first-century assessments regarding his motivations, these incredibly popular illustrations must be reconsidered as the works that made Tissot more famous and more commercially successful than he had ever been before.

The biblical watercolours represent the major focus of Tissot's career from 1885 until his death, in 1902, and they are a distinguishing component of his late oeuvre during the final two decades of his life. Tissot credited his experience at Saint-Sulpice with inspiring the commencement of his focus on this subject matter and his subsequent *Life of Christ* illustration campaign, the designs for which were described by the writer and prolific chronicler of the late nineteenth century Edmond de Goncourt, in an entry from his *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie Littéraire* on 25 May 1889, as having been 'executed in a state of mystical hallucination.'⁴ Tissot's religious vision in Saint-Sulpice has traditionally been understood as the pivotal incident that changed the course of his art, yet the architectural features and specific literary, artistic, religious, and scientific connotations of the church where it took place have not been fully explored by previous scholars. While the previous chapter established the context of Tissot's Spiritualist visions at séances and the art that he created in the aftermath of such occult experiences, this chapter examines the nuances of Tissot's religious vision in Saint-Sulpice, the dynamic spiritual period in which it transpired, and how the unique attributes of the church itself factor into the work that ensued. While existing interpretations of Tissot's religious vision have focused primarily on the authenticity of his experience,⁵ this chapter will situate the incident in a particular location and

⁴ 'Enfin de la réalité rigoureuse, exécutée dans un état d'hallucination mystique, et à laquelle une maladresse naïve ne fait qu'ajouter un charme: de l'art qui a une certaine ressemblance avec l'art de Mantegna.' Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 8, 1889–1891 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, G. Charpentier & E. Fasquelle, 1895), 111. English translation mine.

⁵ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 196. See also Ian Thomson, 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' in Krystyna Matyjaskiewicz, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (Oxford: Phaidon Press; London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1984), 86.

atmosphere, thus elucidating the foundation and genesis of his biblical watercolour illustrations and linking them to the Spiritualist vision that inspired *The Apparition*.

Spiritual Visions: *Inner Voices*

According to Tissot, he went to Saint-Sulpice 'more to catch the atmosphere for [a] picture than to worship.'⁶ This painting was *Sacred Music (Musique Sacrée)* (also called *The Choir Singer*, ca. 1885, location unknown), which Tissot planned as the final composition of his ambitious project to paint a series of various types of contemporary French women, *La Femme à Paris* (ca. 1883–1885). At one point in the Mass, during the celebration of the Eucharist, Tissot believed that he saw a vision of Christ consoling an impoverished couple huddled together in the midst of a desolate jumble of rubble. This divine vision, witnessed at the moment of transubstantiation—a sacred point in the Roman Catholic Mass when it is believed that bread and wine are consecrated and become Christ's body and blood—would alter the course of his career in a definitive way by shifting the primary focus of his art away from depictions of fashionable society and toward religious subjects. The artist's own description from an 1898 interview with the Rabbi Clifton Harby Levy reveals several important themes, which will be explored in this chapter:

It came about in a mysterious way—one that I do not pretend to understand. ... I went to the church of St. Sulpice during mass ... as the Host was elevated and I bowed my head and closed my eyes, I saw a strange and thrilling picture. It seemed to me that I was looking at the ruins of a modern castle ... then a peasant and his wife picked their way over the littered ground ... then there came a strange figure gliding towards these human ruins over the broken remnants of the castle. Its feet and hands were pierced and bleeding, its head was wreathed with thorns. ... And this figure, needing no name, seated itself by the man, and leaned its head upon his shoulder. ... The vision pursued me even after I had left the church. It stood between me and my canvas. I tried to brush it away, but it returned insistently. Finally I was attacked by fever, and when I was well again I painted my vision.⁷

⁶ Clifton Harby Levy, 'James Tissot and His Work,' *New Outlook* 60, no. 16 (17 December 1898): 954.

⁷ Levy, 'James Tissot and His Work': 954, 956.

This vision is represented in *Inner Voices*, which Tissot described to Levy as a 'picture,' suggesting that he interpreted the experience as a fully formed composition. *Inner Voices* depicts Christ leaning against a ragged couple, bolstering the male figure from collapse and thereby representing both physical and spiritual support. The piles of ruins around the trio augment their miserable plight; they are completely surrounded by a chamber of destruction.

It is noteworthy that in his interview with Levy, Tissot refers to Christ as 'it' rather than by name or even as 'he.' In Levy, a religious reformer and author of several books and articles on biblical archaeology and art, Tissot found a receptive interviewer to transcribe his claims of witnessing an otherworldly vision. Levy would later assist in the foundation of a metaphysical organisation, New York's Centre of Jewish Science, in 1924, which gives context for his sensitivity to Tissot's assertions. The artist's claim of being 'pursued' by the vision suggests it is an inescapable force. Tissot's material characterisation—'It stood between me and my canvas. I tried to brush it away, but it returned insistently'—insinuates that the vision later took on a physical, almost human, form that the artist could not escape. His narrative portrays the vision as a spectre that haunted him until he became ill; he could only exorcise it through painting what he saw. The description of 'a strange figure gliding towards' the peasants recalls the language used by Jacques-Émile Blanche to describe the manifested spirit of Newton at the séance he attended with Tissot: 'an ethereal and vaporous form [that] glided on to the scene' (see Chapter 1).⁸ The vivid similarities between these two occurrences (Newton's supposed manifestation and the vision of Christ in Saint-Sulpice) point to a critical parallel between Tissot's Spiritualist and religious visions. *Inner Voices* is

⁸ Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime, The Late Victorian Era, the Edwardian Pageant, 1870–1914* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1938), 65–66.

Tissot's first known original depiction of Christ,⁹ and it launched his venture into biblical illustrations, which consumed the final decades of his life. The work thus serves as a link between *The Apparition* and *The Life of Christ*. That Tissot credited *Inner Voices* as being 'the father of all this big brood of little ones' also designates the painting as the predecessor of his biblical illustrations, which are the aesthetic descendants of his vision in Saint-Sulpice.¹⁰

Judging from their blank facial expressions and body language, the unsuspecting and weary figures in *Inner Voices* are seemingly unaware that they are in Christ's presence; the man cradles his face in his left hand, while the woman hunches over with her eyes downcast. John Byam Liston Shaw's *Christ the Comforter* (1897, Fig. 2.2) provides a particularly instructive contrast: whereas the postures of Tissot's peasants suggest an ignorance of Christ's presence, Shaw's male figure holds the hand of an attendant Christ, whose left hand rests on the man's back. In this sense, Tissot's image is more reminiscent of a spirit photograph, such as the albumen silver print *Mary Todd Lincoln with the Spirit of Abraham Lincoln* (ca. 1870, Fig. 2.3), by the American spirit photographer William H. Mumler, in which the living subject does not interact with the otherworldly presence. Tissot's Christ is present but unrecognised, invisible to anyone but the artist, similar to how Spiritualist mediums could hear and see spirits undetected by others at séances and some Catholic mystics could see saints or the Virgin Mary. Tissot is thus adopting the role of a medium or a religious mystic in his ability to perceive otherworldly manifestations. Further instantiating this interpretation, in *Inner Voices* Christ is outlined with a glowing, bluish tint, reminiscent of the radiance emitted by the figures in *The Apparition*. Tissot uses this effect again in *Jesus Walks on the Sea* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 2.4), from *The Life of Christ*, which will be discussed further in

⁹ Tissot painted a copy of an infant Jesus for Monsigneur Segur in 1858. See Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, 'Tissot's Sales Notebook,' in Melissa E. Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2019), 269.

¹⁰ Theodore Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels,' *Century Illustrated* 48, no. 2 (June 1894): 244.

Chapter 3. In this image, a phosphorescent glow extends beyond Christ's head, where a halo would typically appear, and instead covers the length of his torso.

A pamphlet that accompanied *Inner Voices* when it debuted in 1894 at the Palais du Champ-de-Mars, which was translated into English when the work toured the United States, strengthens the correlation between this seemingly religious painting and Spiritualism. The pamphlet imagines the reaction of the two unsuspecting peasants: 'A thrill creeps over them—A Being is near ... they intuitively know the Christ.'¹¹ This language, used to describe the mystical appearance of an otherworldly presence, could be equally applied to how witnesses experience ghostly apparitions at a séance. Thus, one reading of *Inner Voices* interprets Christ as an otherworldly manifestation summoned like a spirit at a séance in the middle of a Catholic church, with Tissot in the role of a medium.

Although the validity of Spiritualism was not accepted by Catholic theologians, it is significant that many modern Spiritualists enthusiastically reinforced their adherence to Christianity.¹² In one particularly persuasive attempt to emphasise this point, the Victorian cleric and writer Reverend H. R. Haweis proclaimed:

Take up your Bible and you will find that there is not a single phenomenon which is recorded there which does not occur at séances to-day. Whether it be lights, sounds, the shaking of the house, the coming through closed doors, the mighty rushing winds, levitations, automatic writing, the speaking in tongues, we are acquainted with all these phenomena; they occur every day in London as well as in the Acts of the Apostles. ... It is not an opinion, not a theory, but a fact. There is chapter and verse for it, and this is what has rehabilitated the Bible. The clergy ought to be very grateful to Spiritualism for this, for they could not have done it themselves.¹³

¹¹ *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Illustrated by Over Four Hundred Paintings and Drawings by J. James Tissot*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1899), 11.

¹² For more on this topic, see Janet Oppenheim, 'Spiritualism and Christianity,' in *The Other World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 63–110.

¹³ Rev. H. R. Haweis, address to the London Spiritualist Alliance, quoted in Arthur J. Hill, *Spiritualism: Its History, Phenomena, and Doctrine* (London: Casell and Company, 1918), 30.

Haweis and other Spiritualists claimed that not only was their faith compatible with Christianity but also it was responsible for reviving interest in orthodox religion. In other words, Spiritualism could help to prove the veracity of the supernatural events contained in the Bible. The French nineteenth-century Spiritualist author Allan Kardec (*nom de plume* of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail) likewise asserted, 'In [Catholicism] we find all the important principles: Spirits of every rank, their occult and visible relations with men, guardian angels, reincarnation, disengagement of the soul from a living body, second sight, visions, manifestations of all kinds, and even tangible apparitions.'¹⁴ Catholic leaders did not agree with this perspective, however, as the historian Janet Oppenheim explains in *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychological Research in England, 1850–1914* (1985): 'For centuries, the Catholic church resolutely maintained that supernatural effects were either divine or diabolical in origin; they could not be "theologically neutral."¹⁵ She goes on to explain, 'Determined Spiritualists who also happened to be Roman Catholics did not, however, allow dire predictions of future perdition to stand in their way.'¹⁶ This persisted until 1898, when Pope Leo XIII officially condemned anyone who acted as a medium or participated in séances. Even if official Catholic teachings did not condone and actively decried Spiritualism, some nineteenth-century Catholics, such as Tissot, found parallels between these two belief systems and their visual languages.¹⁷ (See Chapter 3 for an in-depth analysis

¹⁴ Allan Kardec, *Le Livres des Esprits, contenant les principes de la doctrine spirite* (Paris: Dervy, 1860), 286. The posthumous inventory of Tissot's library at the Château de Buillon includes 'Cinq volumes des Esprits,' which may be this publication by Kardec. See Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, 60.

¹⁵ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 24.

¹⁶ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 84. For more on this, see John Warne Monroe, 'Spiritism and Catholicism,' in *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 140–149; Lynn L. Sharp, 'The Catholic Church and the Spirits,' in *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006), 140–145.

¹⁷ The contents of Tissot's library at the Château de Buillon included many detailed explorations of mystic and Spiritualist phenomena and their connection to Christian and Roman Catholic beliefs, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

of how Tissot combined the visual languages of Catholicism and Spiritualism in *The Life of Christ*.)

Scholars have characterised the period when Tissot painted his New and then Old Testament illustrations (ca. 1886–1902) as an indication of the artist's dramatic 'conversion' to Catholicism.¹⁸ There is no known evidence, however, that proves he was not religious before that time or that he had ever lost his faith.¹⁹ The perception that Tissot 'lived a faithless life' and had 'hardly set foot inside a church for years' is speculative, although reiterated in various sources, often without references supporting the claim.²⁰ Tissot earned a formal Jesuit education as a young man in Brugelette, Flanders; Vannes in Brittany; and Dôle in Normandy, and there is no documentation of him having ever formally left the Catholic Church. His early biographer George Bastard ascribed his piety to the 'mystical character of his mother,' who was from Brittany.²¹ The relationship to the afterlife in the type of mystical Breton Catholicism that Tissot would have been exposed to during his childhood in Nantes was explained by the Methodist minister and Spiritualist author John Lobb in his publication *Talks with the Dead: Luminous Rays from the Unseen World* (1907):

The Bretons believe that their dead mingle with the living, that they are associated with them in all their earthly affairs. ... The distinction between the natural and the supernatural does not exist in the mind of the Bretons—they live on the borderland of the two worlds. On All Saints' night (eve of All Souls, November 1), a repast is left for the dead on the table of every kitchen. The dead may literally be said to retain their place in the family. In Brittany it is as if the dead had not quite gone away. The beloved one departed is no less loved now that his or her body is entombed. ... Twice

¹⁸ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 175.

¹⁹ See, for example, Ann Saddlemyer, 'Spirits in Space: Theatricality and the Occult in Tissot's Life and Art,' in Katharine Lochnan, ed., *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 157; Judith Dolkart, 'James Tissot, Prodigal Son,' in Judith Dolkart, ed., *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ'*, exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2009), 13.

²⁰ See, for example, Malcom Warner, 'The Painter of Modern Love,' in Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner, eds., *James Tissot: Victorian Life / Modern Love*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 19.

²¹ 'Fils d'un Franc-Comtois et d'une Bretonne, [Tissot] hérita de l'esprit positif de son père et du caractère mystique de sa mère.' (Son of a Franc-Comtois and a Breton, [Tissot] inherited the positive spirit of his father and the mystical character of his mother.) George Bastard, 'James Tissot,' *Revue de Bretagne*, 2nd ser. 36 (July 1906): 255. English translation mine.

a year they offer their devotions to their dead. The priests are powerless to eradicate this basic belief from the minds of the Bretons; they are Spiritualists, with many superstitions.²²

This description of Bretons as deeply spiritual with an affinity for mysticism suggests that Tissot had early exposure to strains of belief that could have made him receptive to both Newton's manifestation at a séance and his vision of Christ in Saint-Sulpice.²³ Although it would be easy to conclude that Tissot's paintings of fashionable society indicate his thorough fascination with the material over the spiritual, there is no proof that Tissot had abandoned religion during the 1870s, when he lived in London and focused almost exclusively on such pictures. The portrait of a louche artist living in sin and without faith who suddenly finds religious redemption late in life certainly worked well for marketing purposes, regardless of its possibly fictional basis.²⁴

Assumptions that Tissot abandoned religion until his presumed change of heart in 1885 were fed by observations from the artist's contemporaries, such as Edgar Degas, who commented in response to *The Life of Christ*, 'Now he's got religion. He says he experiences inconceivable joy in his faith.'²⁵ One could interpret Degas's use of 'now' as implying that Tissot had lost his religious convictions and was *now* rediscovering them. This critique from Degas should be understood, however, within the context of their dissolved friendship.²⁶

²² John Lobb, *Talks with the Dead: Luminous Rays from the Unseen World* (London: John Lobb, 4 Ludgate Circus, E.C., 1907), 107.

²³ John Lobb's description of mystical Breton Catholicism recalls Paul Gauguin's fascination with the subject, which he explored in his painting *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)* (1888, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh). For more on this painting, see Belinda Thomson, *Gauguin's Vision*, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2005).

²⁴ It does not seem that Tissot ever publicly contradicted this perception.

²⁵ Daniel Halévy, *My Friend Degas*, trans. and ed. Mina Curtiss (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1964), 95. Degas further adds: 'At the same time he not only sells his own products high but sells his friends' pictures as well. ... To think that we lived together as friends and then—Well, I can take my vengeance. I shall do a caricature of Tissot with Christ behind him, whipping him, and call it: *Christ Driving his Merchant from the Temple*. My God!'

²⁶ For more on the friendship between Tissot and Degas, see Marine Kisiel, 'Tissot and Degas: Contours of a Friendship,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 246–251.

Degas's scepticism about the veracity of Tissot's faith is coloured by his hostility over the fact that Tissot sold a painting gifted to him by Degas. As Degas explains in the next thought, 'He not only sells his own products high but sells his friends' pictures as well.' This quote arguably reveals more about Degas's spite toward his former friend and the animosity he felt over Tissot's economic success than it does about the latter's religious beliefs.

The years that Tissot spent living with Kathleen Newton out of wedlock certainly posed a challenge to their formal acceptance as a couple in polite society and would also have prevented their participation in traditional late nineteenth-century religious circles. As explained in Chapter 1, Newton's illness may have forced them to be more secluded than social, since the effects of tuberculosis necessitated periods of rest and isolation. A relationship with a divorced woman such as Newton also contradicted the rules mandated by Tissot's Catholic faith. This is presumably why they never married; the Catholic Church does not acknowledge divorce, nor would it allow a Catholic to marry a divorcée. Even with these impediments, their lack of a formally consecrated relationship does not corroborate that Tissot and Newton were not religious or that the artist's life was faithless.

It is possible that Tissot and Newton attended the Catholic Church of Our Lady in St. John's Wood, one of very few Roman Catholic churches in London at that time, since it is within a short walking distance of Tissot's Grove End Road house.²⁷ This church was renowned for its music, having 'one of the finest choirs in London,' and church music was important to Tissot, as will be discussed.²⁸ It is conceivable that Tissot attended Mass there,

²⁷ According to a conversation on 28 February 2016, between the author and Fr. Jeff Steele, parish priest at the Church of Our Lady, current parish records held at the church do not go as far back as the 1870s. Regardless, Tissot could have attended Mass without being a registered parishioner.

²⁸ Alexander Rottman, *London Catholic Churches: A Historical and Artistic Record* (London: Sands & Co., 1926), 256.

and this suggestion is supported by the fact that this is the church where Newton's funeral was held. Records also indicate that Newton and her children, as well as her sister's three children, were baptised at the Church of Our Lady. Newton was baptised on 6 November 1882, just three days before her death, while the children were baptised on 15 October 1883, almost a year after she died.²⁹ Records reveal that they were all converts who were received into the Roman Catholic Church, having already been baptised in the Anglican Church. This newly discovered evidence supports the suggestion that Newton and Tissot never married because of the restrictions he would have faced by the Catholic Church. This indicates his sustained adherence to Catholic doctrines, even if there are no records to document his faith practice or participation during this period. Given these lacunae, his religious opinions and beliefs prior to 1885, if they existed at all, can be categorised as personal devotion rather than a practice for public recognition. After Tissot's vision in Saint-Sulpice, he unabashedly promoted his religious conviction during the creation and marketing of *The Life of Christ*.

Further attesting to his interest in religion prior to 1885, Tissot painted a pair of images each with two saints, *Saint Jacques-le-Majeur and Saint Bernard* and *Saint Marcel and Saint Olivier* (1859, Figs. 2.5a–b), for his 1859 Paris Salon debut. (For more on these paintings, see Chapter 4.) He also made paintings treating the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son in 1862 and 1863 (Figs. 2.6–2.7), and then again in 1880, with the quartet *The Prodigal Son in Modern Life* (1880, Figs. 2.8–2.11). Tissot's return to religious subjects in 1880 manifested with these four compositions after a period of approximately fifteen years when

²⁹ The digitised records of baptisms from of the Church of Our Lady (1836–1936) are in the Westminster Diocese archive (<https://rcdow.org.uk/about-us/archives>). There are no records of parishioners, making it impossible to know whether Tissot and Newton regularly attended the Church of Our Lady. I am grateful to independent scholar Jeremy Brevitt for bringing this information to my attention at the symposium held at the conclusion to the exhibition *James Tissot: Fashion and Faith* (Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 8–9 February 2020) and to Krystyna Matyjaskiewicz for verifying this discovery as well as suggesting the possibility that Newton's baptism could have taken place at Tissot's house if she were too ill to go to the church. Email correspondence with the author, 8 March 2020.

he was primarily focused on secular themes. The 1860s paintings on the theme of the Prodigal Son are set in Renaissance Venice and medieval Northern Europe. The second series was produced while Tissot was in London and was later disseminated in print versions, with the oil paintings first exhibited in 1882 at London's Dudley Gallery and then in Paris at the Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1883 and Exposition Universelle in 1889, where he was awarded a gold medal. The Dudley Gallery exhibition in 1882 also coincided with the year when political exiles were pardoned for offences committed during and after the Franco-Prussian War. Even though it is thought to be unlikely that Tissot was a Communard, the wave of political change might have prompted thoughts of returning to France.³⁰ This, coupled with Newton's illness and imminent death, could have been the inspiration for returning to the Prodigal Son biblical theme that he had first addressed in the 1860s, but this time based in contemporary settings, with the artist himself as the subject of the series. The eponymous young man in the paintings strongly resembles photographs of a young Tissot. Perhaps Newton's sickness motivated Tissot to reflect even more deeply on his life abroad in a foreign land and to imagine a possible reunion with family in his homeland. His later series can be read as a more autobiographical rendering of the narrative, possibly related to Tissot's own adventures in foreign lands, his journey from Paris to London, and thoughts of returning home again.

In his 1898 interview with Rabbi Levy, Tissot does not identify a specific building from which his ruins were derived, but, significantly, the artist describes 'cannon balls and broken bowls added to the debris.'³¹ Tissot left Paris in 1871 in the wake of the bloody Paris Commune, the volatile aftermath following the Franco-Prussian War in which Prussian

³⁰ For more on Tissot and the Franco-Prussian War, see Bertrand Tillier, 'Tissot and the Traumas of the Terrible Year,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 32–33.

³¹ Levy, 'James Tissot and His Work,' 956.

troops defeated the Gallic forces and the exiled Emperor Napoleon III and his family fled from France and their former home in the Tuileries Palace. Many important civic buildings, including this palace, were destroyed during the 'Bloody Week' (21–28 May 1871). When Tissot relocated from London back to Paris eleven years later, the ruins of the Tuileries Palace were still visible. According to the seventh edition of the German publisher Karl Baedeker's authoritative travel guide *Paris and Its Environs*, published in 1881, 'The ruins are not accessible to the public, but they may be well surveyed from the garden on the W. side.'³² In the eighth edition, published in 1884, the description of the palace's remnants was updated to inform visitors: 'In 1871 the palace was set on fire by the Communists, and the ruins, after standing untouched for twelve years, were finally removed in 1883.'³³ Tissot's depiction of a glowing Christ amongst the rubble of a building alongside modern peasants could have evoked memories for both the artist and for French viewers of their collective suffering during the Franco-Prussian War. Moreover, during the Paris Commune, Saint-Sulpice was used as the headquarters for one faction of Communards,³⁴ an association that may have provoked Tissot's memory of the violent events while he was in the church making studies for *Sacred Music*.

Some art historians, such as the Tissot specialist Willard Misfeldt, have suggested that the ruins in Tissot's painting resemble the Tuileries but without making the important connection that the urban scars of the Tuileries Palace—remnants of the devastating events that forced the artist to leave France in 1871—were still very present when he returned in

³² Karl Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs*, 7th ed. (London: Dulau and Co., 1881), 158.

³³ Karl Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs*, 8th ed. (London: Dulau and Co., 1884), 247.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Kauffmann, *Wrestling with the Angel: The Mystery of Delacroix's Mural* (London: Vintage Digital, 2011), 37.

1882.³⁵ Moreover, the imposing Basilica of the Sacré Coeur, a memorial to the Franco-Prussian War and victims of the Commune, was under construction in Montmartre in the 1880s. Not only does the rubble in Tissot's *Inner Voices* resemble other artists' representations of the destroyed Tuileries, such as Ernest Meissonier's *The Ruins of the Tuileries Palace* (1871, Fig. 2.12), but the shards of debris also resemble ceramic tiles, suggesting the origin of the site's name: it derives from the *tuileries*, or tile-kilns, that once occupied that location.³⁶ Tissot might also have had in mind his own *In the Egyptian Ruins* (1882, Fig. 2.13), the tenth and final illustration for the 1884 edition of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's novel *Renée Mauperin* (1864, with illustrations published in 1884), which shows Renée's bereaved parents sitting among the rubble of the ruined temples at Philae. The dejected couple from *Inner Voices* evokes the crestfallen Monsieur and Madame Mauperin, for whom Tissot and Newton had modelled in his St. John's Wood garden before Newton's death.

The Visual Language of Catholicism

When Tissot moved back to France in 1882, he returned to a religious climate that was marked by a widespread receptivity to the profusion of mysticism that embraced visionary experiences like Tissot's in Saint-Sulpice. Although rationalism in the century following the Enlightenment (1715–1789) delegitimised Catholic mysticism and consigned it to the sidelines of theology, there was a distinct resurgence in the late nineteenth century.³⁷ As

³⁵ Willard Misfeldt suggests only that they 'are probably a reminiscence of the ruined Tuileries.' Willard Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot: A Bio-Critical Study* (PhD Thesis, Washington University, 1971), 239. For more on Tissot during these years, see Tillier, 'Tissot and the Traumas of the "Terrible Year,"', 32–37.

³⁶ An early title for Tissot's painting described the location as the ruins of Paris's Cour des Comptes (law courts that were also destroyed during the repression of the Commune): 'Le Christ revêtu sacerdotaux, au milieu des ruines de la Cour des Comptes, vient au secours d'un malheureux abusé de la Commune.' *Hôtel Drouot, Paris, L'Atelier de J. James Tissot, 9–10 July 1903*, 3. Bertrand Tillier suggests that *Inner Voices* is set in the debris of the Cour des Comptes. See Tillier, 'Tissot and the Traumas of the "Terrible Year,"' 33. See also Ian Thomson, 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' 91.

³⁷ Kate Jordan, "'Artists Hidden from Human Gaze': Visual Culture and Mysticism in the Nineteenth-Century Convent,' *British Catholic History* 35, no. 2 (October 2020): 190–220.

Gilles Mongeau, a specialist in theology and culture, explains, 'The "mysticism" that gained currency in this context covered any experiences purporting to perceive or describe a reality richer and more complex than that acknowledged by ... intellectual and scientific materialism.'³⁸ He goes on to describe:

Many French intellectuals and artists, both Catholic and secular, sought ... a new concept of human existence, one that moved beyond the materialism of modern scientific reason. There seemed to be a felt need to reinvigorate meaning in French culture through a return to a richer source of symbols and experience. It was in this context that many artists became attracted to the traditions of Christian and non-Christian mysticism.³⁹

Mongeau's observation highlights the cultural and spiritual atmosphere in which Tissot's alleged visions occurred. He also situates Catholic mysticism as an antidote to modern materialism, which parallels Tissot's embrace of religion as his art became less focused on the depictions of fashionable society for which he had become known in the 1860s and 1870s.

Despite outside political attempts to dismantle and effectively destroy the power of the Catholic Church, Catholicism enjoyed a strong recovery in the late nineteenth century during a resurgence that would become known in the twentieth century as the Catholic Revival. According to Mongeau, 'Catholic interest in mysticism at this time was fuelled not so much by a desire for cultural renewal as by a need for a new source of spiritual creativity and religious unity.'⁴⁰ This revitalisation was a reaction to the anti-clerical and secular policies of the Third Republic (1870–1940), which were not dissimilar to the anti-religious rationalism of the Enlightenment.⁴¹ As a counterpoint to the scientific and social advances

³⁸ Gilles Mongeau, 'French Culture and Mysticism, 1850–1950,' in Katharine Lochnan, ed., *Mystical Landscapes: From Vincent Van Gogh to Emily Carr*, exh. cat. (London: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016), 59.

³⁹ Mongeau, 'French Culture and Mysticism, 1850–1950,' 60.

⁴⁰ Mongeau, 'French Culture and Mysticism, 1850–1950,' 62.

⁴¹ For more on the Catholic Church and the Third Republic, see Richard Thomson, 'The Religious Debate: Representing Faith, Defining Modernity,' in *The Troubled Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004),

that were perceived by some as undermining the basis of religious faith, Catholic reactions took on an almost hysterically zealous tendency toward piety with a peculiarly intense level of mysticism. According to Mongeau:

The dominant interpretation of this period in French history is that secularism increased and Christianity waned. In the midst of political conflicts, however, both secular and Catholic thinkers and artists turned to mysticism. ... Mysticism offered a source of inspiration that was capable of breathing new life into a stagnant culture; for Catholics, it offered a path to personal encounter with Christ, and a way to overcome internal divisions in the conflict with secular culture.⁴²

This conflation of Spiritualism and Catholicism provided the perfect atmosphere for the presentation of Tissot's religious art, which he described as being inspired by spiritual visions. With their combination of mystical piety and claims of anthropological accuracy (see Chapter 3), the *Life of Christ* illustrations expertly captured the mood of the era by communicating religious feeling without completely abandoning secular reason.

Alleged experiences of mystical religious visions had a long tradition and numerous precedents in the Catholic faith.⁴³ The most famous vision in France during Tissot's lifetime was the apparition of the Virgin Mary that a young Roman Catholic girl named Bernadette Soubirous (also known as Saint Bernadette of Lourdes) claimed to see on eighteen separate occasions between 11 February and 16 July 1858 at a grotto in Lourdes, France.⁴⁴ After these manifestations, referred to as 'apparitions,' a clear-water spring flourished at this site. The water from it was believed to cure ailments, making it a major destination for religious pilgrims, such as Tissot. Before he departed on the first of his three

117–169. See also Michael Paul Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

⁴² Mongeau, 'French Culture and Mysticism, 1850–1950,' 67.

⁴³ Mystical visions had to be investigated thoroughly and approved by church hierarchy in order to be accepted and not dismissed as heresy.

⁴⁴ For more, see Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Penguin, 1999); Suzanne Kaufman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Like Kathleen Newton, Bernadette Soubirous died young—at age thirty-five—from tuberculosis, which might have struck the grieving Tissot as a compelling parallel.

pilgrimages to the Holy Land (October 1886–March 1887), the artist said he 'had gone with the pilgrims to Lourdes, to ask a benediction on his effort,' signifying that he knew about Saint Bernadette's alleged visions and their significance.⁴⁵ The inventory of his library at Buillon also records that Tissot owned the six-volume edition of Henri Lasserre's version of events at Lourdes, *Notre Dame de Lourdes* (1869).⁴⁶ Much like the Breton Catholicism of Tissot's youth, the Catholic traditions in the Hautes-Pyrénées region of southwest France, where Lourdes is located, accepted many superstitions that might seem antithetical to Catholicism. According to Mongeau, 'There was also a resurgence of the practices of folk religion, such as the Breton *pardon* (pilgrimage procession). ... This groundswell of popular spiritual activity was not always in line with traditional belief.'⁴⁷ For example, Saint Bernadette described that sometimes seeing the apparition of a white figure bathed in dazzling light resulted in her falling into a trance. These elements are reminiscent of the narratives surrounding séance experiences. Although Saint Bernadette's visions provoked intense public debate, the apparitions were validated by Catholic Church authorities in 1862.

Many Catholics were already primed to be receptive to the more mystical aspects of Spiritualism, such as visions and séances as historian Sophie Lachapelle explains:

Tales of visionaries, stigmatics, demonics, and other believers experiencing physical manifestations of their faith inspired sensational books and pamphlets, pilgrimages, and claims of miracle cures...This was a world in which the supernatural was being constructed and concretized...and the dead communicated with the living at séances.⁴⁸

Similarly, as the Catholic priest and writer Andrew Greeley describes in his sociological exploration of Catholicism, *The Catholic Imagination* (2000), 'Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and

⁴⁵ Cleveland Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ,' *McClure's* 12, no. 5 (March 1899): 7.

⁴⁶ Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, 62.

⁴⁷ Mongeau, 'French Culture and Mysticism, 1850–1950,' 61.

⁴⁸ Sofie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853-1931* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 2.

religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. ... We find our houses and our world haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of grace.⁴⁹ In other words, the pungent aroma of incense, the sight of flickering candles, and the sound of choral or organ music—individually and sometimes combined—could have triggered sensory stimuli and an experience of the 'hyperaesthesia' that Tissot later described as a condition of his visions for the biblical illustrations.⁵⁰ As Greeley details, 'Catholics tend to see their churches as sacred places. ... It echoes with distinctly enchanted, and enchanting voices.'⁵¹ This 'enchanted world,' as Greeley describes it, in which Tissot found himself on that visit to Saint-Sulpice, contained the ideal atmosphere for a spiritual vision.

It is therefore unsurprising that Tissot's alleged vision at Saint-Sulpice occurred at the sacred moment of transubstantiation—the high point in the Catholic Mass. Catholics believe that during the celebration of the Eucharist, ordinary bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the priest saying the Mass. The spiritual transformation of conventional food and drink into another divine substance is, as Catholic priests state during the liturgy, 'the mystery of faith.' This holy transformation marks the symbolism of Christ being completely present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the representative form of consecrated bread and wine. Tissot's vision of Christ at the very instant when Catholics believe that Christ's presence manifests anchors the incident in the established structure of the sacrament, making it more credible to those predisposed to understand it.

⁴⁹ Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 1.

⁵⁰ James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 1, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), X.

⁵¹ Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 21.

Tissot's vision in Saint-Sulpice was thus buttressed by traditional Catholic mysticism and its attendant rites. But it was likewise inspired by accounts of religious visions that were circulating at the time. These included the visions of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich (also known as Anna Katharina Emmerick), an eighteenth-century Catholic Augustinian nun whose mystical encounters supposedly included apparitions of Mary, Jesus, and assorted saints. Descriptions of Emmerich's visions were recorded by the poet Klemens Maria Brentano and published in *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, which appeared first in German in 1833 and was later translated into other languages.⁵² In his introduction to *The Life of Christ*, Tissot expressed admiration for Emmerich's visions, 'generally so precise,' which he admitted 'impressed [him] greatly.'⁵³ By publicly acknowledging that he had turned to the spiritual revelations of a mystic religious woman for aesthetic inspiration, Tissot revealed an important source of his compositions—not only for their visual details but also for the visionary process by which they were produced.

One of the documents discovered at Tissot's Château de Buillon (this property and its contents will be discussed further in Chapter 4) during the course of research for this thesis is a notebook in which the artist compared the Gospel texts with Emmerich's visions. Emmerich's supposed clairvoyance was likewise a source of inspiration for Tissot's contemporary the Austrian artist and Spiritualist Gabriel von Max, who made a series of paintings depicting religious mystics, including Emmerich (*The Ecstatic Virgin Anna Katharina Emmerich*, 1885, Fig. 2.14) and the nineteenth-century German mystic Friederike Hauffe (*The Seeress of Prevorst in High Sleep*, 1892, Fig. 2.15). Similar to Tissot, Max was

⁵² Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, According to the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*, trans. and ed. Klemens Maria Brentano (El Sobrante, CA: North Bay Books, 2003). The text was checked and approved by German Roman Catholic bishops who knew her. Emmerich was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2004.

⁵³ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, XI.

raised Catholic and turned to Spiritualism later in life. Both Max and the Swiss-German painter and co-founder of the Munich Secession, Albert von Keller, belonged to the Munich Psychologische Gesellschaft (Psychological Society), a group founded by the German psychologist and psychical researcher Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, which was devoted to studying the paranormal.⁵⁴ Max and Keller hosted experiments conducted by Schrenck-Notzing in their studios, and both artists' work from the 1880s demonstrates a keen interest in mystical and occult themes that often also pertain to religion. Max's purely Spiritualist compositions include *Geistergruss (Spirit Greeting)* (1879, Fig. 2.16), a painting of a spirit hand touching the shoulder of a young woman seated at a piano, and a very corporeal-looking representation of the medium Florence Cook's famous spirit guide, *Phantom Katie King* (ca. 1897, Fig. 2.17). Tissot and Max may have met through the medium William Eglinton, who supposedly conjured the spirit of Newton for Tissot at the 1885 séance that inspired *The Apparition* (see Chapter 1). Max organised at least two séances with Eglinton in Munich.⁵⁵ Both painters' works were also shown together among 'twenty-eight pictures illustrative of the phenomena of materialisation' displayed and discussed at the London office of the Spiritualist publication *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research*.⁵⁶ At this 1886 exhibition, Max's *Geistergruss (Spirit Greeting)* was exhibited (no. 20) with a mezzotint of Tissot's *The Apparition* (no. 18).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, ed., *Gabriel von Max*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Frye Art Museum, University of Washington Press, 2011), 35–36; Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, *Séance: Albert von Keller and the Occult* (Seattle: Frye Art Museum, University of Washington Press, 2010), 13–14. See also Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 110–111.

⁵⁵ Danzker, *Gabriel von Max*, 102. No dates are provided.

⁵⁶ Untitled, *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* VI, no. 263 (16 January 1886): 29.

⁵⁷ 'Catalogue of Drawings Illustrative of the Phenomena of Materialisation, exhibited at the Conversazione of the London Spiritualist Alliance at St. James's Hall, Thursday, January 14th, 1886,' *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* VI, no. 263 (16 January 1886): 34. I am grateful to Serena Keshavjee for bringing this reference to my attention.

Regardless of whether or not Tissot knew Max or of *The Ecstatic Virgin Anna Katharina Emmerich*, the image and Max's companion paintings of religious seers provide significant context for nineteenth-century European artists' fascination with religious visionaries. Max's depiction of Emmerich places her in bed with bandages on her head and the blood of the stigmata—wounds in locations corresponding to Jesus's crucifixion injuries—on her hands. She stares intently at a crucifix on her lap, her hands clutching her head. A candle on a bedside table in the left background provides some light in the composition, but the scene is actually lit from the right, out of the viewer's frame of reference, as if illuminated by some unseen spiritual source. The painting's dominant colour palette is variations of white—from Emmerich's dressing gown to her pillows and bedding—which emphasises the sallow pallor of her skin, the dark circles around her eyes, and the macabre matching hue of her lips. The picture is one of great spiritual suffering. Emmerich clutches her head as if attempting to concentrate in the midst of a painful headache, echoing the painful scenes of Christ's Passion that were recorded in the accounts of her visions.

In contrast, Max's image of Hauffe, *The Seeress of Prevorst in High Sleep*, is a more peaceful version of religious vision. Here the mystic is presented asleep, in a trance. Unlike the painting of Emmerich, there is no sign of physical distress or pain. Hauffe's hands fall open at her sides, signifying her reception to religious visions. Max's *The Seeress in a Seeing State* (1895, Fig. 2.18) shows her awake and alert, staring off into the distance. Given his interest in mystical subjects and his familiarity with Emmerich's text, it is possible that Tissot also knew of a publication by the German poet and physician Justinus Kerner entitled *The Seeress of Prevorst: Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-life of Man, and the Inter-*

diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One We Inhabit.⁵⁸ Tissot and Max's shared interest in visionary religious mystics is evidence of a common enthusiasm demonstrated across the visual arts in this period. As outlined in Kerner's book, Hauffe's visions and communications with spirits occurred during a state of somnambulism, or appearing awake during sleep, and sometimes sleepwalking. While Emmerich's visions were of scenes from the lives of Jesus and his mother Mary, Hauffe was apparently recorded in communication with the dead, like a Spiritualist medium. All of these compositions—like the popularity of Saint Bernadette and pilgrimages to Lourdes—reflect the late nineteenth-century resurgence of interest in Catholic visions and Spiritualism. They show, as do Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations, how Catholic mysticism and Spiritualism overlapped and how the boundaries between these two systems of belief were often blurred.

Tissot may have also been familiar with other representations of holy visions by contemporary artists, such as Jules Bastien-Lepage, whose *Joan of Arc* (1879, Fig. 2.19) was displayed in Paris at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts, at the monographic *Exposition des oeuvres de Jules Bastien-Lepage* (March–April 1885). The work's exhibition title, *Jeanne d'Arc écoutant les voix*, emphasised the subject's supernatural religious experience of hearing otherworldly voices at the moment when Saints Michael, Margaret, and Catherine appeared to her. In Bastien-Lepage's painting, these holy apparitions hover in the air behind Joan of Arc as she listens to their call with an expression of rapturous absorption. Ian Thomson suggests that 'Tissot was momentarily tempted to embark on a series of paintings on the story of Joan of Arc, rapidly becoming a cult in the 1890s,' which is drawn from the introduction to

⁵⁸ Justinus Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst: Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-life of Man, and the Inter-diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One We Inhabit*, trans. Catherine Crowe (London: J. C. Moore, 1845).

Tissot's Old Testament illustrations, although Thomson does not cite his source.⁵⁹ Tissot apparently considered but abandoned the idea of illustrating the lives of Joan of Arc and Napoleon Bonaparte and decided on the Old Testament instead because he said that he believed in 'Inner Voices.'⁶⁰ If Tissot knew about or saw the 1885 exhibition of Bastien-Lepage's painting, the artist's representation of ethereal apparitions could possibly have inspired his representations of similar holy visions, such as *Inner Voices*.

Further demonstrating the vogue for images of visions during this period, Tissot's contemporary Gustave Doré also painted a scene of an otherworldly vision occurring inside the atmospheric conditions of a church in *A Day Dream* (1880, Fig. 2.20). In contrast to Tissot's religious vision of Christ and the peasants in *Saint-Sulpice*, Doré's work depicts a monk experiencing a romantic vision of a young woman. A contemporary review in *The Aberdeen Daily Press* described the conditions in which the young monk, seated at an organ and otherwise physically present, was induced to have this vision: 'Into the sombre Cathedral there streams a flood of light from the window near the organ, and in that light there stands the visionary form of a beautiful lady looking wistfully at the player. ... The painter's success in representing this spectral figure ... cannot but powerfully impress every spectator.'⁶¹ Although the vision is of a more secular nature than Tissot's vision of Christ, the monk is similarly aware of yet disengaged from the materialisation next to him. He exhibits no sign of sensing the young woman's presence, but seems calmly comforted by her company, much like the peasants in *Inner Voices*.

⁵⁹ Ian Thomson, 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' 92. In fact, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 catalyzed the revival of a cult devoted to Joan of Arc.

⁶⁰ Introduction, *The Old Testament* (Paris: M. De Brunhoff & Co., Art Publishers, 1904), no page number.

⁶¹ *Descriptive Catalogue of the Great Pictures by Gustave Doré and Edwin Long, R.A. on View at 35 New Bond Street* (London: The Doré Gallery Ltd., 1891), 42–44.

Notably, Tissot also promoted his own visionary experiences as part of his ongoing artistic process, which aligns with the popularity of religious mystics in the nineteenth century. In addition to the incident in Saint-Sulpice, he also professed to seeing other visual manifestations as his work to illustrate the Bible continued into the 1890s. In his interview with Tissot, the American journalist Cleveland Moffett describes the artist as 'not only ... deeply religious in his daily life, but he is something beyond that: he is a mystic and seer of visions.'⁶² In this portrayal of the artist and his artistic process, Moffett elaborates:

[Tissot] possesses in a high degree the sensitiveness to colour impulses of the brain that is enjoyed by many artists and gives them, literally, the power of beholding visions. ... In him the cause has been reflection and prayer and a peculiar artistic temperament. Not only does he get vivid impressions of his pictures from these skeletons of composition, but he gets them often while walking in the street; so distinctly, sometimes, that the real things about him seem to vanish. One day, for instance, while strolling in Paris, near the Bois de Boulogne, M. Tissot suddenly saw before him a massive stone arch out of which a great crowd was surging. ... And the multitude, with violent gestures, lifted their hands and pointed to a balcony high up on a yellow stone wall where stood Roman soldiers dragging forward a prisoner clad in the red robe of shame. Hanging down from the balcony was a piece of tapestry worked in brilliant colours, and over this the prisoner was bent by rough hands and made to show his face to the crowd below, and it was the face of Jesus. What M. Tissot saw in this vision he reproduced faithfully on canvas in his painting 'Ecce Homo [ca. 1886–1894, see. Fig. 3.11].' And he did the same in many other paintings.⁶³

This description provides several key elements of Tissot's visionary experiences. Moffett credits the source of Tissot's visions to 'reflection and prayer and a peculiar artistic temperament.' In other words, the visions are encouraged by Tissot's religious convictions and artistic tendencies. It seems that Moffett finds nothing in this practice strange, since he prefaces the anecdote by assuring the reader, 'Let me not give the idea that there is anything abnormal about M. Tissot.' Yet, paradoxically, Moffett also calls Tissot's temperament 'peculiar.' Perhaps the peculiarity derives from the continuation of the visions in modern Paris, as the subsequent details in the anecdote reveal. This unique blend of religious

⁶² Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and his Paintings of the Life of Christ,' 387.

⁶³ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and his Paintings of the Life of Christ,' 395.

conviction and artistic temperament, which rendered Tissot particularly receptive to mystical experiences, created a mix of influences specific to his biblical work and is a key factor in what makes it unique.

Saint-Sulpice

The specific characteristics of Saint-Sulpice made it an ideal site for Tissot's religious vision. In 1880s Paris, this church was associated with fashionable contemporary society, scientific inquiry, and even rumours of occult practices. Its history as a site of worship, scientific experimentation, renowned musical performances, and artistic awakening created a uniquely conducive environment for Tissot's religious vision, which he credited with inspiring his subsequent dedication to religious imagery, his *Life of Christ* watercolours.

Founded in 1646 on the site of a thirteenth-century Romanesque church, Saint-Sulpice is located in the Luxembourg Quarter of Paris's sixth *arrondissement*. It is one of the city's largest churches, second only to Notre-Dame de Paris. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Tissot abstained from religion throughout his years in London with Newton, even if he had in fact turned away from Catholicism, Saint-Sulpice carried important literary associations that would have encouraged a visit. The church is a central location in the short story 'La Messe de l'Athée' ('The Atheist's Mass'), written in 1836 by Honoré de Balzac as part of his *La Comédie Humaine* (*The Human Comedy*), a collection of intertwined novels and stories about nineteenth-century French society. Tissot was no doubt aware of Balzac's popular *magnum opus* of interwoven narratives, and highlights from his own artistic career mirrored the *Comédie Humaine* in chronicling contemporary customs. Just like Tissot, Balzac created a veritable tapestry of modern life in London and Paris. The plot of 'The Atheist's Mass' revolves around the physician Horace Bianchon's inadvertent and covert

discovery of his teacher Desplein, a renowned master-surgeon and an atheist, furtively entering Saint-Sulpice as if he were surreptitiously sneaking into a brothel. After spying on his mentor, Bianchon sets out to discover why an avowed religious sceptic would bother spending time in this church. He later learns that for two decades Desplein has attended Mass at Saint-Sulpice four times a year. Moreover, he sponsored Masses by giving financial support in honour of a deceased friend who was a devout Catholic. In Balzac's story, Saint-Sulpice represents a sacred site where even an admitted atheist—a surgeon ensconced in the most secular scientific research—could find comfort in honouring a dead person whose memory was precious. This behaviour could therefore be interpreted as similar to Tissot's while in mourning for Newton.

After a grief-stricken Tissot abandoned life in London in 1882 and returned to Paris following Newton's funeral, he visited Saint-Sulpice in 1885 to make studies for *Sacred Music*.⁶⁴ Although this painting has never been found—and a photograph of the work was removed from Tissot's albums—according to Misfeldt, 'It was the custom in Paris at that time for fashionable women, mainly opera singers, to perform at mass. The painting entitled [*Sacred Music*] depicted a prima donna and a nun rehearsing a duet in an organ loft with another nun accompanying them at the organ.'⁶⁵ Saint-Sulpice, 'the richest and one of the most important [churches] on the left bank of the Seine,' was especially known for its spectacular pipe organ and impressive musical offerings.⁶⁶ Baedeker's seventh edition of *Paris and Its Environs* described the organ as 'one of the finest in Paris ... [with] six keyboards, one hundred-eighteen stops, and about seven thousand pipes.'⁶⁷ The organist of

⁶⁴ Willard Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 8.

⁶⁵ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 236.

⁶⁶ Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs*, 7th ed., 247.

⁶⁷ Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs*, 7th ed., 248.

Saint-Sulpice at the time of Tissot's vision was the celebrated Charles-Marie Widor, who ranked among the nineteenth century's most important organ composers and whose post lasted more than six decades, from 1870–1934. Perhaps because he was such a celebrated organist, or perhaps because of some other connection with the artist, Widor also played the organ at the rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré Dominican Church, the Couvent de l'Annonciation des frères dominicains, during the 3 December 1897 dedication ceremony celebrating Tissot's enormous *Christ Pantocrator* (1897, Fig. 4.1) for the hemicycle above the church's high altar. (This work, Tissot's only surviving commission for a church interior, is further discussed in Chapter 4.)⁶⁸

The subject of an organ rehearsal was also undertaken by Tissot's contemporary Henry Lerolle, which Wentworth identifies as 'indicative of the religious feeling of the time.'⁶⁹ *The Organ Rehearsal* (1885, Fig. 2.21) was exhibited at the Salon of 1885 and to great acclaim in New York in the first major exhibition on Impressionism in the United States.⁷⁰ Lerolle's large and commanding composition positions the viewer's perspective from the choir loft of Saint-François-Xavier in Paris's seventh *arrondissement*, near Saint-Sulpice, and it depicts members of the artist's family practicing the musical accompaniment for a mass, similar to Tissot's depiction of a nun and an opera singer in the choir loft of *Sacred Music*. While Lerolle's composition was seemingly a stand-alone work in his oeuvre, Tissot's *Sacred Music* was planned as the final composition of his ambitious *La Femme à Paris* project. Just as Tissot had revisited the theme of the Prodigal Son in the 1880s, he also

⁶⁸ The painting is still visible today at 222 rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, Paris. The reference to Widor is in Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 193n50. Wentworth cites a souvenir pamphlet by Père Jacques de Tilly, 'Evocations de cent an: centenaire 1874–1974 du Couvent des Dominicaines. Deux causeries, les 12 & 19 November 1974,' première causerie, 7.

⁶⁹ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 172n47.

⁷⁰ Exhibited in Paris from 1 May–30 June 1885, no. 1563 (as *A l'orgue*), and at the American Art Association, *Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris* (10–28 April 1886), no. 29 (as *The Organ*).

reiterated earlier compositions for two pictures in the *Femme à Paris* series.⁷¹ Due to his propensity for repeating earlier compositions, and because their titles are so similar, it is possible that *Sacred Music* resembled Tissot's own *Young Woman Singing at the Organ* (ca. 1867, location unknown), which preceded the former by approximately fifteen years.⁷² Since *Sacred Music* has yet to be discovered, this can only remain a speculation.⁷³ These pictures suggest that Tissot was drawn to fashionable churches with magnificent musical offerings, including the Church of Our Lady in London, so it is not surprising that he found himself in Saint-Sulpice—which meets both of these criteria—when his alleged vision of Christ took place.

There is also an interesting historical relationship between the two churches depicted in the paintings by Tissot and Lerolle: Saint-François-Xavier functioned as the area's parish church during the era of the French Revolution, while the official parish church, Saint-Sulpice, was used for worship of the goddess Reason and the 'Supreme Being.'⁷⁴ Saint-Sulpice thus had a history of reverence for both reason and the divine. This tolerance of both secular enquiry and orthodox religious principles is reflected in Tissot's work as well,

⁷¹ *Provincial Woman* (1883–1885, Collection Diane B. Wilsey, San Francisco) was based on *Too Early* (1873, Guildhall, London), and *Political Woman* (1883–1885, RISD Museum, Providence, RI) reprised the pose of a woman entering a crowded room that Tissot depicted in *Evening* (also known as *The Ball*, 1878, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). For full catalogue information, see Buron, *James Tissot*, 204, 133, 203, 169.

⁷² See Wentworth, *James Tissot*, pl. 35. Saint-Gervais-et-Saint-Protais may have provided inspiration for the church interior of *Young Woman Singing at the Organ* (possibly never completed). Located in the Marais District in the fourth *arrondissement*, this church was built between 1494 and 1657, making it one of the oldest churches in Paris. Smaller than the imposing Saint-Sulpice, it housed a celebrated seventeenth-century pipe organ and was renowned throughout its history for its resident musicians, the Couperin family. Tissot faithfully reproduced one of the putti musicians from its wooden carved decorations, although the location of the cherub is not a direct quotation, suggesting that he took inspiration from the church without directly copying it.

⁷³ Misfeldt identifies that in the earlier work the nuns wear the habit of the *Retraite d'Angers*. This Catholic order of nuns, also known as *Les Sœurs de la Retraite*, is based in the northwestern city of Angers, France, which is approximately 100 kilometres from Tissot's birthplace, Nantes. He was therefore possibly thinking about a church he may have visited near his hometown, giving this detail personal significance and demonstrating his familiar knowledge of religious details. Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot*, 8.

⁷⁴ A sign over the centre door of the main entrance announces: 'Le Peuple Francais Reconnoit L'Etre Suprême Et L'Immortalité de L'Âme' (The French people recognise the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul). Laurence Terrien, *Saint-Sulpice* (Paris: Paroisse Saint-Sulpice, 2004), 33. English translation mine.

especially in his claims to scientific accuracy through primary research in the *Life of Christ* illustrations (discussed in Chapter 3). In fact, it was Saint-Sulpice's scientific associations, discussed later in this chapter, that helped it narrowly escape destruction at the hands of anticlerical crowds during the Revolution. This dual association of religious spaces—between the secular and the spiritual—echoes the hybridity of Tissot's spiritual and Spiritualist visions. The *Life of Christ* illustrations also carry a similar tension between Tissot's religious imagination and his assertions of anthropological analyses. The history of French spirituality at Saint-Sulpice, allowing for the worship of both reason and the divine, speaks to the complexity of belief whereby both secular and orthodox religious principles could be honoured simultaneously.

Contrary to the suggestion that 'during the first half of his career, Tissot rarely demonstrated any interest in religious themes,'⁷⁵ *Young Woman Singing at the Organ* is one of several paintings from Tissot's first Paris period (1855–1871) that depict women in church interiors.⁷⁶ From a series of at least ten pictures that depict scenes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1808), three known compositions focus on the character of Marguerite in a church, including *Marguerite à l'office* (1861, Fig. 2.22) and *Marguerite in Church* (ca. 1860–1865, Fig. 2.23).⁷⁷ Each includes highly detailed, decorative religious elements, such as a large crucifix (*Marguerite à l'office*) and a life-size representation of the entombed body of Christ behind a latticed grate (*Marguerite in Church*). These distinctive embellishments suggest that Tissot was either recalling from memory or potentially visiting Catholic churches, given the Protestant faith's prohibition against depicting imagery within sites of

⁷⁵ Nancy Rose Marshall and Malcolm Warner, eds., *James Tissot: Victorian Life / Modern Love*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 163.

⁷⁶ For example, *Leaving the Confessional* (1865, Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton) portrays a woman exiting a confessional box.

⁷⁷ For more on Tissot's versions of Faust and Marguerite, see Margareta Frederick, "'Love, Error, and Repentance': The Faust and Marguerite Paintings," in Buron, *James Tissot*, 29–31.

worship. With his long-standing attraction to representing women in ecclesiastic—specifically Catholic—interiors, the intended inclusion of *Sacred Music* in Tissot's *La Femme à Paris* represents the culmination of Tissot's fascination with this theme.

Tissot's multiple treatments of scenes from *Faust* depicting the character Marguerite inside church settings were surely inspired by the 1859 Paris debut of composer Charles Gounod's opera *Faust*.⁷⁸ Gounod serves as a significant connection between Tissot's early religious Faustian subjects and *Sacred Music*; the composer was reportedly selected by Tissot to write an accompanying storyline that would narrate the latter.⁷⁹ This connection also hints at an important link between the story of Faust, which interweaves characters with supernatural powers (including witches and especially the devil's messenger, Mephistopheles) with orthodox religious doctrine, and Tissot's own blending of the orthodox and the occult in *The Life of Christ*. One contemporary critic even directly compared the faith and conviction of the two men: 'Like Gounod [Tissot] took a priestly view of his calling. The one composed and the other painted to the greater glory of God.'⁸⁰ The article's unidentified author associates Tissot and Gounod as devout artists whose work served a higher spiritual purpose. It is significant that both Tissot and Gounod were revered for their faith and for creating works of art with serious religious messages, yet these works also simultaneously express occult themes. Perhaps Faust's vision of Marguerite in Gounod's opera served as an inspiration for Tissot's own visions, both occult and religious.

⁷⁸ The opera features Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's tragic characters, with the name Marguerite substituted for the author's original character name, Gretchen. Tissot's scenes of Marguerite in church depict the moment in Gounod's opera where the choir sings and the organ thunders in at the musical high point, which links to the organ music at Saint-Sulpice.

⁷⁹ 'Tissot's Novel Art Work,' *New York Times*, 10 May 1885. Tissot had envisioned an unrealised plan that contemporary writers would author a short story for each painting and that print versions would make them available to a wider audience.

⁸⁰ 'Tissot's Artistic Tribute to Religion,' *Literary Digest* 25, no. 8 (23 August 1902): 227.

Further demonstrating the fashionable associations between Tissot's depictions of women in church interiors and the similar subject in contemporary popular culture is a scene from *Manon*, Jules Massenet's most popular opera, which debuted in Paris in 1884, the year before Tissot's vision in Saint-Sulpice.⁸¹ Massenet's opera tells the story of the beautiful Manon Lescaut, who is destined for the convent. En route, she is instead seduced by the charms of the Chevalier des Grieux, who later enters the seminary of Saint-Sulpice after they are separated. It is in Saint-Sulpice that the new *abbé* reminisces about his former love, and that is where they are reunited moments after her remembers her. No doubt this story of lovers who are separated and then reconciled in Saint-Sulpice appealed to the grieving Tissot. It could have rekindled his memory of the separation from Newton—a separation that prompted him to seek a supernatural vision of her at a séance, which was around the same time as the spiritual vision that Tissot professed to have experienced in Saint-Sulpice.

Attesting to Saint-Sulpice's musical and artistic associations, when the French Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix was working on his own religious commission in the church, he remarked upon its atmosphere and splendid musical programs. In correspondence with the novelist George Sand dated 30 August 1855, Delacroix wrote, 'There was an extraordinary service [in Saint-Sulpice] at eight o'clock. This music puts me in a rapturous state of mind very favourable to painting.'⁸² Delacroix was in the church working on the commission for his celebrated murals (painted between 1854–1861) that decorate its Chapelle des Saints-Anges.⁸³ These depictions of biblical subjects include *Heliодorus Driven from the Temple*, *St. Michael Defeating the Devil*, and the most famous of the three, *Jacob*

⁸¹ Act 2, Scene 3.

⁸² Kauffmann, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 76.

⁸³ Delacroix's paintings in the chapel were finished on 22 July 1861. Tissot was living in Paris at this time, so he easily could have known about the celebrated artist's completion.

Wrestling with the Angel (1854–1861, Fig. 2.24), which features a theme that Tissot repeats in his biblical illustrations: contact between spiritual and earthly subjects.⁸⁴

In a nearby chapel dedicated to the souls in purgatory, which is adjacent to the Delacroix murals, are frescoes by Delacroix's contemporary François-Joseph Heim, including *Religion Encourages a Dying Christian* (also called *Religion Exhorts a Christian to Endure Suffering in This Life in Order to Avoid Purgatory*, 1845), *The Effectiveness of Prayers for the Deceased* (1845), and *Christ and Mary Intercede for Sinners Before God the Father* (1845). The similar themes of these paintings—meditations on souls waiting for salvation—would have had a particularly symbolic meaning for Tissot considering Newton's recent death. Perhaps the image of a supplicant woman with arms outstretched to a hovering angel in *The Effectiveness of Prayers for the Deceased* reminded Tissot of his own separation from Newton and his bereavement after her death.

Another very striking and possibly haunting image that Tissot would have encountered inside Saint-Sulpice is the mausoleum for Jean-Baptiste Languet de Gergy (Fig. 2.25), priest of Saint-Sulpice from 1719–1745, who oversaw the completion of the church's construction and who initiated the creation of its gnomon (discussed later in this chapter). Commissioned in 1750 and designed by the eighteenth-century French sculptor René-Michel Slodtz (called Michel-Ange Slodtz)—tutor of the celebrated French neoclassical sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon—the Baroque-style mausoleum features a scythe-wielding skeleton (representing Death) recoiling from the Angel of Immortality, who has drawn back a curtain or veil. This product of the French Enlightenment may have presented different associations

⁸⁴ For more on this topic, see Jack J. Spector, *The Murals of Eugène Delacroix at Saint-Sulpice* (New York: College Art Association of America, 1967).

to a nineteenth-century viewer sympathetic to Spiritualism, such as Tissot. It was believed, for example, that séances could part such veils separating the worlds of the living and the dead.⁸⁵ Moreover, the symbolism of personified Immortality rescuing de Gergy from death resonates with a core belief of Spiritualists, who proposed that the soul continued to exist and progress after the body dies. The figures also participate in a miraculous occurrence that is sympathetic to Tissot's own experience of a religious vision. Although her interpretation does not read the sculpture within a Spiritualist framework, art historian Anne Betty Weinshenker suggests:

The kneeling figure of Languet de Gergy communicates his wonder at the triumphant vision he is experiencing. The remarkably inventive effect of that vision is felt not only by the curate but also by the vigorously active Angel and the toppling skeleton; all of the tomb's sculpted figures respond instantaneously to it, but it is otherwise unseen. The cause for their reaction remains invisible to the spectator.⁸⁶

Tissot's vision in Saint-Sulpice was also unseen by those around him, which draws an interesting parallel between the action taking place in the eighteenth-century monument and the nineteenth-century painter's experience. The supernatural aspects of the mausoleum's sculpture reinforce the mystical atmosphere of Saint-Sulpice, which fostered the conditions that were conducive to Tissot's religious vision.

In Saint-Sulpice's Chapel of Saint Francis Xavier are two murals by the nineteenth-century Academic painter Jacques-Emile Lafon, including *The Saint Raises Someone from the Dead* (1853–1859, Fig. 2.26), in which a shrouded figure rises ominously while nearby spectators look on in shock. This unnerving image, based on accounts of St. Francis Xavier's alleged miracles, could have evoked for Tissot visions of shrouded apparitions brought back from the dead at Spiritualist séances, such as Newton and Ernest at Eglinton's 1885 séance.

⁸⁵ It is mentioned, for example, in John Stephen Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of the Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886; 2nd ed., London: E. W. Allen, 1890), 187.

⁸⁶ Anne Betty Weinshenker, 'A Mausoleum by Michel-Ange Slodtz: Visible and Invisible Components,' *Mediterranean Studies* 18 (2009), 189.

Another set of murals located in the transept, painted by Tissot's contemporary Émile Signol, show scenes from the Passion of Christ, including the arrest on the Mount of Olives, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus. The surrounding art must have fostered an environment conducive to Tissot's inspired reflection on themes that overlap between Catholicism and Spiritualism: the revivification of the dead, visions of spiritual and terrestrial dialogue, and contemplation of the life of Christ.⁸⁷

Although the art in Saint-Sulpice features contributions from prestigious artists such as Delacroix, Heim, and Signol, there were also less lofty artistic connotations associated with the church in the nineteenth century. By the time that Tissot experienced his vision, the neighbourhood around the church was populated by a variety of shops that sold religious curios, such as painted plaster saints. Known as *l'art Saint-Sulpicien*, or the Sulpician style, this kind of devotional object or image was typically considered gaudy kitsch, and was very much in contrast to the high art contained inside the church.⁸⁸ As art historian Richard Thomson describes, 'The so-called imagery of St. Sulpice proliferated in many Catholic households: mass produced painted plaster saints, vulgar chromolithographs, or indifferent reproductions of great works of religious art.'⁸⁹ Although there are no known contemporary reviews of *The Life of Christ* that draw parallels between Sulpician-style artworks and Tissot's watercolours, it is noteworthy that due to the widespread availability of low-cost reproductions and their mass popular appeal, *The Life of Christ* would suffer from comparable assessments of quality and taste in the twentieth century.

⁸⁷ For more on the art of Saint-Sulpice, see Gaston Lemesle, *Masterpieces of Saint-Sulpice*, trans. Pamela Archaud (Paris: La Compagnie d'Hauteville, 2005).

⁸⁸ John Lyden and Eric Michael Mazur, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁸⁹ Thomson, *The Troubled Republic*, 131.

In addition to the art adorning its walls and the images sold in surrounding streets, Saint-Sulpice was also distinguished by other noteworthy features that seem more suited to a pagan site of worship than a grand Catholic church. *Paris and Its Environs* describes these items located in the left arm of the transept: 'A *Meridian Line* was drawn in 1743, with the sign of the zodiac. It is prolonged to an obelisk of white marble which indicates the direction of due north, while towards the S. it corresponds with a closed window, from a small aperture in which a ray of the sun falls at noon on the vertical line of the obelisk.'⁹⁰ The sunlight that passes through a small opening in the transept's southern stained-glass window forms a beam of light on the church floor that crosses the meridian line at noon, which essentially makes the church function as an enormous sundial. This apparatus, identified on the base of the obelisk as a *gnomon astronomicus*, was used for telling time, determining dates for religious holidays, and for directing activities such as the ringing of the church's bells at appropriate intervals.⁹¹ As a model instrument of the French Enlightenment, the gnomon provided scientific information used to support a variety of the church's religious needs, and is today credited by the church as being 'a striking example of peaceful co-existence between science and true religion.'⁹² This combination of the scientific and the religious would certainly have appealed to Tissot and other adherents of Spiritualism, a practice that used purportedly pseudo-scientific research in the service of spiritual beliefs.

The gnomon is a seemingly peculiar feature within a Catholic church, as the modern French journalist Jean-Paul Kauffmann notes when describing his fascination with Delacroix's murals in Saint-Sulpice. In Kauffmann's *Wrestling with the Angel: Delacroix*,

⁹⁰ Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs*, 7th ed., 247.

⁹¹ For more, see the section on Saint-Sulpice in J. L. Heilbron, 'The Last Cathedral Observatories,' in *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 219–226. See also Michel Rougé, *The Gnomon of the Church of Saint-Sulpice* (Paris: Parish of Saint-Sulpice, 2017).

⁹² Rougé, *The Gnomon of the Church of Saint-Sulpice*, 16.

Jacob, and the God of Good and Evil (2001), the author discusses this paradoxical item in conversation with an art critic friend, who asserts:

Saint-Sulpice cannot be understood without this [gnomon]. This is a very unusual concept for a church: it's solar architecture. Heliotropism is not the strong point of Christian churches; they usually seek the dark and sombre. The cult of the sun is a pagan thing: Ra, Phoebus. ... Anything that comes from the sun is a bit suspicious. ... The gnomon is a rarity in a church.⁹³

In fact, gnomons were installed in many churches to determine and convey the time of day through the ringing of bells.⁹⁴ Accordingly, Kauffmann goes on to discuss the gnomon with his friend, who explains the scientific reasoning behind the device and its purpose in determining the religious calendar, which changes annually based on dates of the seasonal solstices and equinoxes. To make this point clear, a Latin inscription at the base of the obelisk clarifies its mission: *Ad Certiorem Paschalis Aequinoctii Explorationem* (for a more accurate study of the Paschal Equinox).⁹⁵

The gnomon's seemingly occult symbols—signs of the zodiac and an obelisk—combined with its allegedly scientific function, demonstrates how the interior of Saint-Sulpice encouraged the cooperation between religion and science, a noted feature of Spiritualism, which used pseudo-scientific methods of investigation to attempt contact between the living and the dead. Such symbols may have already been on the artist's mind, for just a few years earlier, Tissot created a model for an unrealised fountain that he called *Fortune* (ca. 1878–1882, Fig. 2.27), which included zodiac symbols rendered in bronze around the circumference of a blue *cloisonné* enamelled globe topped with a crystal ball, flanked with writhing serpents and angels. Tissot decorated the base with the

⁹³ Kauffmann, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 70–71.

⁹⁴ Other prominent Catholic churches that feature gnomons built in the same era include the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence; the cathedral of San Petronio, Bologna; the Church of the Certosa, Rome; and the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels and the Martyrs, Rome.

⁹⁵ Rougé, *The Gnomon of the Church of Saint-Sulpice*, 10.

aphorism, 'Everything comes in time to those who wait.' The model may have had special significance for the artist, since it remained in his possession until he died.

Despite their arguably innocuous function, instruments such as the gnomon were the impetus for persistent conspiracy theories about Saint-Sulpice, as were numerous other controversies that led to the church being associated with the occult. For example, Alphonse Louis Constant, who published in the nineteenth century under the name Éliphas Lévi, trained to become a priest by entering the seminary at Saint-Sulpice before being expelled and becoming one of the leading nineteenth-century French occultists. The church was also prominently featured in Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1891 novel about Satanism in nineteenth-century France, *Là-Bas* (*Down There* or *The Damned*). Huysmans's trilogy of *Là-Bas*, *En route* (1895), and *La cathédrale* (1898) traces the spiritual journey of a novelist named Durtal, a thinly veiled autobiographical protagonist, through to his conversion to Catholicism.⁹⁶ In *Là-Bas*, Durtal befriends M. Carhaix, the bell ringer of Saint-Sulpice, while he is investigating the Parisian occult underworld. Durtal's research leads him to a Black Mass celebrated by Canon Docre, an excommunicated Catholic priest. This inversion of the traditional Roman Catholic celebration takes place in a former convent, not in Saint-Sulpice. Nevertheless, Saint-Sulpice figures so prominently in the narrative that it is difficult to disentangle its connection from the occult. Huysmans's novel thus offers yet another link between these alternative spiritualities and the church in late nineteenth-century popular culture.

⁹⁶ In a fourth novel, *L'Oblat* (1903), Durtal becomes an oblate (lay monk) in a monastery in the Benedictine Abbey at Ligugé near Poitiers, in the neighbourhood where Huysmans himself lived from 1899–1901 as an oblate.

Huysmans, Durtal, and Tissot are all products of a particular moment in French cultural and religious history where visions of both occult and spiritual origins were reputedly experienced and recorded. Like Tissot, Durtal also witnesses visions—both demonic and religious—and in the subsequent novel in Huysmans' series, *En route*, his vision leads to a mystical ecstasy after taking communion.⁹⁷ As Durtal observes in conversation with his friend Des Hermies before attending a Black Mass: 'What a queer age. ... It is just at the moment when positivism is at its zenith that mysticism rises again and the follies of the occult begin,' to which Des Hermies responds, 'Oh, but it's always been that way. The tail ends of all centuries are alike. They're always periods of vacillation and uncertainty. When materialism is rotten-ripe magic takes root. This phenomenon reappears every hundred years.'⁹⁸ According to Des Hermies's conclusion, both the Satanic subject of Huysmans's novel and Tissot's Spiritualist pursuits are a natural by-product of their time and place at the end of the nineteenth century, when positivism was at a high point and great uncertainty about traditional religious beliefs manifested in the popularity of occult spiritualities, such as Spiritualism.

The characterisation of Saint-Sulpice as providing a home for occult symbolism is complicated by its parallel reputation as a distinguished centre of spiritual teaching. In *En Route*, a fellow oblate counsels Durtal:

If you wish above all a zealous-souled priest, go to St. Sulpice. You will find there honest and intelligent ecclesiastics, excellent hearts. In Paris, where the clergy of the parishes are so mixed, they are at the top of the basket of the priesthood, and, as may be imagined, they form a community, live in cells, do not dine out; and as the Sulpician rule forbids them to aspire to honours, or places, they do not run the chance of becoming bad priests by ambition.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ For more on this trilogy, see Ruth B. Antosh, *Reality and Illusion in the Novels of J.-K. Huysmans* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986), 81–105.

⁹⁸ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Là-Bas*, trans. Keene Wallace (Sydney: The Floating Press, 2017), 272.

⁹⁹ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *En Route*, trans. Kegan Paul (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), 284.

Indeed, Saint-Sulpice had a long history of sound religious education. Founded in the seventeenth century, the first Sulpician seminary, the Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice, was established adjacent to the church. The order had a reputation for attracting sons of the nobility, since they did not take vows of poverty. A particularly notable figure associated with Saint-Sulpice in the nineteenth century was the religious historian Ernest Renan, who studied at the college of Saint-Sulpice before deciding that he would not take his vows to become a priest. Tissot owned a copy of the work for which Renan was best known in his lifetime, *The Life of Jesus (La Vie de Jésus)*, published in 1863, which humanised Christ in a manner that was highly controversial but also enormously popular.¹⁰⁰

Tissot's attempts at depicting biblical details accurately in *The Life of Christ* align with this precedent. Like Tissot after him, Renan went to the Holy Land in search of topographical accuracy. Napoleon III commissioned Renan's archaeological expedition to Syria in 1860, and the author wrote his *The Life of Jesus* in Palestine shortly thereafter. Perhaps it is this history and association with serious religious scholars such as Renan that resulted in Durtal's observation in *En Route*: 'It seemed to him that at St. Sulpice, grace mixed with the eloquent splendours of the liturgies, and that in the dim sorrow of the voices there had been appeals to him; and he therefore felt filial gratitude to that church where he had lived through hours so sweet and sad.'¹⁰¹ As Huysmans's character reveals, Saint-Sulpice represented many contradictions like the artist Tissot.

The cultural associations of Saint-Sulpice are part of its general atmosphere, and they infused it with meaning that would have contributed to how Tissot perceived the church and

¹⁰⁰ Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, 62.

¹⁰¹ Huysmans, *En Route*, 23.

how he might have felt while inside of it. Similar to Tissot, Durtal also experienced visions because of the specific atmosphere of Saint-Sulpice. In *En Route*, Huysmans describes the sound of the organ as a prompt for Durtal's visualisations:

In the silence of the church, the verses mourned out anew, thrown up by the organ, as by a spring board. As he listened with attention endeavouring to resolve the sounds, closing his eyes, Durtal saw them at first almost horizontal, then rising little by little, then raising themselves upright, then quivering in tears, before their final breaking.¹⁰²

On another visit to Saint-Sulpice, Durtal has a vision of a woman: 'He saw her ... extend her hand to him. He recoiled, struggling to free himself; but his dream continued mingling her with the form of one of the sisters whose gentle profile he saw. Suddenly he started, returned to the real world, and saw that he was at St. Sulpice, in the chapel.'¹⁰³ In these experiences, Durtal, similar to Tissot, witnesses visions inside the church, suggesting that its atmosphere was especially conducive to such occurrences.

A late nineteenth-century photograph taken inside the church (Fig. 2.28) reveals details such as candelabras that hang low from the ceiling, as if they are levitating in mid-air. This scheme of suspended illumination would have evoked the appearance of floating lights flickering in the church's lofty interior. Given Saint-Sulpice's unique ties to the occult, it is possible that these effects heightened the church's supernatural ambiance. In *Wrestling with the Angel*, Kauffmann describes the atmosphere in Saint-Sulpice on one occasion while visiting the church, in which he depicts the interior as a space that encourages hallucinations and visions:

The wind blowing under the doors, the flickering flames, ... the solemn melody that the organist embellishes with such skill, all seem to belong to the past rather the present. They have come to life again in a kind of hallucination. ... Saint-Sulpice still retains that golden, passionate melancholy. ... The church lends itself to these floating visions. Is it due to the low-tide light? The imagination wanders free in this ebb and

¹⁰² Huysmans, *En Route*, 2.

¹⁰³ Huysmans, *En Route*, 67.

flow ... the light acts as a source of life and energy. A kind of photosynthesis is at work, metamorphosing the paintings in all the chapels.¹⁰⁴

Kauffmann deftly ties the atmospheric effects of sound and light to artistic inspiration:

The powerful voice of the organ booms out. ... Its thundering notes penetrate its wall. The music comes in bursts, almost in circles, as if it were trying to follow the shape of the spiral staircase. The distant explosion of sound sends a thrill through me. I now understand the excitement felt by Delacroix and his insistence on painting during services, ... the warm wave of music envelops me. The empty church has suddenly come to life. The air vibrates. The angel in the painting with Jacob and the one in *Heliodorus* are dancing, roused into action by the brilliant sunlight shining through the window.¹⁰⁵

It was in this environment—music and light at play in the church's grand and imposing structure—that Tissot experienced the religious vision that would change the course of his art, and his life, forever.

Conclusion

The significance of visions in Tissot's late art and career has been overlooked by previous scholars, which has resulted in a general misunderstanding of *The Life of Christ* and its importance. The parallels between his Spiritualist vision at a séance and his religious vision in Saint-Sulpice must also be considered in the context of the late nineteenth-century vogue for the occult and the Catholic Revival. The cultural and religious atmosphere in which Tissot's visions occurred was especially favourable to such experiences, which establishes a critical lens through which the images that he produced in their aftermath must be understood.

The vision that Tissot described as occurring in Saint-Sulpice has specific contextual significance that has not been considered in previously published scholarship on the artist. It

¹⁰⁴ Kauffmann, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Kauffmann, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 13–14.

is well known that Tissot admitted to his vision and even capitalised on the notoriety that it brought him, but the social, spiritual, and occult associations of this specific location have not been carefully considered. It was not just any church that fostered an environment where Tissot could conjure his vision of *Inner Voices*; Saint-Sulpice carried explicit connections to occult rumours, fashionable musical programming, and artistic highlights with otherworldly references. That existing scholarship on Tissot has overlooked the significance of Saint-Sulpice as an influence on Tissot's late oeuvre is indicative of the wider disregard for this period of his career. The focus of these final two decades, *The Life of Christ*, is the subject of the next chapter.

Part Two

Chapter 3: *The Life of Christ*

*And now in the East a star of guidance shone out clear, a sign in the heavens beckoning this man, calling him to Jerusalem, and he heard the call and answered it. Tissot the artist became Tissot the pilgrim.*¹

—Cleveland Moffett (1899)

Introduction

As discussed in the previous two chapters, James Tissot was attracted to both Spiritualism and Catholicism in the final two decades of his life. His curiosity about Spiritualism led him to participate in séances, which inspired his work *The Apparition* (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885, see Figs. 1.1–1.2). With *The Apparition*, created as an oil painting and then reproduced in mezzotint prints, Tissot attempted to directly record visual manifestations that occurred at a séance he attended. Tissot's belief in the established doctrines of Catholicism also occasioned a visit to the Parisian church of Saint-Sulpice, where he said he experienced a religious vision. He thereafter depicted this vision in *Inner Voices* (also known as *Christ the Comforter* or *The Ruins*, 1885, see Fig. 2.1), which inspired his grand campaign to depict the Bible through watercolour illustrations. To this end, the artist made three known trips to the Holy Land between 1886 and 1896.² The first two trips (October 1886–March 1887 and October 1888–April 1889) ultimately resulted in his publication of 365 watercolour illustrations of people and scenes from the New Testament (ca. 1886–1894), which were accompanied by pen-and-ink sketches as well as Tissot's annotated commentary on subjects such as his interpretation of biblical passages or the topography and costumes of the Holy Land.³ The 'Tissot Bible,' as it became known

¹ Cleveland Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ,' *McClure's* 12, no. 5 (March 1899): 388.

² Tissot scholar Willard Misfeldt suggests, 'It seems probable that there were more.' Willard Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot: A Bio-Critical Study* (PhD Thesis, Washington University, 1971), 251.

³ According to Misfeldt, there are also seven oil-on-canvas versions of the watercolours. See Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 327. See also Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 188n38. Seven are recorded in the posthumous inventory of Tissot's Paris house. See Hélène Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, vol. II: Volume d'annexes: Mémoire d'étude, (MA

colloquially, was first published in the French edition, *La vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1896), and subsequently in English as *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings* (between 1897–1899), referred to from hereon as *The Life of Christ*.⁴ Tissot's third trip to the Holy Land (February/March–November 1896) was made in service of a goal to illustrate the Old Testament, which was only partially completed when the artist died, in 1902.⁵

With his incredibly popular and commercially successful illustrations of the New Testament, many of which emphasise the visionary and mystical elements of traditional Christian narratives, Tissot made a significant contribution to religious art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The magnitude of the hundreds of works in *The Life of Christ* and their widespread popularity when they were exhibited in Paris, London, and then throughout the United States (see thesis Conclusion), as well as their successful publication, resulted in the most ambitious, lucrative, and successful project in Tissot's prolific oeuvre. Yet this also remains the period of his career that has been the most underappreciated and misunderstood by art historians. Tissot's syncretism of visual

thesis, *École du Louvre*, 2018), 13. Most of these works are unlocated, but two are in museum collections: *The Sojourn in Egypt* (ca. 1886–1894, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) and *The Journey of the Magi* (ca. 1886–1894, Minneapolis Institute of Art). A version of Tissot's *Mary Magdalene at the Feet of Jesus* (ca. 1886–1894) was discovered in a private collection during the course of research for this thesis.

⁴ James Tissot, *La vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (Tours, France: Alfred Mame, 1896); James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-Five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings* (New York: McClure-Tissot Co., 1899). 1899 is the date of the American publication by McClure-Tissot; the first English-language edition was published by Sampson Low, Marston and Co., London (1897–1898) but the 1899 McClure-Tissot edition is the more complete first edition published in English.

⁵ While they are referenced in context, Tissot's Old Testament watercolours are beyond the scope of this thesis. Identifying which of these works are by Tissot's hand and which were finished by other artists will add greatly to the corpus of scholarship about Tissot. There has been little published about them, and the only catalogue is Yochanan Muffs and Gert Schiff, eds., *J. James Tissot: Biblical Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1982), which reproduces a limited number of the watercolours. The suite of illustrations for the Old Testament was recently digitised for the first time and is now available online on the Jewish Museum's website: www.thejewishmuseum.org. Questions regarding the authorship of the Old Testament illustrations may also be resolved through research for the forthcoming exhibition *Prophets, Priests, and Kings: James Tissot's Illustrations of the Old Testament*, slated to open at the BYU Museum of Art in Provo, Utah, in spring 2022 (6 May–31 December 2022).

languages—drawn from conventional religious sources and his own occult Spiritualist experiences—is the essential characteristic that makes *The Life of Christ* such a distinctive achievement among other examples of nineteenth-century religious art. Informed by the artist's visionary experiences at séances, discussed in Chapter 1, and in Paris's Church of Saint-Sulpice, discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter offers a new examination of the unique representational style that he brought to the *Life of Christ* illustrations.

As shown in the previous two chapters, Tissot produced the *Life of Christ* watercolours following a period in which he publicised—through interviews and in his art—his Spiritualist visions of materialised apparitions at a séance, and his vision, while in Saint-Sulpice, of Christ consoling two peasants. The works created in the aftermath of these visionary experiences thus illustrate traditional Christian narratives while also highlighting themes that resonate with Tissot's interest in mysticism. This fusion of motifs has prompted previous scholars, such as the preeminent twentieth-century Tissot specialist Michael Wentworth, to devalue the Tissot Bible's significance—in the context of both the artist's career and the milieu of late nineteenth-century religious art. Among his many disparagements, Wentworth describes *The Life of Christ* as a 'fantastical blend of mysticism, empathy, pseudo-science, and vulgarity,'⁶ which was also an 'uncomfortable result' of 'Tissot's attempts to make his familiar genre approach create a kind of Christian ... super-reality in which reportage combines with mystical and visionary elements.'⁷ By referring to the illustrations' 'seemingly irrational appeal to the general public'⁸ and to Tissot as working in 'the realm of the subjective and irrational,'⁹ Wentworth summarily diminishes the core

⁶ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 189.

⁷ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 178.

⁸ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 190.

⁹ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 183.

elements that render *The Life of Christ* so interesting and important. In fact, it might be argued that the success of these works was specifically *due to* Tissot's personal and aesthetic syncretism of Catholicism and Spiritualism, which reflected the cultural and spiritual climate of his time.

The Spiritualist themes in *The Life of Christ* are underscored in a variety of nineteenth-century Spiritualist publications that draw connections between mysticism and conventional Christianity. For example, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (1919), for example, by the Anglican curate Rev. George Henslow, quoted a list of comparisons between incidents in the Bible and Spiritualist episodes, which he sourced from the fellow Anglican minister Charles Lakeman Tweedale's publication *Man's Survival after Death* (1909):

Other writers have collected passages from the Bible which correspond with well-known psychological phenomena of spiritualism. The reader will find a useful list under the headings—Apparitions of the Dead; Levitations and Transportations of the Body; The Direct Voice; Trance ... Sounds of Varied Import; Luminous Appearances; Appearances of Hands; Touch of Spiritual or Discarnate Beings; Direct Writing; The Rising of Spiritual Beings through the ground or Floor; Manifestations of Spiritual Beings in a Flame or Luminous Cloud; Spiritual Beings Superior to the Laws of Gravitation; Materialisations ... Prophecy or the Foretelling of Events. ... From the above, it will be seen that there is an extraordinary identity between the phenomena of ancient and modern times, and that identity is so close and striking as to justify the conclusion that they have this in common, namely, that they are both the varied manifestations of spiritual power.¹⁰

Man's Survival after Death devotes a chapter to comparing 'modern psychic phenomena with those recorded in holy scripture,' in which Tweedale scrutinises these biblical sources and their connections to 'supernormal' happenings using examples from the scripture passages that illustrate them.¹¹ His chapter begins with the following assessment:

One of the first things that impresses a student of psychical matters is that the Bible, revered by all Christian people as the record of divine revelations to man, is full from

¹⁰ George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1919), 206–207.

¹¹ Charles Lakeman Tweedale, 'A Further Comparison of Modern Psychic Phenomena with Those Recorded in Holy Scripture,' in *Man's Survival after Death or, The Other Side of Life in the Light of Scripture, Human Experience, and Modern Research*, 2nd ed. (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1920), 474–489.

front to back of accounts of happenings which bear a striking resemblance to the psychical phenomena of modern times.¹²

Tissot also draws out the mystical elements of these subjects in *The Life of Christ*, which the known contents of his library at the Château de Buillon suggest that he studied. The posthumous inventory of his collection included many detailed explorations of mystic and Spiritualist phenomena and their connection to Christian and Roman Catholic beliefs, such as Johann Joseph von Görres *La Mystique Divine, Naturelle et Diabolique* (1854–1855), Louis Figuier's *Histoire du Merveilleux dans les Temps Modernes* (1860–1874) and Jérôme Ribet's *La Mystique Divine* (1879–1883).¹³ In this chapter, the artist's biblical illustrations are considered in light of key visual and conceptual leitmotifs associated with Spiritualist experiences and the visions of religious mystics: luminous auras around figures; gleaming/transparent shrouds; light emissions and transparencies resembling spirit photography; figures in trance postures/poses informed by spirit photography of mediums at séances; the dead appearing to and communicating with the living; supernatural happenings (including the revivification of the dead); and the continuation/progress of the soul after death.

Tissot's belief in mysticism was established early on through the example of his mother and influenced by his Breton childhood. As Tissot's biographer George Bastard observed, 'Son of a Franc-Comtois and a Breton, [Tissot] inherited the positive spirit of his father and the mystical character of his mother.'¹⁴ The artist was thus able to easily reconcile the two systems of Catholicism and Spiritualism, and he read widely to find support and

¹² Tweedale, 'A Further Comparison of Modern Psychic Phenomena with Those Recorded in Holy Scripture,' 474.

¹³ Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, 62.

¹⁴ 'Fils d'un Franc-Comtois et d'une Bretonne, [Tissot] hérita de l'esprit positif de son père et du caractère mystique de sa mère.' George Bastard, 'James Tissot,' *Revue de Bretagne*, 2nd ser. 36 (July 1906): 255. English translation mine.

clarification for these ideas, as attested to by the books in his library at the Château de Buillon. His *Life of Christ* illustrations visually manifest what he had absorbed from both strands of belief, and perhaps were the artist's way of trying to help others see these connections. He may also have wanted to make a strong case, as did many Spiritualists, for clerical and Church acceptance of the similarities between the two ideologies. For example, both systems of belief support the fundamental existence of an afterlife, and the Bible is filled with miracles that mirror supernatural phenomena, such as visions and resurrections.

In this regard, Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations contributed an original visual argument to the widespread debate in late nineteenth-century France (and elsewhere in Europe and the United States) about connections or oppositions between Spiritualism and Christianity.¹⁵ By 1856 Pope Pius IX had prohibited Catholics from trying to communicate with the spirit world because it was thought that such practices could expose participants to evil spirits. Then, in 1864, the Vatican banned a number of Spiritualist authors and texts, such as those by the French author Allan Kardec (*nom de plume* of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail), putting them on a forbidden-reading list, where they remained when Tissot was working on the *Life of Christ* illustrations, although he may have owned volumes by the author.¹⁶ But there were also those, including Tissot and the journalist Henri Carion, who were enthusiastic about Spiritualism's potential to reinforce Catholic beliefs. Writing in the ultraconservative Catholic *Gazette de France*, Carion claimed that he had made contact with the spirits of historical figures, such as Joan of Arc, who told him details about the afterlife

¹⁵ Historian John Warne Monroe summarises these concerns in 'The Catholic Critique of Spiritism,' in *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 142–146.

¹⁶ The posthumous inventory of Tissot's library at the Château de Buillon includes 'Cinq volumes des Esprits,' which may refer to publications by Kardec. See Lichy, *La Collection d'Objets Asiatiques de James Tissot (1836–1902)*, 60.

that supported Catholic principles.¹⁷ In light of these debates, Tissot carefully communicated about his own occult interests in interviews while also revealing an awareness of potential critiques, such as when he stated in the introduction to *The Life of Christ* that he did not want to 'risk being accused of mysticism.'¹⁸ If he had crossed that line too blatantly, he might have had difficulty in getting his publication endorsed by Catholic hierarchy, which would have jeopardised his campaign to make a visual case for the similarities between Catholicism and Spiritualism.

The Life of Christ operates as a visual polemic but also as a demonstration of its creator's personal beliefs. Tissot was trying to make a powerful argument and effectively communicate it to his readers. By describing and publicising his own mystical and religious visions, Tissot established the groundwork for others to knit these two strands of belief together.¹⁹ Although many authors and thinkers tried to reconcile Spiritualism and Christianity during this same period, Tissot's distinct merging of traditional religious imagery/themes with the modern alternative forms of Spiritualism was something that no other contemporary artist did to the same extent or with such widespread appeal.

Tissot the Pilgrim: Travel to the Holy Land

On 15 October 1886, Tissot embarked on the first of his three trips to the Holy Land. The objective of this expedition was to study places and people that represented as accurately as possible the Holy Land during Christ's lifetime. The artist departed on his fiftieth birthday,

¹⁷ Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*, 28–29.

¹⁸ James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 1, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), X–XI.

¹⁹ It is significant that Tissot's publication was thoroughly examined by specialists on behalf of the Catholic church and was endorsed by the Archbishop of Tours. Such endorsement or 'imprimatur' was essential for acceptance. Without it, publications could be banned on the basis of heresy.

which marked the occasion with personal symbolic meaning.²⁰ Although his specific itinerary has yet to be discovered, Tissot's travels between October 1886 and March 1887 included stops in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine—a major undertaking even in the twenty-first century. For him to repeat the travel from France to the Holy Land again on two subsequent occasions (October 1888–April 1889 and February/March–November 1896), and for him to remain there for such a long period each time, demonstrates how deeply he was committed to his illustration campaign. Tissot conjectured that this region had not changed since the time of Christ, which seemed plausible to many people in the nineteenth century.²¹ These sorts of judgments aligned with a pervasive 'Orientalist' misconception in Western European countries that the Holy Land could not be modern; hence the belief that it still looked like it did in the time of the Bible.²²

As an astute businessman, Tissot fuelled the considerable attention that his ambitious spiritual and artistic pilgrimage received through several publicity-generating interviews.²³ In conversation with the American journalist Cleveland Moffett for *McClure's* magazine, for example, Tissot divulged details about his first view of Jerusalem and visit to the Holy Sepulchre.²⁴ The most informative documentation that exists about these first two trips is to

²⁰ 15 October is also the feast day of Saint Teresa of Avila, an important sixteenth-century mystic who saw visions and experienced inner voices.

²¹ See Michael Paul Driskel, 'The Progress of Naturalism,' in *Representing Belief: Religion, Art, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 165–226.

²² For more on Orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). Art historian Linda Nochlin has argued that attention to detail is one tool used in the service of constructing fantasies about an exotic but authentic ethnography. See Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient,' in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 33–59. See also Doron Bar and Kobi Cohen-Hattab, 'A New Kind of Pilgrimage: The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Palestine,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2003): 131–148.

²³ See the following interviews: Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 387–396; Robert H. Sherard, 'James Tissot and His "Life of Christ,"' *Magazine of Art* 18 (January 1895): 1–8; Theodore Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels,' *Century Magazine* 48, no. 2 (June 1894): 244–248.

²⁴ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 390–392. The American edition of *The Life of Christ* was published in four volumes in 1899, by the McClure-Tissot Company, New York, which was established for this purpose. The McClure company co-published the American edition with Tissot himself, an arrangement brokered by publisher Maurice de Brunhoff, so it was in McClure's and Tissot's interest to generate as much interest in the publication as possible through personal interviews.

be found in the images that Tissot created, particularly the pen-and-ink sketches, which will be considered later in this chapter.

Despite the great distance and expensive cost, this journey was not unique to Tissot. An array of contemporary artists, such as the British Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt, the French *École des Beaux-Arts*–trained academic artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, and the American Realist Henry Ossawa Tanner, also travelled to the Holy Land to study the culture, people, buildings, and environment. Although they travelled to the same region, neither Holman Hunt, Gérôme, nor Tanner realised the extraordinarily ambitious result that Tissot achieved. The images that arose from Tissot's travels can be differentiated not only on the basis of aesthetics but also by the scale and scope of their production as well as their widespread popular appeal. And, of course, as previously discussed, the biblical illustrations comprehensively represent the artist's distinctive blend of orthodox religious and Spiritualist visual vocabularies.

To highlight the magnitude of Tissot's project and the particular character of his blend of Christian and Spiritualist visual languages, it is helpful to consider Holman Hunt's four trips to the Holy Land (1854–1855, 1869–1872, 1875–1878, and 1892), which were similarly inspired by spiritual convictions and the intent to paint religious subjects. Traces of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's founding principle to achieve 'truth to nature' can be located in the detailed symbolism of Holman Hunt's works, as is demonstrated in paintings such as *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (ca. 1854–1856, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery,

England).²⁵ Tissot presumably knew about Holman Hunt's work, given that the latter mentions Tissot's appreciation for *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* in his memoirs:

The Franco-German war had brought many French artists to England, some of whom had returned to Paris, while others remained here. One evening at a small bachelors' gathering at Millais' studio, a foreigner, being told that I had just returned from Jerusalem, asked if I were Holman-Hunt, the painter of 'The Finding of Christ in the Temple', which he had lately seen in Mr. Charles Mathews' collection. He said that he had admired it and my principle of work so much that he had resolved some day to go to the East and paint on the same system. I then learnt that this artist was young Tissot.²⁶

It is possible that the seed of inspiration for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was planted in Tissot's mind when he saw *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* in London. It seems more probable, however, that Holman Hunt—whose memoirs recall events several decades in the past and are riddled with revisionist history—was positioning himself strategically in the early twentieth century as the muse for Tissot's highly successful biblical illustrations. Although the religious works of both artists were extremely popular during their lifetimes, Holman Hunt's art, like Tissot's, suffered from critical bias in later years. Art historian Carol Jacobi explains:

Hunt's output is considered, at best, pious and earnest and, at worst, incomprehensible, ugly, moribund and even insane. This pattern of reception would seem, perhaps to justify Hunt's neglect and hinder critical reassessment, but there is a venerable tradition of understanding negative responses as revelations of the radical, pointers to the particular power of a work. ... To evade it is to limit Hunt's works to a minority taste. To embrace it is to discover a genuine discord, a tragic drama which does indeed proceed from links between the persona of the painter, issues of religion, insanity and death, and a laborious painting practice.²⁷

As Jacobi suggests, rather than deterring reappraisals of an artist's work, such negative reactions can prompt new insights about the power of their individualised aesthetic style. The

²⁵ For more on Holman Hunt's depictions of Christ, see Michaela Giebelhausen, 'The Making of William Holman Hunt as the Painter of the Christ,' in *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 127–187.

²⁶ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1905–1906), 312.

²⁷ Carol Jacobi, *William Holman Hunt: Painter, Painting, Paint* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 6.

unusual combination of Spiritualism's and Christianity's visual vocabularies in Tissot's *The Life of Christ* generated numerous negative assessments from twentieth and twenty-first-century art historians. These responses, however, unexpectedly illuminate the unique character of his religious illustrations and why they are worthy of reconsideration.

Further points of connection between the two artists include the fact that Holman Hunt turned to Spiritualism after the death of his first wife, Fanny, in 1866, and, like Tissot, he also claimed to have witnessed an otherworldly apparition.²⁸ In his memoirs, Holman Hunt describes returning from a train station at night along with the station-master, who carried a lantern to light their way, when they unexpectedly encountered a 'white creature' before them:

I kept my eyes riveted on the approaching being. ... The mysterious midnight roamer proved to be not brute, but had the semblance of a stately, tall man wrapped in white drapery round the head and down to the feet. Stopping within a few paces from us, he seemed to look through me with his solemn gaze. Would he speak? I wondered. Was his ghost clothing merely vapour? I peered at it; it seemed too solid for this, and yet not solid enough for earthly garb.²⁹

Although Anglican, rather than Roman Catholic like Tissot, this account reveals that Holman Hunt was also a deeply religious artist who was open to the possibility of paranormal encounters. Even so, his religious images, such as *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, do not exhibit the same emphasis on supernatural encounters or phenomena that is so evident in Tissot's *Life of Christ* illustrations.

Like Tissot and Holman Hunt, Gérôme also travelled to the Holy Land. Just over a decade older than Tissot, Gérôme went on his Holy Land pilgrimage for the first time in

²⁸ For more on Holman Hunt and Spiritualism, see Ann Clark Amor, *William Holman Hunt: The True Pre-Raphaelite* (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press Limited, 1989), 199, 206.

²⁹ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1905–1906), 296.

1856, one year after Tissot began his career in Paris, and three decades before Tissot would first embark on his own pilgrimage in 1886. Gérôme's inspiration from his travels in the Middle East resulted primarily in a series of Orientalist scenes of bathhouse interiors and mosques. One divergent example is the religious painting *Jerusalem* (also known as *Golgotha, Consummatum est* or *The Crucifixion*, 1867, Fig. 3.1), in which historical accuracy and realism are prioritised. Gérôme's approach reflects the humanised version of Christ that Ernest Renan had promoted in 1863 with his popular but controversial book *La Vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus*), which, as discussed in Chapter 2, had an important effect on religious art in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Gérôme's painting *Jerusalem* made a most provocative contribution to nineteenth-century religious art by including a radical representation of the Crucifixion, which is depicted by the shadows on the ground cast by the crucified Christ and the two thieves who were crucified near him. This treatment of the Crucifixion from an alternative viewpoint offers an important parallel to Tissot's approach to the subject. Tissot's watercolour *What Our Saviour Saw from the Cross* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.2) would similarly portray this climatic moment in Christ's Passion from an unprecedented position: Christ's elevated view from the cross. While Gérôme's unusual approach introduced an innovative interpretation by depicting the Crucifixion without showing Jesus, Tissot's image was arguably even more groundbreaking in showing the scene from Christ's vantage point. Tissot invites the viewer to engage with the drama of the Passion through Christ's eyes and the sorrow of the witnesses to the Crucifixion, whose faces display a mix of emotions. Notably, this innovation had a strong influence on early filmmakers who treated biblical scenes, a legacy that will be discussed further in the thesis Conclusion.

The American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner arrived in Paris in 1891 to study at the Académie Julian, and by 1895 he had transitioned to painting primarily religious subjects, perhaps drawing on his father's career as a reverend and bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.³⁰ Impressed by Tanner's paintings of biblical themes, such as *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (1896, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), the American department store magnate and patron of the arts Rodman Wanamaker sponsored Tanner's trip to the Holy Land in the late 1890s, the same decade in which Tissot made his third pilgrimage.³¹ Tanner travelled through Egypt and Palestine, and soon after returning to Paris in 1897, he painted an unconventional representation of *The Annunciation* (1898, Fig. 3.3). Tanner's Archangel Gabriel, rendered as a vertical shaft of blazing golden light, announces to Mary, depicted as a young woman wearing simple peasant clothing and without traditional attributes such as a halo, that she will bear the Son of God. Like Tissot's *The Annunciation* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.4), discussed later in this chapter, Gabriel is not represented in human form. Rather, the supernatural effect of the otherworldly messenger is defined by radiance, although Tissot's Gabriel bears a human face and hands surrounded by blue and white beams of light. Tanner's *Annunciation* was exhibited at the 1898 Paris Salon, and it became his first work to enter an American museum when it was acquired the following year by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Despite some scholars' interpretation of Tanner as a 'modern mystic,'³² there is no evident connection between his religious beliefs and occultism. Although his work exhibits elements of mysticism, his approach to representing the supernatural is closer to the Symbolists' non-illustrative

³⁰ For more on Tanner, see Anna O. Marley, 'Henry Ossawa Tanner and Religious Painting,' in Anna O. Marley, ed., *Henry Ossawa Tanner: Modern Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 109–143.

³¹ In 1899, Wanamaker's New York department store debuted a 'Tissot Gallery' to display *The Life of Christ* and to sell the 'Tissot Bible.'

³² Robert Cozzolino, "'I Invited the Christ Spirit to Manifest in Me': Tanner and Symbolism,' in Marley, *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, 120.

evocations of the intangible and less like Tissot's conflation of Catholic and Spiritualist visual languages.³³

Although Holman Hunt, Gérôme, and Tanner all made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the relatively small number of works that resulted from their respective journeys underscores the incredible breadth and ambitious scope of Tissot's series. The project that is perhaps most closely comparable with Tissot's illustration campaign in its impressive range and popularity is the 241 engravings by French printmaker Gustave Doré for his *La Grande Bible de Tours* (1866). Along with Charles Knight's *The Pictorial Bible* (1836–1838), *Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible* (1859–1863), and, later, *Dalziel's Bible Gallery* (1880), Doré's series belonged to a revival of illustrated bibles that were published in the nineteenth century. Doré's black-and-white images articulate the inherent drama of biblical narratives, and their contrast of light and darkness exploits the engraving technique to achieve powerful effects.

A key difference between Doré's and Tissot's approaches lies in Doré's resistance to visiting the Holy Land as part of his research. He chose instead to 'trust entirely to his own artistic conception' rather than rely on the empirical evidence of seeing the Holy Land in person.³⁴ It was surely a calculated move on Tissot's part, therefore, to select the Lemercier Gallery—previously known as the Doré Gallery after Doré exhibited twenty large-scale New Testament canvases there from 1868 to 1892—as the sole English venue for his exhibition of biblical illustrations (1896–1898). Tissot would have known about the popularity of Doré's

³³ Although Tissot and the Symbolists shared an interest in depicting visions and apparitions, Tissot's take on illustrating the New Testament is unique in his parallel commitment to expressing intangible spiritual manifestations and his adherence to the depiction of precise details.

³⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine* (May 1866): 709–710, reprinted in Sarah C. Schaefer, "'From the Smallest Fragment': The Archaeology of the Doré Bible," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2014). Doré also employs clothing and settings in the tradition of Old Master painting, which is something Tissot specifically rejected and sought to counter in his own images based on observations from his travels.

own illustrations, and he would have positioned his multicoloured watercolours as being entirely different, having a more luminous and vibrant visual impact than Doré's black-and-white images. Both illustration campaigns were commercially successful, but Tissot's images would ultimately make a more enduring contribution to successive modes of biblical storytelling in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, most notably in its influence on cinematic treatments of the Bible.

Tissot's Visionary Process

In the interview with Moffett for *McClure's*, Tissot described his dedication to his research in the Holy Land as almost monkish: rising early and praying, setting off for hours of sketching in the countryside, and spending his evenings in seclusion.³⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that the notoriously gossipy writer Edmond de Goncourt reported that Tissot shared his plans to acquire substantial acreage including 'a small mountain near Jerusalem, and of building a workshop there, where he would have printed and engraved his book [*The Life of Christ*]: a workshop, which he said, would have become a workshop of religious art.³⁶ Although this project seemingly never came to fruition, the anecdote hints at the commercialism that Tissot brought to his *Life of Christ* campaign, which was both a manifestation of the established business acumen that characterised his career to date and a liability that threatened to undermine the religious underpinnings of his pilgrimage. The degree to which Tissot's journey was a savvy marketing ploy rather than an authentic spiritual pilgrimage was debated by his contemporaries. His motives remained a source of deliberation for and among

³⁵ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 393.

³⁶ 'Tissot nous contait ce soir, chez Daudet, qu'il avait été au moment d'acheter 7,000 francs, une petite montagne près de Jérusalem, et d'y bâtir un atelier, où il aurait imprimé et gravé son livre: un atelier, qui disait-il, serait devenu un atelier d'art religieux, en même temps qu'une colonie française, faisant revivre l'influence de notre pays dans les lieux saint.' Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 8, 1889–1891 (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, G. Charpentier & E. Fasquelle, 1895), 126. English translation mine.

twentieth-century scholars. The fact that he made three trips to the Holy Land over the course of two decades, resulting in hundreds of watercolour illustrations as well as over one hundred pen-and-ink sketches, arguably contradicts any suggestion of sheer profiteering. The lengthy trip would have been gruelling and expensive, so to undertake it three times implies a level of personal conviction that Tissot could not have contrived purely for profit. He was already financially successful, and he could have remained in Paris to stay committed to the society portraits that were regularly commissioned from him in the 1890s by patrons such as the wealthy Clotilde Briatte, Comtesse Pillet-Will (*Clotilde Briatte, Comtesse Pillet-Will*, ca. 1882–1902, private collection), with whom he shared an interest in the occult.³⁷ He also could have continued exhibiting at the public forums where he had once successfully made his artistic reputation. Although he did not cease exhibiting entirely, he stopped showing works at London's Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery as well as the Paris Salon, where he had been *hors concours* following the 1866 Salon, a status that allowed him to exhibit anything he wanted without the formalities of the jury's review. He did, however, continue to exhibit at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris and to accept some portrait commissions from fashionable members of society, including many made in pastel, such as the portrait of the Comtesse Pillet-Will.³⁸

Indeed, Tissot was incredibly financially successful by 1886—the year of his first trip to the Holy Land—with a *carnet des ventes* (notebook of sales) documenting that he earned 82,203 francs that year.³⁹ The *carnet* reveals that his previous career successes afforded him the financial means to embark on expensive international expeditions for primary research,

³⁷ Comtesse Pillet-Will wrote several books in the early 1900s under the pseudonym Charles d'Orino. See catalogue entry for lot 27, Sotheby's 19th Century European Art (New York, 9 May 2013).

³⁸ See Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot*, 71–78, 103–112.

³⁹ See Krystyna Matyjaskiewicz, 'Tissot's Sales Notebook,' in Melissa E. Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2019), 266–283.

and the pages of a sketchbook used for *The Life of Christ*, now held at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, detail the costs for one of these journeys. These records demonstrate that, although he had garnered significant wealth by this point in his career, Tissot was not profligate; he attentively, perhaps compulsively, recorded the details of expenses incurred on the trip. This potentially supports the argument that Tissot's trips to the Holy Land were orchestrated for the prospective profit from the sale of his illustrations, but it could also suggest that such an expensive and arduous endeavour must have had personal significance to justify the substantial expenditure.

Part of the expense of Tissot's second trip to the Holy Land was incurred by his use of the relatively new medium of photography. An 1894 article authored by the American journalist Theodore Stanton, son of the famous American suffragist and activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, describes how 'during this second sojourn [Tissot] utilized instantaneous photography, which was then first becoming known in France, and was thus able to bring back with him quantities of characteristic types, scenes, and landscapes. ... The details furnished by the photographs have been reproduced in many of the watercolours.'⁴⁰ Moffett corroborates this detail in his *McClure's* article: 'What would serve his purpose he took down stroke by stroke, with infinite patience, using colours, using black and white, sometimes using the camera—whatever would give the best result. No trouble was too great.'⁴¹ Tissot clarified that he did not make many paintings while 'on the march':

I made many sketches in the villages, and took photographs which were useful as documents. Most of the actual painting of pictures was done in France. I would spend a few months in the Holy Land getting material, and would then return to Paris to use it. Then I would go back for more, and then return again. In the ten years I made a number of these double trips, getting my vivid impressions in the one country and carrying them out in the other.⁴²

⁴⁰ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels:' 244.

⁴¹ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 390–393.

⁴² Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 390–396.

When the artist subsequently returned to Europe from his first and second Holy Land trips (March 1887 and April 1889, respectively), he used photography as an *aide-mémoire* to continue working on his watercolours as well as the pen-and-ink sketches. In addition to the sketchbook from Tissot's Holy Land travels in the Brooklyn Museum's collection,⁴³ there may have been more, since Stanton describes 'the thorough manner in which Tissot studied before beginning to paint [which] is shown by his note-books ... on the fly-leaf of the first of these blank-books the artist has written the title of the proposed volume: "Life of our Lord Jesus Christ. By a Pilgrim of the Holy Land ... Begun on October 15, 1886," [which] tells exactly how many years he has so far devoted to it.'⁴⁴ This inscription is not visible in the Brooklyn Museum's sketchbook, so it is quite possible that there were others that are either lost or undiscovered.

The Brooklyn Museum's sketchbook is dated to 1888–1889, connecting it to Tissot's second trip to Jerusalem.⁴⁵ It contains a note that refers to it as an 'Album de Croquis de J. Tissot pour son voyage à Jerusalem,' and that further explicates that the sketches are 'croquis pour l'illustrations de la vie de N.S.J.C.' (sketches for the illustrations to *The Life of Our Saviour Jesus Christ*). Just as his compositions sometimes recorded a scene in precise detail,

⁴³ Although this is the only known sketchbook, given the breadth of images in *The Life of Christ* and the number of years that Tissot worked on this project, it is possible, even probable, that there were more sketchbooks that have either since disappeared or are unlocated. A private archive of unpublished photographs that appear to be from Tissot's travels in the Holy Land was discovered in the research for this thesis and the exhibition *James Tissot: Fashion and Faith* (Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 12 October 2019–9 February 2020).

⁴⁴ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 246.

⁴⁵ Although he made many drawings, there are only a few known sketchbooks from earlier periods to which the Holy Land sketchbook can be compared. There is a sketchbook that corresponds to some of the compositions in his *La Femme à Paris* series (ca. 1883–1885), for example, in which the figures are articulated as Tissot begins to express the elements of the scene, but these more formal sketches are nothing like the abbreviated notations in the sketchbook from the Holy Land. The original of the *La Femme à Paris* sketchbook is unlocated, but facsimile copies are in the archives of the Art Institute of Chicago. Michael Wentworth (1938–2002) Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, accessed by the author on 25–26 February 2019.

so too was Tissot meticulous about recording his expenses and labelling the documentation of his process. The sketchbook's pages are filled with squares of abstract compositional sketches that later evolved into the detailed watercolours. As described by Moffett:

About the only work he allowed himself at night was the jotting down in an album of little pictorial notes, each one about the size of a postage stamp, just the roughest pencil scrawling, to bring back a hint of composition. ... Each one of these rude drawings might be called the receipt for a picture, and when the mood took him for painting, M. Tissot would enlarge one of these into a more detailed sketch, outlining the background and central figures in heavy black lines; the whole, still formless, the merest skeleton of a picture, with only black ovals for the heads and a few rough lines for the bodies.⁴⁶

Although it is challenging to decipher them, some of the squares clearly hint at their final subjects. The dominant image on one page of the sketchbook (Fig. 3.5), for example, shows the crucified Christ surrounded by outlines of the hovering prophets, a scene Tissot would materialise in greater detail in *Consummatum Est: It Is Finished* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.6).

These sketchbook images abbreviate the compositions that Tissot saw in his imagination and are quite different from the very precise pen-and-ink drawings. Even with their lack of colour, the detailed pen-and-ink works correspond more closely to the finished watercolours. Some of the pen-and-ink sketches are directly related to the final places and subjects in the watercolours, but unlike the sketchbook images, they do not show Tissot thinking through the future compositions of his illustrations. Rather, they are studies of clothing, physiognomy, and landscapes. For example, two of the figures carrying vessels on their heads in *Women of Geba, Samaria* (1886–1887 or 1888–1889, Fig. 3.7) translate into the two foreground figures in *Jesus Forbids the Carrying of Loads in the Forecourt of the Temple* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.8). Similarly, the mother carrying a baby in *Woman and Child of Jericho*, (1886–1887 or 1888–1889, Fig. 3.9) relates to the foreground pair in *The Widow's*

⁴⁶ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 393–394.

Mite (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.10). These meticulous drawings of the people, buildings, and topography of the Holy Land were later translated into the colourful and often luminous watercolours. Both the sketchbook notations and the more realistic pen-and ink-drawings are essential to understanding how Tissot's watercolours ultimately came to fruition. Together they reveal the duality in his working method: the immediate response to spiritual inspiration and the direct study of precise details.

Although the economy of line used by Tissot in the sketchbook images seems far removed from the intricate and dramatic watercolours that he later created, the former are most significant for the way that they resonate with the 'automatic drawings' made by Spiritualist artists, which many practitioners referred to as 'spirit drawing'.⁴⁷ An interview with the English journalist Robert H. Sherard reported Tissot's description of receiving inspiration for *The Life of Christ* as if he were a Spiritualist medium practicing automatic drawing—a process by which a medium would channel images from a spirit source:

For the Christ he was ... guided entirely by inspirations. He relates ... that it often happened to him to make a charcoal sketch of the Saviour's face, and that whilst looking at this sketch the black lines would all disappear, and from the blurred mass of black there would look out upon him a Divine face, which he would copy to the best of his ability as from a living model.⁴⁸

In Sherard's explanation, Tissot created *The Life of Christ* through both his knowledge of sacred texts and his reception of visions from spiritual guidance, which were essential to his ambitious illustration campaign. Moffett defines this element of Tissot's process as the result of 'a strange thing [that] would happen, a rather uncanny thing. ... Scientists have called it "hyperaesthesia," a super-sensitiveness of the nerves having to do with vision.'⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷ Rachel Oberter, *Spiritualism and the Victorian Imagination in Victorian Britain* (PhD thesis, Yale University, 2007), 13–16.

⁴⁸ Sherard, 'James Tissot and His "Life of Christ"': 4.

⁴⁹ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 394.

sketchbook illustrates this very process, beginning with a channelling of inspired visions that echoes Spiritualist practices. The abstract images from Tissot's sketchbook thus act as a bridge between the spiritual transmission of his religious visions and the detailed photographs and pen-and-ink drawings.

This suggests that Tissot created a new way of working for his biblical illustrations, in which he became like a vessel through which his spiritual visions were channelled. Tissot wrote about the mystical process by which the biblical images came to him in his introduction to *The Life of Christ*. He also describes the experience of 'hyperaesthesia,' where his visions were inspired by a 'brilliant light, almost amounting to divination, which was thrown on various points by the sight of certain stones, and certain apparently insignificant topographical details.'⁵⁰ As was previously mentioned, he refrains from giving further details or explanation at the risk of being 'accused of mysticism.'⁵¹ This tantalizing hook leads the reader to speculate on what further revelations a more detailed explanation of his visions might have revealed. One clue is found in Moffett's explanation that Tissot made his images after staring 'over the white [sketchbook] paper with its smudged surface and, looking intently at the oval marked for the head of Jesus or some holy person, would see the whole picture before him, the colours, the garments, the faces, everything he needed and had already half conceived.'⁵² In other words, the shorthand images in Tissot's sketchbook seemed to serve as visual stimuli that prompted the artist's visions.

Tissot's visions while making the biblical watercolours recall the alleged manifestation of Kathleen Newton's spirit at a séance (see Fig. 1.1) and his vision of Christ in

⁵⁰ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, X–XI.

⁵¹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, XI.

⁵² Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 394.

Saint-Sulpice (see Fig. 2.1). These episodes were apparently not rare or isolated. As

discussed in Chapter 2, the following incident was also recounted to Moffett:

One day, for instance, while strolling in Paris, near the Bois de Boulogne, M. Tissot suddenly saw before him a massive stone arch out of which a great crowd was surging—a many coloured crowd—with turbaned heads and Oriental garments. And the multitude, with violent gestures, lifted their hands and pointed to a balcony high up on a yellow stone wall where stood Roman soldiers dragging forward a prisoner clad in the red robe of shame. Hanging down from the balcony was a piece of tapestry worked in brilliant colours, and over this the prisoner was bent by rough hands and made to show his face to the crowd below, and it was the face of Jesus.⁵³

This description of Tissot's inspirational vision for the watercolour *Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.11) reveals that even an urban promenade—far removed from the darkened séance room or the incense-and-music-filled interiors of a church—could present the conditions for Tissot's 'mystical hallucinations,' as the *Journal des Goncourt* characterised them.⁵⁴ Period articles about the illustrations picked up on this, and the American writer Edith Coues opined, 'Scene after scene is restored with what would seem almost the power of a seer.'⁵⁵ It is worth noting that Coues's Roman Catholic upbringing possibly made her a sympathetic reviewer of the *Life of Christ* illustrations, which she describes as 'made possible by the rare combination of the master's hand, the scholar's mind, and the soul of the religious enthusiast,'⁵⁶ although her allusion to Tissot having 'the power of a seer' suggests a more mystical rather than orthodox religious interpretation of this series.

Moffett and Coues were not the only journalists who identified the mystical aspects of Tissot's process in their reports. Stanton also describes in his 1894 profile of Tissot that 'before taking up his brush, Tissot saturated his mind with his subject, and gave full rein to an imagination now thirsting for the occult and the mysterious.'⁵⁷ Stanton further summarises:

⁵³ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 395.

⁵⁴ Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt*, vol. 8, 110–111.

⁵⁵ Edith Coues, 'Tissot's "Life of Christ,"' *Century Magazine* 51, no. 2 (December 1896): 292.

⁵⁶ Coues, 'Tissot's "Life of Christ": 302.

⁵⁷ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 244.

The collection of illustrations may be divided into four classes. Some of them are simply pictorial translations of the Bible texts. Others give form to old traditions. ... A third category, the most original of the whole, is the product of the artist's imagination alone, stimulated by inspiration resulting from long study of, and meditation on the career of Jesus. And lastly ... we have reproductions of historic spots, landscapes, etc., of the Holy Land as it appears to-day.⁵⁸

The remainder of this chapter will highlight works from Stanton's third category—those that are 'the product of the artist's imagination' or, in other words, those that reveal mystical affinities—to demonstrate Tissot's unique approach to his illustrations of biblical narratives. Indeed, his emphasis on the supernatural features of select biblical events is a recurring theme that runs throughout *The Life of Christ*.

The Visual Language of Spiritualism and *The Life of Christ*

Much of the imagery in Tissot's *The Life of Christ* demonstrates correlations with the visual phenomena and beliefs of Spiritualism and with divine mystical visions: luminous auras around figures; subjects cloaked in gleaming/transparent shrouds; light emissions and transparent bodies resembling spirit photography; the dead appearing to and communicating with the living; supernatural happenings (including the revivification of the dead); and the continuation/progress of the soul after death. The radiant bluish-white glow surrounding the shrouded figure of Christ in *Jesus Walks on the Sea* (ca. 1886–1894, see Fig. 2.4) is arguably the strongest example of this first correlation. Already, Tissot had depicted luminous auras around figures, such as the supernatural glow that emanates from the spirits in *The Apparition* and from Christ in *Inner Voices*. In fact, Tissot refers to the biblical incident of *Jesus Walks on the Sea* as 'the apparition of Jesus walking on the sea,' introducing the word *apparition*.⁵⁹ Tissot's word choice is particularly important, since it explicitly relates this

⁵⁸ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 247.

⁵⁹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 175.

biblical event to his own composition *The Apparition*, made after the séance with the medium William Eglinton at which Kathleen Newton's spirit allegedly appeared.⁶⁰

Tissot deploys *apparition* again in the title for *Apparition of the Dead in Jerusalem* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.12), a scene that takes place after Christ suffers and dies at the Crucifixion.⁶¹ As the Gospel of Matthew vividly describes: 'And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose. And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.'⁶² Matthew's Gospel contains the only description of these holy bodies reappearing. The flying souls are described in more detail by the mystic Catholic visionary Anne Catherine Emmerich (see Chapter 2), which is where Tissot most probably sourced the idea and some of his visual elements: 'More than a hundred persons who had died at different epochs re-entered the bodies they had occupied when on earth, made their appearance in different parts of Jerusalem, and filled the inhabitants with inexpressible consternation. ... They were generally in couples, and appeared ... to glide through the air without moving their feet.'⁶³ Tissot enhances the scene's supernatural quality with a disquieting vision: shrouded spectral figures glide through a claustrophobic and dimly lit architectural space while frightened bystanders react in shock. The pair of ominous saintly revenants hover above the ground, suspended in mid-air like the

⁶⁰ Although Tissot's original text was written in French, the word *apparition* is interchangeable in French and English.

⁶¹ John 19:30, in James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 3, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), 449. This painting is also titled *The Dead Appear in Jerusalem* in Judith F. Dolkart, ed., *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ,'* exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2009), 260. Citations include page numbers from the 'Tissot Bible' where text is quoted directly from this source. All other biblical citations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

⁶² Matthew 27:52–53, in Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 458.

⁶³ Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, According to the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*, trans. and ed. Klemens Maria Brentano (El Sobrante, CA: North Bay Books, 2003), 194–195.

prophets surrounding the crucified Christ in *Consummatum Est: It Is Finished*, drawing a parallel between these two scenes: one depicting the Crucifixion, and the other, its aftermath.

The dramatic scene in *Consummatum Est* offers another example of the interpretive liberties taken by Tissot in depicting the biblical supernatural, since the levitating saints who are depicted are not mentioned in the Gospels. The exhibition catalogue that accompanied the 1968 Tissot exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Art Gallery of Ontario noted in the entry for *Consummatum Est* that 'Tissot's interest and belief in spiritism ... are in accord with the mystical symbolism and visionary aspects of the Bible illustration which he strangely combined with local colour and realistic rendition.'⁶⁴ The discussion ends there and avoids any substantial engagement with the composition and its connections to other visionary or supernatural themes in Tissot's *The Life of Christ*.

While the witnesses to the Crucifixion seem oblivious to the floating prophets in *Consummatum Est*, the bystanders in *Apparition of the Dead in Jerusalem* recoil at what they see, an effect that is increased because they are also trapped in the crevices of a dark passageway. Their horror and panic mirror the terror of the witnesses to a related scene of the materialised deceased, *The Dead Appear in the Temple* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.13), which is arguably one of the most visually commanding watercolours in *The Life of Christ*.⁶⁵ This work cements Tissot's powers as a masterful creator of supernatural drama. The levitating saints float over terrified witnesses, who cower in fear. As was previously mentioned, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's death triggered the tombs of holy persons to

⁶⁴ Henri Zerner and David S. Brooke, eds., *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, exh. cat. (Providence: Rhode Island School of Design, 1968), cat. 59, no page number.

⁶⁵ This scene is also vividly described by Emmerich. See Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 191–194.

open, whereby the bodies of the deceased came back to life, went into Jerusalem, and revealed themselves.⁶⁶ In a calculated compositional decision, Tissot conceals the faces of the revived from the viewer; what causes such fright in the spectators must be imagined, thus augmenting the sense of dread through the power of suggestion. Rather than transgressing the principles of Christianity, Tissot's illustrations highlight the supernatural elements inherent within the traditional biblical texts, advancing his fusion of these two systems of belief.

In his commentary on the context of *The Dead Appear in the Temple* and *Apparition of the Dead in Jerusalem*, Tissot takes particular interest in giving precise details that illuminate the eeriness of these paranormal biblical events. He quotes directly from the Gospel of Matthew but goes even further, adding: 'The dead appeared ... in the streets of the city, gliding like shades over the surface of the ground and spreading horror and dread before them. ... Does [Saint Matthew] mean to describe the actual resurrection of dead bodies or merely phantom-like semblances of the departed?'⁶⁷ By incorporating his own commentary as a layer of interpretation to the Gospels—in this case, the Gospel of Matthew—Tissot deftly weaves his own personal thoughts about the supernatural events in the Bible with actual biblical text. In questioning the identities of the dead who appeared, he speculates:

What would appear to be more probable, judging from the context, is that the 'bodies' were those of people who had but recently died, as the sacred text would seem to imply that they were recognized by those to whom they appeared in the city. That is at least the impression made on my mind by the expressions used by the Evangelists.⁶⁸

Saint Matthew's Gospel account could have brought to mind Tissot's own relatively recent experience of having 'recognized' the departed Kathleen Newton, someone 'who had but recently died.' This is one of many instances where Tissot infuses his annotations with

⁶⁶ Matthew 27:52–53.

⁶⁷ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 458.

⁶⁸ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 458.

particular attention to a biblical passage's supernatural elements. Rather than shying away from these disquieting events, he seems fascinated by their visual and conceptual complexity. He concludes by sharing, 'Experts are still eagerly discussing the question, and will probably long continue to discuss it, without any chance of coming to a final conclusion.'⁶⁹ Perhaps, as a way to legitimise concerns about Spiritualism, he aspired to equate this ambiguity and debate between biblical scholars with the contemporary deliberations around Spiritualism and the legitimacy of experiments that claimed to foster communication with the dead.

Another image in which Tissot takes creative liberties, given the parameters of the biblical text, is *The Soul of the Penitent Thief in Paradise* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.14). Here viewers see the so-called 'good thief,' who was crucified alongside Jesus, ascending into heaven. Although this event is steeped in the Christian theology of salvation, the continuation of the soul after death was also of great importance to Spiritualists, which may have prompted Tissot to take a particularly inventive stance with the narrative. Wentworth is merciless in his assessment of this image:

There is a whiff of the ultimate cosmic séance about *The Soul of the Penitent Thief in Paradise*, which brings *L'Apparition médiunimique* [*The Apparition*] immediately to mind, as a pair of celestial *dames des chars*, their liturgical splendours combining the bird's wings and bandages of Burne-Jones with the Byzantine bric-à-brac of Sarah Bernhardt.⁷⁰

Wentworth's distaste for this particular work, and for *The Life of Christ* in general, is clear throughout his commentary. It is also obvious that his disparagement is coloured by personal bias, although he does concede that the perspective of the 'receding terrestrial sphere ... would not be confirmed until the generation of the astronauts.'⁷¹ Indeed, this incredible aerial viewpoint could only have been drawn from Tissot's creative 'intuition,' since no photographs

⁶⁹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 458.

⁷⁰ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 189.

⁷¹ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 189.

of Earth from space yet existed, and this heavenly ascent is not described in the Gospels.⁷² Tissot's enhancement to the Crucifixion's postscript with, as he describes it, the 'heavenly apparitions' gliding upward away from Earth, which is 'bathed in a mysterious light,' is yet another example of his syncretism of Catholicism and mysticism.⁷³ The repetition of the word *apparition* again recalls *The Apparition*, featuring its own 'figures bathed in mysterious light.'

Similarly syncretic is *Jesus Walks on the Sea*. While the Gospel of Matthew establishes the miraculous elements of this event,⁷⁴ Tissot embellishes the scene with details that neatly dovetail with features of ghostly apparitions at séances: bluish light around figures cloaked in luminous shrouds. This light is also similar to the light around Jesus—particularly along the edges of his cloak—in Tissot's *Inner Voices*, and the glowing light from the hands of the materialised spirits in *The Apparition*. Tissot's remarks in the published volume's commentary specifically elaborate on the light emanating from Christ's body in the darkness, and evoke the artist's explanation of Ernest's and Newton's luminous spirit figures materialising at Eglinton's 20 May 1885 dark séance:

The darkness must, therefore, have been almost complete. ... In spite of this, [the disciples] perceived the Master from afar, walking upon the waves. It is, therefore, very probable that light emanated from His body, and irradiated all around Him to some extent. Hence the terror of the Apostles, who took Him for a Spirit.⁷⁵

Out of context, the narrative in the Bible comes close to the details of a ghost story or Holman Hunt's account of seeing a phantom on the streets of London. The Gospel of Matthew describes that 'when the disciples saw [Jesus] walking on the sea, they were

⁷² A number of nineteenth-century writers and artists also tried to imagine the view of Earth from the moon. See, for example, Camille Flammarion, *L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1888). See also Lynda Nead, 'Lumen and the Celestial Archive of Images,' in *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 99–245.

⁷³ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 461.

⁷⁴ Matthew 14:24–33.

⁷⁵ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 175.

troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.⁷⁶ Tissot cites only Matthew's Gospel in the corresponding entry in *The Life of Christ*. The Gospel of Mark, however, uses similar language to set the scene: 'But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out.'⁷⁷ The language in both biblical passages about the vision of a 'spirit' suggests that this supernatural feat incited the disciples to think that they had witnessed a ghost—not Jesus. Tissot's own remarks in his accompanying commentary include annotations that fuse scientific observation and biblical tradition. He proposes that the early hour of the Gospel account was 3:00 a.m., and postulates that, due to the weather conditions, the darkness must have been 'almost complete'—perhaps comparable, in his mind, to the absence of light at the start of a dark séance before a glowing apparition became visible.

This type of manifestation, which Tissot had allegedly witnessed himself at the séance mediated by Eglinton, was represented in the artist's print and painted versions of *The Apparition* (see Chapter 1). In John Stephen Farmer's biography of Eglinton, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of The Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886), it is explained, 'After the usual preliminaries of a dark *séance* ... they were at first seen very indistinctly, but gradually they became more and more plainly visible, until those nearest could distinguish every feature.'⁷⁸ Tissot's description that 'light emanated from [Christ's] body, and irradiated all around Him' recalls his own alleged description of the séance in an 1899 article published in *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, an American Spiritualist weekly periodical:

Therewith someone signals me to look to the left behind me at a light. It is the form of a female. I look too soon; I hardly see it and the form vanishes. ... I now keep from regarding it until the form shall be distinct. After two minutes the light appears again.

⁷⁶ Matthew 14:26, in Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 175.

⁷⁷ Mark 6:49.

⁷⁸ John Stephen Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds: A Narrative of the Life and Work of William Eglinton* (1886; 2nd ed., London: E. W. Allen, 1890), 187.

I wait a while, then softly I turn to the left. I see then a human form, ... the light is bluish.⁷⁹

By repeatedly emphasising the miraculous and supernatural events in the Bible through bright light emanating from and around the figures, which is comparable to what participants at a dark séance might have seen during the manifestation of an apparition, Tissot's images, such as *Jesus Walks on the Sea*, draw from the visual language of Spiritualism and superimpose it on traditional Christian narratives. By merging the two systems of belief in *The Life of Christ*, he creates a novel fusion and a distinctive representational perspective on the New Testament.

The light depicted in *Jesus Walks on the Sea* anticipates other radiant figures in *The Life of Christ*, such as Jesus in *The Resurrection* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.15), in which his glowing stigmata is characterised by Tissot as 'shining luminously.'⁸⁰ Tissot frequently depicts and refers to the resurrected Christ in terms of 'his body radiating light,'⁸¹ although this phenomenon is not described explicitly in the Gospels. Coues explains how Tissot 'always represented [Christ] in a white garment,' appearing 'almost luminous' in *Jesus Tempted by the Devil* (ca. 1886–1894, Brooklyn Museum) while in *The Last Supper* (ca. 1886–1894, Brooklyn Museum), she notes, 'there seems to be an incandescence in the figure of the Christ.'⁸² Concerning *The Resurrection*, Tissot calls the angel seated in the tomb an 'apparition,' which he associates with the 'blinding radiance' that emanates from within the sepulchre.⁸³ He goes on to describe the three Holy Women—Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome—returning to the tomb to anoint Christ's body, where they

⁷⁹ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit. Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture,' *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* 36, no. 31 (3 August 1899): 1.

⁸⁰ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 483.

⁸¹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 494.

⁸² Coues, 'Tissot's "Life of Christ": 294.

⁸³ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 483.

observe 'in the midst of a bluish radiance ... a strange and supernatural figure seated at the entrance to the Sepulchre. The tomb itself is open and filled with a surpassing glory of light.'⁸⁴

This bluish light recalls the colours in *The Apparition*, in which the spirits' light gives the impression of a similar tone. This spirit glow was a hallmark of many séances, including the dark séance where Newton's spirit appeared through Eglinton's mediation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Tissot reportedly described Newton's glowing spirit appearance similarly, revealing that her 'face [was] blue, as if illumined by moon light.'⁸⁵ He continues, 'I saw then an admirable group lit by the same blue light, but more white, as if portions of the moon had been taken and put into the hands of the apparitions.'⁸⁶ This is perhaps why the moon is such a prominent feature in two of the watercolours that have the most pronounced appearances of luminous, mystical auras: *Jesus Walks on the Sea* and *Jesus Going Up into a Mountain to Pray* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.16). In *Jesus Walks on the Sea*, the light emanating from Christ's body echoes the cool, silvery light of the crescent moon behind him. It is as if Jesus has become like the moon—a source of bright light—and the reflection on the water's surface mirrors his supernatural radiance. The illuminated pattern of ripples in the water ahead of him seem like rays of electric light originating from his toes. Tissot explained that 'the two hands joined have the appearance of holding phosphorous, lit as if by electricity focused against the stomach.'⁸⁷ This phenomenon is also represented in the illustrations by J. G. Keulemans in *'Twixt Two Worlds*, such as *A Spirit Hand* (ca. 1884–1885, see Fig. 1.11). The

⁸⁴ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 485.

⁸⁵ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit: Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture': 1.

⁸⁶ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit: Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture': 2.

⁸⁷ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit. Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture': 1.

common visual theme in both Tissot's biblical works and these Spiritualist images is the bright light manifesting from an otherworldly spiritual source.

The luminous crescent moon in *Jesus Walks on the Sea* and *Jesus Going Up into a Mountain to Pray* is not mentioned in any of the related Gospel passages. Regarding the latter work, which Tissot describes as being 'fraught with a character of mysterious grandeur,' he asks, 'Who shall say what ineffable communications took place between the divine son and His Father?'⁸⁸ This 'ineffability' evokes the communications between spiritual and terrestrial planes that purportedly occurred at séances. According to Tissot, this biblical event resembles a type of preternatural dialogue. Perhaps the 'mysterious grandeur' of these biblical episodes led him to reflect on the astonishing appearance of Newton's spirit at Eglinton's séance and, subsequently, to his use of bluish-white luminescence in his own interpretation.

There is a rational explanation for the luminosity of the figures that Tissot described having witnessed at a séance. Harry Price, a British author and member of the Society for Psychical Research, whose research into paranormal phenomena made him well known for exposing fraudulent Spiritualist mediums, explains in *Revelations of a Spirit Medium* (1922) how duplicitous mediums could achieve incandescent effects during a dark séance: 'The bare arm glowed with a luminous bluish light. This condition of things was brought about by powdering his arm with pulverized luminous paint.'⁸⁹ Price's exposé explains how mediums could trick the participants at a séance into thinking that the light was from a supernatural source. It is unclear whether Tissot was aware of the deceitful methods behind these phenomena, but he repeatedly translates this impression of radiant figures into his biblical

⁸⁸ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 174.

⁸⁹ Harry Price and Eric J. Dingwall, *Revelations of a Spirit Medium* (New York: E. Button & Co., 1922), 293.

watercolours. Perhaps these revelations encouraged Tissot to use his images as way of legitimising Spiritualism by providing parallels to established biblical narratives.

Price's disclosure about how mediums could create the impression of a luminous, glowing body draws a connection with another aspect of Spiritualist investigation. Similar to the means taken to deceive séance participants, nineteenth-century spirit photography was also notorious for duplicitous exploits. As discussed in Chapter 1, attempts to capture and record manifestations at séances captivated the imagination of a public eager to investigate and potentially prove the existence of life after death. Many Victorians on both sides of the Atlantic, including notable cultural celebrities such as the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the widowed former first Lady of the United States Mary Todd Lincoln, held that these photos proved the existence of supernatural entities like ghosts and fairies. Such images blurred the lines between science and art by using newly available technology to make viewers believe that the invisible could be made visible.

There were two typical types of spirit photographs: those meant to entertain and/or frighten, and those that were used as scientific evidence of the existence of life after death.⁹⁰ This second type can be further distilled into two subcategories: photographs of spirit manifestations by themselves and photographs pairing the dead and the living together. The latter was especially important to counteract scepticism of Spiritualism. Arguments against spirit photography often explained spirit materialisations by claiming that the medium and the materialised form were in fact the same person. In other words, the medium was suspected of impersonating different spirits by using a variety of costumes, accents, etc.,

⁹⁰ For more on spirit photography, see Clément Chéroux and Andreas Fischer, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Corey Keller, *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

which could trick gullible believers. But if a recognisable deceased person 'appeared' with living family members, then this, in theory, was proof that the departed loved one still existed on a spiritual plane. Photographs that showed both the medium and the materialised figure at the same time, believers argued, were proof that they were two separate entities and not a result of the medium's deception. For example, investigations by the scientist William Crookes into the famous medium Florence Cook allegedly produced photographs showing her with the spirit that called itself 'Katie King.'⁹¹ This is the same apparition depicted by the artist Gabriel von Max in *Phantom Katie King* (ca. 1897, see Fig. 2.17). Katie King was one of the most famous spirit celebrities, and there are reports of her materialisations at séances on both sides of the Atlantic. Many photographs were taken of her in an effort to prove that the alleged manifestations actually took place. Yet some argued that photography could not convey an accurate impression of her appearance. In *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874), Crookes said, 'Photography is as inadequate to depict the perfect beauty of Katie's face, as words are powerless to describe her charms of manner. Photography may, indeed, give a map of her countenance; but how can it reproduce the brilliant purity of her complexion, or the ever-varying expression of her most mobile features?'⁹² This is perhaps the conundrum that Von Max attempted to reconcile in his painting.

Tissot also worked to capture the transparency of ephemeral figures, as is evident in several of his watercolours representing the resurrected Jesus. *He Vanished from Their Sight*

⁹¹ For more on William Crookes's photographs of Katie King, see Andreas Fischer, "'That Queer Machine.'" The Photographs of Katie King,' from "'The Reciprocal Adaptation of Optics and Phenomena": The Photographic Recording of Materializations,' in Chéroux and Fischer, *The Perfect Medium*, 172–174. See also Fig. 1.10.

⁹² William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: J. Burns, 1874), 110. Critics noted a remarkable resemblance between Cook and King. Numerous attempts to uncover the truth about Katie King were made and yet she remains one of the best known of the Victorian spirit visitors, perhaps in large part because of the many photographs that documented her likeness. It is possible that Tissot had in mind the images of a shrouded Katie King when he represented the shrouded Newton and Ernest in *The Apparition* and the shrouded Christ in *Jesus Walks on the Sea*.

(ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.17), for example, shows a transparent Christ appearing to the disciples. The biblical passage depicted in this work was often cited by Spiritualists as evidence of a connection between Christ and the immortality of the soul. As described in the Spiritualist publication *The Spiritual Birth or Death, and Its To-Morrow: The Spiritualistic Idea of Death, Heaven and Hell* (1904), written by Moses Hull, a prominent minister who often debated the strong connections that he perceived between Spiritualism and Christianity: 'Those who will examine the various appearances of Jesus after his death will discover that in every instance he came and went exactly as he said. ... Usually he appeared and then vanished.'⁹³ Other Spiritualist writers, such as the Rev. Joseph Beals, founder of Lake Pleasant, the oldest extant Spiritualist community in the United States, commented on the phenomenon of Christ's appearance and likened it to the dematerialisation that spectators frequently beheld at séances:

Jesus, after walking and talking with the two disciples, sat down to the table with them, and, to their utter astonishment, vanished out of sight, or, in other words, dematerialized. ... It distinctly states that it was in the evening, and 'the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled ... and Jesus came and stood in their midst.' Now here are the exact conditions that are observed in the *séances*, or circles, that are held to-day.⁹⁴

Beals used a comparative paranormal experience to describe spirits appearing and disappearing:

The door opened again, and in came the spirit, and said, 'You think I am trying to deceive you; will you step to the door and lock it?' Baxter said he began to be a little frightened; he went to the door, keeping his-eyes continually upon this form, and took hold of the knob ... and while he was intently watching it the spirit vanished out of sight; soon it gradually re-formed, and then asked, 'Are you now satisfied that I am a spirit?' Baxter said he was; whereupon the spirit vanished again.⁹⁵

⁹³ Moses Hull, *The Spiritual Birth or Death, and Its To-Morrow: The Spiritualistic Idea of Death, Heaven and Hell* (Lily Dale, NY: Sunflower Publishing Co., 1904), 17.

⁹⁴ Joseph Beals, 'Ancient and Modern Spiritual Manifestations,' *The Spiritualist and Journal of Psychological Science* 14:22, no. 353 (30 May 1879), 256. See also *Spirit Manifestations of Ancient and Modern Times Compared* (Greenfield, MA: Field and Hall, 1870).

⁹⁵ Beals, 'Ancient and Modern Spiritual Manifestations,' 256.

Similar to these examples of materialising spirits, Tissot renders Jesus's appearance in the Bible using a visual vocabulary that demonstrates Spiritualist beliefs: that the dead could appear to the living and that the two could be represented together.

Through these testimonials, Spiritualists such as Hull, Beals, and others were trying to legitimise their belief system. Arguably, Tissot was attempting to do the same through the mystical aspects of images such as *The Apparition* and the *Life of Christ* illustrations. Conan Doyle even used Tissot's *The Transfiguration* (ca. 1886–1894, Brooklyn Museum) in a lecture about Spiritualism, attesting to the parallels between biblical narratives and the tenets of Spiritualism:

When showing Tissot's drawing of *The Transfiguration* Sir Arthur claimed that the psychic phenomena of these days are really a continuation of similar experiences recorded in the Bible. He interpreted the appearance of Moses and Elias to Christ as psychic phenomena. He expressed the opinion that Christ chose His disciples not because they were learned men or socially important, but because of their psychic powers.⁹⁶

Conan Doyle and Tissot both perceived and promoted the similarities between Spiritualist principles and biblical phenomena. Tissot's biblical works thus capitalised on the fashionability of alternative spiritualities and mysticism. Like his earlier compositions of elegantly dressed subjects, which appealed to his contemporary audiences and patrons, Tissot's pivot toward mystical religion at the end of the nineteenth century represented both his own interests as well as the style of the time.

For many Spiritualists, their mystical beliefs did not conflict with religious beliefs. Rather, one reinforced the other. This is at play in Tissot's images; the artist drew upon religious texts to lend respectability to the often-controversial reputation of Spiritualism,

⁹⁶ 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Luncheon and Public Meeting at Brighton,' *The Two Worlds* XXXV, no. 1794 (31 March 1922), 147.

dabbling in an amalgamation forbidden by the Catholic Church. But by fusing time-honoured biblical narratives with debated Spiritualist beliefs, *The Life of Christ* elevated occult ideas and distributed them to a traditional religious audience. Even commentators such as Stanton, who highlighted that Tissot had 'an imagination ... thirsting for the occult and the mysterious,'⁹⁷ declared:

His originality may often border on profanity, but never crosses the line. His innovations in the handling of old familiar themes frequently take the breath away when the beholder is of the cloth. An ecclesiastic who has carefully studied the collection declares that in his rendering of the Passion Tissot has introduced numerous details that had never before occurred to the clerical mind, and yet that none of these new departures is contrary to orthodoxy.⁹⁸

By toeing this line, *The Life of Christ* helped legitimise Spiritualism, especially to those who were predisposed to accept the supernatural elements of the Bible. For example, the depiction of Jesus literally dematerialising before the disciples in *He Vanished from Their Sight* is based on the Gospels. Yet, in the context of Tissot's fascination with Spiritualism, it must also be considered within a wider framework of visual culture from this period, such as séances and spirit photography.

The creativity, ingenuity, and cunning employed by those who practiced spirit photography in the nineteenth century cannot be disputed. As media historian Tom Gunning argues, 'The belief that photography could discover a new spiritual world now seems naïve and perhaps a bit touching, but capturing the invisible remains an ultimate horizon for both scientific and artistic practice.'⁹⁹ Tissot's efforts to capture the invisible elements of religious phenomena in his biblical illustrations perhaps refer to spirit photography most directly in the images of otherworldly beings that populate the narratives, such as *Mary Magdalene and the*

⁹⁷ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 244.

⁹⁸ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 247.

⁹⁹ Tom Gunning, 'Invisible Worlds, Visible Media,' in Keller, *Brought to Light*, 63.

Holy Women at the Tomb (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.18) and *The Angel Seated on the Stone of the Tomb* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.19). These apparitions also appear behind the levitating Christ in *The Resurrection*, but here they are less prominently part of the scene, since Jesus takes centre stage. The brilliant bluish-white light emanating from the angels most certainly recalls the depiction of phantoms in spirit photography, as well as Tissot's own painting *The Apparition*.

Another example from *The Life of Christ* that has a strong narrative correlation and visual resonance with both accounts of séances and Victorian spirit photography is *The Appearance of Christ at the Cenacle* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.20), which Tissot describes as a 'very striking apparition of Jesus' (again using the term *apparition*).¹⁰⁰ The previously quoted description by Rev. Beals reverberates in Tissot's explanation of Christ's appearance, which sounds more like a visit from a materialised spirit than the appearance of the resurrected Jesus: 'The doors were closed, yet He passed through them without effort ... and suddenly stood in their midst.'¹⁰¹ In this watercolour, Jesus stands behind the group of apostles, who turn back toward the emerging figure. Their expressive postures suggest shock and alarm at the astonishing appearance of a deceased visitor.

In Tissot's *Two or Three Gathered in My Name* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.21), a transparent Jesus hovers above three seated men. Like the peasants in *Inner Voices*, the men seem unaware of the spiritual presence. This is a common feature of spirit photography, which often depicted the living subjects as unaware, or at least undisturbed, by the spiritual company. The albumen print of American spirit photographer William H. Mumler's *Mary*

¹⁰⁰ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 501.

¹⁰¹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 501.

Todd Lincoln with the Spirit of Abraham Lincoln (ca. 1870, see Fig. 2.3), is a famous example. In Tissot's *The Piscina Probatica* or *Pool of Bethesda* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.22), a pair of disembodied hands hover above the water, which pools and bubbles in reaction to divine contact. The semi-transparent hands are completely invisible beyond the forearms, and the people in this scene do not appear aware of the otherworldly presence before them. This phenomenon of disembodied hands was a familiar trope in spirit photography, such as Mumler's albumen print of *Fanny Conant with Spirit Arms and Hands Showering Her with Flowers* (1870–1875, Fig. 3.23), and is also seen in Von Max's painting of a ghostly manifestation *Geistergruss (Spirit Greeting)* (1879, see Fig. 2.16).¹⁰² Tissot's *The Vision of Saint Joseph* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.24), which depicts the Archangel Gabriel, also seems to nod to spirit photography as well as the automatic drawings of Spiritualist artists, such as Georgiana Houghton and Anna Mary Howitt. In these drawings, faces often emerge from abstract patterns. For example, Houghton's watercolour *The Portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ* (1862, Fig. 3.25) reveals a human face in the midst of swirling spirals of colour highlighted with corresponding patterns in white paint. The levitating head is completely disembodied, recalling Tissot's *The Annunciation*, which depicts Gabriel in a similar fashion, although with the suggestion of more corporeal features, such as hair. Indeed, a number of Tissot's biblical images resonate with Houghton's spirit drawings, especially when considered in relation to his own confessions about seeing visions.¹⁰³

In many of his biblical watercolours, Tissot refers back to the theme of visionary experiences. In *The Vision of Zacharias* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.26), the second colour

¹⁰² While Tissot would have been exposed to a wide variety of such images through his interest in Spiritualism, it is not known whether he was aware of these works specifically.

¹⁰³ For more on Houghton, see Lars Bang Larsen, Simon Grant, and Marco Pasi, *Georgiana Houghton: Spirit Drawings*, exh. cat. (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016).

illustration in *The Life of Christ*, Tissot depicts the Archangel Gabriel (shown here in a much more human appearance than in *The Vision of Saint Joseph* or *The Annunciation*) bearing the message that Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias, will become pregnant, despite her advanced age. According to the Gospel of Luke, Zacharias 'had seen a vision in the temple,' similar to Tissot, who saw a vision of Christ in the Church of Saint-Sulpice.¹⁰⁴ The description in the Gospel reads: 'And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.'¹⁰⁵ The passage does not mention the billowing, luminous cloud encircling the angel that is shown in *The Vision of Zacharias*. In Tissot's painting, the hovering Gabriel appears with a cloud of white smoke surrounding his torso, an evocation of one of John Farmer's descriptions of an Eglinton séance when he conjured a spirit, which eventually materialised into a woman's form: 'I saw what appeared to be a small cloud. ... This gradually developed until I could make out what appeared to be a human form draped in white. A little after, this form began to move, and then glided through the doorway.'¹⁰⁶ Describing another séance, Farmer mentions a 'thin, whitish cloud forming over the spot where the medium lay. This cloud grew larger, was taller than broad,' before a spirit emerged.¹⁰⁷ The supernatural cloud was a recurring element in descriptions of materialisations at Eglinton's séances, suggesting that Tissot could have witnessed such an event. This phenomenon was so closely associated with Eglinton that the catalogue accompanying an 1886 exhibition in the offices of *Light*, which featured works by Keulemans and Tissot, among others, specifically highlighted this manifestation: 'At a séance with Mr. Eglinton, vaporous clouds were seen to rise in front of the medium. By the dim light, the cloudy mass had appeared shapeless and ill-defined, but it

¹⁰⁴ Luke 1:22, in Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 1:11–12, in Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Farmer, *Twixt Two Worlds*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Farmer, *Twixt Two Worlds*, 40.

gradually developed into a thick white substance, to be compared to very dense smoke.¹⁰⁸

These 'vaporous clouds,' could have inspired the effects seen in *The Vision of Zacharias*, including the bluish light cast below the angel's floating feet, which seems to be Tissot's own interpretation of the biblical narrative.

The spectacle of mystical clouds at Eglinton's spirit manifestations was not exclusive to his demonstrations. A description of a July 1896 séance in Paris with the English medium Madame d'Esperance (born Elizabeth Hope) offers:

After a few moments we all saw a luminous ball in the direction of the medium. ... The ball looked like mist, or a luminous fog. It spread out towards the floor, then contracted. ... This vapor doubtless resembled that which came from the medium Eglinton, under like circumstances. He compared it to the smoke of a lighted cigarette.¹⁰⁹

This effect was described in other sources as well. In a 3 August 1899 *Religio-Philosophical Journal* article, the writer states: 'Finally [Tissot] visited Eglinton. ... This was the man who, according to the writings of M. Rambaud, had the ability to go into a trance and evoke a spirit which could be seen to arise from his chest, coming at first in a bluish vapor like the smoke of a cigarette and gradually materialising into a spirit which was luminous in the dark and could be seen and felt.'¹¹⁰ In accordance with this description, the French artist Albert Besnard depicted a spirit wafting up and over Eglinton's prostrate body in *La fumée lumineuse* (1887, Fig. 3.27). Although few, if any, artists were making religious images with Spiritualist undertones, there were some notable examples. The shrouded Mary and the mystical appearance of the diaphanous Archangel Gabriel in Arthur Hacker's *The*

¹⁰⁸ 'Catalogue of Drawings Illustrative of the Phenomena of Materialisation, exhibited at the Conversazione of the London Spiritualist Alliance at St. James's Hall, Thursday, January 14th, 1886,' *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* VI, no. 263 (16 January 1886), 34.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Aksakov, *A Case of Partial Dematerialization of the Body of a Medium: Investigation and Discussion*, trans. Tracy Gould (Boston: Banner of Light Publishing co., 1898), 100.

¹¹⁰ 'French Artist Sees a Spirit. Prof. Tissot's Spirit Picture': 1.

Annunciation (1892, Fig. 3.28), for example, looks more like Besnard's spectral phantom than a messenger of divine communication.

One of the most important connections between Tissot's Spiritualist visions and the *Life of Christ* images can be found in his depictions of the resurrected Messiah. Rather than bearing evidence of the Crucifixion through physical scars, Tissot's Christ radiates light from his injuries, which reflects the revelations of the mystic Emmerich, who describes Jesus's wounds as being transformed by light: 'His large open wounds shone brightly ... and rays of light proceeded from them.'¹¹¹ This illumination is not limited to the spectacular moment of resurrection, however, as all of Tissot's images of the post-resurrection Christ include the luminous stigmata. The effect resembles the light emitting from the hands of the figures in *The Apparition* as well as the illustrations by Keulemans in Farmer's *'Twixt Two Worlds*, where the 'spirit-lights' are described as 'the purest white light, like starlight.'¹¹² The images of this mystical phenomenon produced by a medium (see Fig. 1.11) create a strong visual parallel between the spirit light manifested at séances and the holy light emanating from the resurrected Christ.

By comparison, Holman Hunt's post-resurrection *Christ and the Two Marys* (1847, completed ca. 1900, Fig. 3.29) conceals the injuries from the Crucifixion via a spiralling coil of the white shroud that winds around Jesus's hands. The wounds on his feet are hidden by the figure of his mother, Mary, who bends over them. The only visible damage to his body is the laceration on his side, where a Roman soldier pierced him with a lance to confirm that he was no longer alive. This gash is red and raw—evidence of the physical trauma inflicted

¹¹¹ Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 239.

¹¹² Farmer, *'Twixt Two Worlds*, 84.

during Christ's Passion. The body of the resurrected Christ is highlighted as the central figure in this brilliantly coloured scene. The luminosity is an overall effect enhanced by the colourful rainbow in the background, unlike the glowing stigmata of Tissot's resurrected Christ.

In Tissot's own post-resurrection depictions of Jesus, such as *Jesus Appears to the Holy Women* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.30), Christ reveals himself to the two Marys with radiant wounds that emit a ghostly glow, once again recalling *The Apparition*. The title of another work, *Apparition of Our Lord to Saint Peter* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.31), even more explicitly points to a relationship with Tissot's spirit painting. As previously mentioned, the biblical texts never specifically refer to the vision of Christ as an *apparition*. The Gospel of Luke, however, describes an event following the Crucifixion that could just as well be an account of a séance: 'And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. ... And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.'¹¹³ Perhaps Tissot's use of this word in the title of his painting was meant to directly refer to *The Apparition*. Like the spirits in that work, the Jesus in *Apparition of Our Lord to Saint Peter* has returned from the dead in order to interact with the living. In both works, the figures' hands radiate light, connecting the Spiritualist vision of departed spirits with the spiritual vision of the resurrected Christ.

One of the culminating scenes from *The Life of Christ* is *The Ascension as Seen from the Mount of Olives* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.32). In his commentary on this painting, Tissot draws attention to his use of luminous clouds and light, which were hallmarks of séances:

¹¹³ Luke 24:34.

It is evident that the cloud did not resemble a chariot ... but was simply a veil hiding from the disciples what became of that body, endowed as it now was with special powers. It may perhaps have undergone a kind of dematerialisation, fading away in the light. ... He suddenly faded from sight, and where He had been, a cloud stretched like a veil, hiding the mysteries of God.¹¹⁴

In this watercolour, the dazzling whiteness appears like a supernatural combustion rendered in paint. Tissot's powerful representation of light in his biblical illustrations was not lost on contemporary spectators.¹¹⁵ Coues, who 'enjoyed the privilege of knowing this great artist intimately in his own home,' dispatched this opinion: 'In the picture of the "Angels Ministering unto Jesus," where they renew His strength with aliments not of this world, divinely and mysteriously fortifying Him for His task, there is a certain awfulness of light and whiteness.'¹¹⁶ She goes on to describe that 'there seems to be an incandescence in the figure of the Christ.'¹¹⁷ The illustration at hand, which is clearly associated with the physical experience of participants at a séance, is *Jesus Ministered to by Angels* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.33), in which pale blue angels hover over and touch the body of Christ, almost as if they are gathered around a séance table. Photographs such as those taken of John Beattie (1872, *Séance conducted by John Beattie, Bristol, England, 1872*, Fig. 3.34) and by H. Mairet (1898, *Séance with Eusapia Palladino at the home of Camille Flammarion, Rue Cassini, France, 25 November 1898*, Fig. 3.35) show what this might have looked like. As described in the memoirs of the Spiritualist researcher Ernest Tietkens, *Mediumistic and Psychical Experiences of Ernest A. Tietkens* (n.d.), the gathering around a séance table began like this:

¹¹⁴ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, 512.

¹¹⁵ Although not everyone saw Tissot's biblical works as supernatural or visionary. Given the mystical themes in his own writing, it is strange that the author Joris-Karl Huysmans did not perceive this aspect of Tissot's watercolours. Rather than noticing their spiritual qualities, Huysmans instead criticised *The Life of Christ* as 'one of the least religious works that exists,' suggesting instead that the illustrations should have accompanied Renan's *The Life of Jesus*, which employed historical details as evidence to characterise Jesus. While Tissot's works were indeed intended by the artist to be documentary in their details, they nevertheless are filled with representations of mystical, supernatural, and visionary events. See Joris-Karl Huysmans, *La Cathédrale*, 8th ed. (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1898), 376.

¹¹⁶ Edith Coues, 'Tissot's *Life of Christ*,' *The Literary Digest* XII, no. 8 (21 December 1895): 11.

¹¹⁷ Coues, 'Tissot's *Life of Christ*': 11.

'Our hands were, as is usual at these séances, on the table and little fingers joined.'¹¹⁸ The ministering angels in Tissot's illustration thus create the effect of Christ being on the séance table; he is the conduit through which to communicate with the spirit world. In her memoirs, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867–1887* (1925), the painter Louise Jopling recognised this watercolour's particular association with Spiritualism: 'The Life of Christ was treated from a spiritualist's point of view, and very remarkable the drawings were. ... One picture of the dead Christ surrounded by a multitude of hands, with their fingers extended towards the Holy Body ... had a weird, mystical effect, haunting in its beauty.'¹¹⁹

Beyond their visual resonances with spirit lights, spirit photography, and séances, Tissot's images also echo the postures and expressions of mediums. Discussing *Christ Falls beneath the Cross* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.36), Wentworth goes as far as to describe Christ's face as having 'the eyes of a medium or a hypnotist, his is more like Eglinton in a trance, or Rasputin.'¹²⁰ In Tissot's *The Magnificat* (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.37), Mary's physical bearing recalls the poses of mediums in a trance. Tissot's own description of this passage in the Bible suggests this interpretation: 'Mary was suddenly possessed by the Spirit of God, and, in a kind of prophetic ecstasy, she poured forth her joy at her coming maternity.'¹²¹ With her closed eyes and upturned face, this Mary recalls the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti's representation of his deceased wife, Elizabeth Siddal, in *Beata Beatrix* (ca. 1871–1872, Fig. 3.38). Both women are depicted in a state of rapture, caught between spiritual and

¹¹⁸ Ernest A. Tietkens, *Mediumistic and Psychological Experiences of Ernest A. Tietkens* (London: Office of Light, n.d.), 29.

¹¹⁹ Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867–1887* (London: John Lane, 1925), 61.

¹²⁰ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 189.

¹²¹ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, 11.

physical realms, just like the mediums who communicate between the spirit world and the world of the living.¹²²

Like Christ's raising of Lazarus or Eglinton's revivification of Newton through materialisation, Tissot articulates his desire 'to make [Jesus] live again before the eyes of the spectators, to call up the very spirit which shone through his every act.'¹²³ This assertion embodies the artist's overall mission in his ambitious project. He saw clearly the connections between Spiritualism and Catholicism, and he aimed to articulate them through his work. In *The Life of Christ*, Tissot brought together the visual languages of both belief systems, creating an innovative style of biblical illustration that was completely his own.

Conclusion

Tissot's distinctly late nineteenth-century merging of traditional religious narratives with the modern alternative forms of Spiritualism indicates that the *Life of Christ* illustrations are more significant than has been previously considered. Although twentieth-century scholars such as Ian Thomson have suggested that these biblical illustrations 'are least worthy when he contrives to convey mysticism and supernatural power,'¹²⁴ this is the very element that makes them so exceptional. It is something that few, if any, painters did, and it is interpreted in this thesis for the first time.

¹²² Rossetti and his brother, William Michael, attempted to make contact with Siddal after her death and believed that they received messages from her through table rapping. Stanley Weintraub, *Four Rossettis: A Victorian Biography* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), 148–152.

¹²³ Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1, X. There are, of course, works that literally illustrate the raising of the dead, such as *The Daughter of Jairus*, *The Resurrection of the Widow's Son at Nain*, and *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (all are ca. 1886–1894, Brooklyn Museum).

¹²⁴ Ian Thomson, 'Tissot as a Religious Artist,' in Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (Oxford: Phaidon Press; London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1984), 92.

Although this chapter has identified a variety of writers who, like Tissot, tried to reconcile Spiritualism and Christianity in this period, no other artist achieved what Tissot did in terms of scale and scope. This syncretism of his belief in both Catholicism and Spiritualism is perhaps why Tissot's illustrations were so misunderstood in the twentieth century. Not only had nineteenth-century religious art fallen out of favour by then, but the connections to Spiritualism may have been misconstrued. Tissot's fusion of two seemingly discrete visual languages, however, led to the development of a fascinating series of idiosyncratic and multivalent biblical illustrations that warrant the deeper consideration presented in this chapter.

The next chapter will focus on Tissot's unique fusion of these two spiritualities, and how it manifested in his lifestyle as well as his artwork. Tissot spent much of the last two decades of his life on a property he inherited in 1888, the Château de Buillon, an estate in eastern France. An analysis of this place, where Tissot lived for extended periods of time during the phase when he was focused on his biblical illustrations, provides further context for how certain sites inspired the artist and for how they allowed him to live, and work, in a liminal, generative space 'twixt two worlds.'

Part Two

Chapter 4: *The Château de Buillon and Tissot's Final Years*

To do my work best I must be able to think and to feel quite alone. I must have solitude. So, for weeks at a time, I would withdraw from Paris to a wonderful lonely valley, shaped like a vast amphitheatre, where the wind blows always and a little river runs. This is one of nature's worship spots, where reverence is in the air. Hundreds of years ago godly men chose this place for a monastery, and on the ruins of their building I have made my home for contemplation. Ah, the days that I have spent there listening to the wind sigh and watching the river flow!¹

—James Tissot (1899)

Introduction

In an 1899 interview with the journalist Cleveland Moffett for *McClure's* magazine, James Tissot declared, 'To do my work best I must be able to think and to feel quite alone. I must have solitude.'² He credited the work that he perceived as his most accomplished, *The Life of Christ*, to the atmosphere of a specific place, where he claimed that 'reverence is in the air.'³ This site was the Tissot family property in eastern France, the Château de Buillon, which, according to the artist, exerted a critical influence on him during the production of his biblical watercolours. In fact, the estate itself operated as a physical expression of the artist's curiosity about various spiritual belief systems and was a key component of his strategy to market and promote *The Life of Christ*.

Prior to the research for this thesis and for two comprehensive exhibitions of Tissot's work—*James Tissot: Fashion & Faith* (Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 12 October 2019–9 February 2020) and *James Tissot (1836–1902), l'ambigu moderne* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 23

¹ Cleveland Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ,' *McClure's* 12, no. 5 (March 1899): 396.

² Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

³ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

June–13 September 2020)⁴—the privately owned Château de Buillon was visited in the twentieth century by only one scholar, the art historian and one of the twentieth century's preeminent scholars on Tissot, Willard Misfeldt. Unfortunately, although he questioned how 'all of the earlier scholars posing as authorities on Tissot could have completely ignored a place that the artist himself considered one of the most important and one of the most sustaining spots in the world,'⁵ Misfeldt only references his research on Buillon in part of a chapter from his unpublished PhD thesis, which then became the basis of a short article about the location in 1984.⁶ More than three decades later, research trips to Buillon for this thesis—made in June and October 2018 and July 2019—uncovered important and previously undocumented information about the artist's life and work. An 1896 description of Tissot's three pilgrimages to the Holy Land could very well describe these research visits: 'Among other opportunities for study, the privilege of entering old ... churches, generally inaccessible, where, jealously guarded from profane eye, are to be found ancient and curious manuscripts, carvings, and relics which throw new light on the history of that time.'⁷ Misfeldt claims that there 'are literally dozens of extant photographs that record the château and its grounds and the life that went on there in the 1890s,' which substantially underestimates the actual number of photographs in the private Buillon archives today.⁸ More than 1,600 photographs—only a few of which have ever been published—provide insight into Tissot's carefully cultivated environment at his estate during these late years.⁹ The images that are most relevant to the

⁴ See Melissa E. Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2019); Geneviève Aitken et al., *James Tissot (1836–1902), l'ambigu moderne*, exh. cat. (Paris: Établissement public des musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie, 2020).

⁵ Willard Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot: A Bio-Critical Study* (PhD Thesis, Washington University, 1971), 293.

⁶ See Willard Misfeldt, 'The Period of Religious Dedication,' in *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 246–289; Willard Misfeldt, 'James Tissot's Abbaye de Buillon,' *Apollo* 119, no. 263 (January 1984): 24–29.

⁷ Edith Coues, 'Tissot's "Life of Christ,"' *Century Magazine* 51, no. 2 (December 1896): 291.

⁸ See Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 427–431; Willard Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 9. By this author's estimate, there are approximately 1,677 photos in the Buillon archives today.

⁹ For the most recently published information on Buillon, see Frédéric Mantion, 'Final Years at the Buillon Estate,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 76–77

topic of this thesis show Tissot acting as a fashionable host, entertaining a select group of specially invited guests and close family at his elegant property, which he also promoted as the site of serious spiritual research and solitary artistic production.

Despite Tissot's carefully cultivated persona as a religious pilgrim utterly devoted in this period to illustrating the Bible, the variety of materials found in the archives of Château de Buillon demonstrates the artist's fluid spiritual interests, which continued to include orthodox and occult religion, as the previous chapters have established. These primary documents reveal that in the last two decades of Tissot's life, he blended his Catholic and Spiritualist beliefs with facility, resulting in a generative and idiosyncratic style that is reflected in the *Life of Christ* illustrations and that offered a distinctive contribution to late nineteenth-century art. Tissot's resistance to a homogeneous point of view is characteristic of the more mature, synthesised Tissot, whose position in the French art world at the turn of the century was characterised by seemingly contradictory pursuits. On one hand, he was engaged with prevalent trends, such as the fervour for spectacular displays of panoramic art, which may have inspired his colossal *Christ Pantocrator* (1897, Fig. 4.1) in Paris. On the other, he also pursued the more solitary endeavour of religious pilgrimages. The artworks that resulted from these trips to the Holy Land, discussed at length in the previous chapter, are further examined here in light of their relationship to Tissot's family estate in Buillon, where, according to Moffett, the artist claimed he could 'think and feel quite alone.'¹⁰ Analysing the château's collections as well as its transformation and the activity there during Tissot's ownership reveals that Tissot avoided adhering to one belief system or aesthetic. He was consistently an artist 'twixt two worlds,' blending different sources of inspiration in order to create his unique visual vocabulary.

¹⁰ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

Whereas previous chapters have traced the evolution of Tissot's style through the visual languages of Spiritualism and Christianity and into the *Life of Christ* watercolours, this chapter moves into a slightly different register to explore the physical and geographical landscape where many of these biblical illustrations were made and where Tissot spent much of his final two decades when he was not touring to promote *The Life of Christ*. A description of the Buillon estate conjures many of the same characteristics that apply to the artist himself: mysterious, spiritual, elegant to the point of excess, and replete with idiosyncrasies. The religious history of the property and the mysticism that Tissot continued to study there reinforced and reflected his ability to embrace the tenets of both Spiritualism and Catholicism simultaneously. They also supplemented the narrative that he built around his pilgrimages to the Holy Land, in which he marketed himself as a spiritual pilgrim in search of inspiration for his biblical watercolours.

To contextualise these images in Tissot's oeuvre, it is essential to consider them through the history and character of the place where many of them were completed. The Buillon estate is where Tissot often retreated during the years that he was dedicated to the ambitious creation of 365 watercolours illustrating the New Testament and to the subsequent production of the Old Testament series that was in progress at the time of his death. Despite Tissot's own admission of the site's importance, the significance of Buillon as a source of creative inspiration for the artist has been even more overlooked than the works themselves. As discussed in previous chapters, these religious illustrations have suffered from critical bias, changes in the popular taste for nineteenth-century religious art, and an overall misunderstanding about their meaning as manifestations of Tissot's religious and Spiritualist visions. This chapter explores how the aesthetic syncretism of Christianity and Spiritualism

in Tissot's biblical illustrations is reflected in the history, atmosphere, and collections at his estate in Buillon.

The broader historical context of Buillon can be understood within the framework of other late nineteenth-century artists whose output was intrinsically associated with and inspired by specific locations. One such example is the village of Giverny for Claude Monet, who purchased a house there in 1890. Until his death, in 1926, Monet used the surrounding landscape in his paintings and as part of his self-promotion.¹¹ The Impressionist artist's home and gardens ultimately became synonymous with his most famous subject: waterlily ponds. Other examples include the artists' colony at Pont-Aven in Brittany, which developed in the 1860s and lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century, attracting such luminaries as the artists Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard, who spent time there in 1886.¹² The concept of place as a source of inspiration was a long-standing idea for artists that would have had particular appeal to Tissot, especially in terms of the marketing potential for his *Life of Christ* campaign. The religious history of the Buillon property, which contained the remnants of a twelfth-century Cistercian chapel and buildings, provided an appropriate backdrop for Tissot's narrative about continuing the legacy of the 'godly men [who] chose this place for a monastery.'¹³ His renovated home and studio on the estate dovetailed with the period when he completed *The Life of Christ*, and he emphasised the site's religious history to support the publicity accounts of his religious pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the biblical illustrations that he produced after returning to France. In interviews, he omits discussion about inheriting the property from his father in 1888, which was two years after his first Holy Land trip

¹¹ For a recent source on the importance of Giverny in Monet's career, see George Shackelford, ed., *Monet the Late Years*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

¹² For more, see Belinda Thomson, 'Gauguin in Pont-Aven,' in *Gauguin's Vision*, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2005), 25–37.

¹³ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

departure in 1886. The overall narrative thus reads as if Tissot consciously sought out Buillon for its potential to inspire his religious works. Indeed, Tissot was effective in finding ways to promote himself and his work throughout his career, especially in these final decades.

Tissot's wealth was significantly augmented by his inheritance of the Buillon estate's acreage and the property's main buildings, which he acquired after his father's death on 13 March 1888 (his mother passed away almost three decades earlier, in 1861).¹⁴ Located near the small village of Chenecey-Buillon, the property is so expansive that apparently 'fifteen gardeners were required to maintain the grounds.'¹⁵ It included a *château*; an *abbatiale* (abbey), which Tissot transformed into an impressive studio; and a *moulin* (mill) that Tissot renovated and expanded into an idyllic retreat on the banks of the Loue River. Although the entire property itself is referred to as the 'Château de Buillon,' the *château* is a late eighteenth-century building at the centre of the estate. This building served as the property's main residence, with grand rooms for dining and entertaining. Other structures on the property contributed to an overall atmosphere of religiosity and spirituality, including a private family chapel built by Tissot's mother, where she and Tissot would both eventually be interred; the Cistercian chapel ruins; and a monumental Japanese *torii*, a traditional symbol marking the entrance and transition to a sacred space.

The most impressive structure that still exists today is Tissot's addition of a magnificent studio in the *abbatiale*. Since the studio renovations started around 1894 and continued during the period when he produced his Old Testament watercolours (1895–1902), he probably built it specifically to complete *The Life of Christ* and to work on his next

¹⁴ As the last surviving son of Marie and Marcel Théodore Tissot, James Tissot inherited the entire estate five and a half years after he returned to France from London.

¹⁵ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 285–286; Misfeldt, 'James Tissot's Abbaye de Buillon': 24.

biblical illustration project. The atmosphere of a former abbey transformed into an elegant studio was the perfect environment for religious research. Even though Tissot could have spent all of his final years in the spotlight of Parisian 'Belle Époque' high society, enjoying a 'brilliant and somewhat pampered life, from a circle of friends that counted the best names in Paris and London, from affluence and ease,'¹⁶ he allegedly preferred instead to 'be able to think and to feel quite alone,' as he described to Moffett, at his family's estate in Buillon.¹⁷ In this remote place, 'where reverence is in the air,'¹⁸ Tissot devoted considerable time to completing the *Life of Christ* illustrations, which would ultimately augment his already substantial wealth and make him more famous than ever before. It is critical, therefore, to understand this location in the context of Tissot's final years.

Tissot's commercial achievements from the periods when he lived in Paris (1855–1871 and sporadically between 1882–1902) and London (1871–1882) accounted for the transformation of the buildings on the Buillon property, which was documented in numerous photographs over the course of these construction projects. Several of them show Tissot engaged in attentively observing these activities—from the mundane felling of a large tree to the hoisting of masonry on the ruins of the old church—suggesting the enthusiasm that he felt for the repairs. The property's enhanced opulence reaffirms his financial success in these late years, which was due in part to his successful realisation and promotion of *The Life of Christ*. The astonishing number of photographs found in the Buillon archives after Tissot's death can be explained by his creation of a photography studio in the *abbatiale*, where Tissot may have

¹⁶ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 388.

¹⁷ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

¹⁸ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

developed the images himself.¹⁹ These private archives, which originated from the contents of the estate, are currently maintained in a collection preserved by the château's current owner. The contents include photographs, glass-plate negatives, letters, ephemera, and personal effects. Tissot had long been interested in photography, as revealed by the photograph albums he made to document his own paintings as early as 1859.²⁰ According to Kathleen Newton's niece, Lilian Hervey, Tissot used photography when preparing compositions during his London years, and he employed a studio assistant with the skills needed to record groupings of models.²¹ These surviving photographs from the London period are primarily of Newton and her children, and have a tone of familial intimacy similar to later photographs of the Tissot family in Buillon, including the three surviving children of Tissot's brother Marcel and his widow, Claire (*née* Bichet); his nephew Henri; and two nieces, Louise and Jeanne. The photographs of Buillon also date to the period when Tissot compiled numerous photographs from his Holy Land pilgrimages during his research for *The Life of Christ* and *Old Testament* watercolours.

Through the interpretation of these primary sources, this chapter fills a critical void in existing research on Tissot's final two decades, which no previous scholarship has addressed in such detail. These findings contribute to the subject of this thesis by examining Tissot's expressed emphasis on the importance of spiritual solitude in Buillon for his work during this period and by interpreting the estate as an embodiment of Tissot's interest in multiple belief systems, such as Spiritualism and Catholicism. This analysis is supported by the architecture and archives of the Château de Buillon. The changes the artist made to the property after

¹⁹ Misfeldt, 'James Tissot's Abbaye de Buillon': 25. The number of photographs that exist suggest that the development process was accomplished onsite at the estate. There is also evidence of such activity in photography materials found on the Buillon property, which are now in the archives at the estate.

²⁰ See Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot*.

²¹ Marita Ross, 'The Truth about Tissot,' *Everybody's Weekly*, 15 June 1946, 6–7.

acquiring it also demonstrate how wealthy Tissot became at this time as a result of the successful publication, tour and sale of *The Life of Christ*, which benefited from the artist's avid marketing and promotion of himself as a religious pilgrim who lived in spiritual solitude. In contrast to this persona, what remains of the Château de Buillon today and what is evident in the selection of archival photographs discussed in this chapter demonstrate that Tissot was a wealthy aesthete whose surroundings were a far cry from the ascetic accommodations of a hermit. The estate itself is thus a substantive part of understanding the *Life of Christ* and Old Testament projects as a whole.

Unpublished photographs, documents, and ephemera in the Buillon archives reveal new details about Tissot's final years, such as the extent of his lavish architectural modifications after inheriting the château, the personalised environment that he cultivated there, and the people who were invited to spend time with him in Buillon. Many of the associates who visited Tissot in Buillon appear in the photographs, such as the publisher of his Old Testament illustrations, Maurice de Brunhoff, who was a manager for the specialist chromolithographic printers Lemercier & Cie and became a friend over the course of the *Life of Christ* publication project; the Dominican priest Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, O.P.; and the Scottish architect John McKean Brydon, who had designed the interior of Tissot's London home and studio as well as the studio in Buillon. The photographs also detail significant building alterations, including enhancements to the château that sits at the centre of the estate's extensive grounds as well as the construction of a studio and a photography room inside the nearby *abbatiale*, where the monks who founded Buillon in the twelfth century once resided. 'Hundreds of years ago godly men chose this place for a monastery,' Tissot said of Buillon, 'and on the ruins of their building I have made my home for

contemplation.²² It was in this studio that Tissot probably painted his final *Life of Christ* watercolours and the majority of his Old Testament illustrations. According to the interview for *McClure's*, Tissot told Moffett that much of his work on *The Life of Christ* was accomplished in Buillon. Although Tissot was savvy with regard to marketing himself, and this could have been a promotional ploy, it makes sense that Tissot was inspired by Buillon's religious history.

Beyond the property's religious history, the photographs also reveal important works that remained in Tissot's private collection, including *The Apparition* (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885, see Fig. 1.1), which had been presumed lost or destroyed.²³ The images also show the extent to which Tissot personalised the property. His 'JTJ' monogram, which appears frequently on his graphic works, is stamped in conspicuous places across the estate's grounds, from the silverware to decorative elements on gates and building facades.²⁴ Individual letters and the full monogram appear as roundels in the iron gates that demarcate the château from the nearby *abbatiale* and monastery ruins. The full monogram also appears on the outside of the barn. These brazen adornments reinforce Tissot's reputation as an astute businessman keenly aware of highlighting his trademark, even in this remote and cloistered setting.

²² Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

²³ *The Apparition* had not been documented by any known sources since Tissot's lifetime until its recent rediscovery during the research for this thesis and the 2019–2020 exhibitions in San Francisco and Paris. In addition to *The Apparition*, a late self-portrait (*Self-Portrait, June 1898, Buillon*, 1898, Collection Frédéric Manton) made four years before Tissot's death was also available for study. This watercolour was modelled on a photograph taken on the grounds of the estate, which is also held in the Buillon archives, along with the boots that Tissot was probably wearing in the two versions of this portrait. The painting depicts an older, confident artist, settled in his wealth and success, corroborated by the remarkable splendour of the Château de Buillon. See Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, 83, cat. 2.

²⁴ For more on Tissot's monogram, see Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints* (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1978), 26–27.

The display of his initials was something that Tissot had also done to his property in London. The 'JTJ' monogram is still visible there today, on a privately-owned building that Tissot built as a studio, which is adjacent to the main villa.²⁵ If there were similar initials on the main London property, they may have been removed by the subsequent resident, the artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema, who added his own initials into the studio building's ceiling, perhaps in response to Tissot's precedent. In Buillon, the initials and monograms have the effect of reinforcing Tissot's established career. His parents' wealth from their textiles business established the financial means for the initial acquisition of the property, but it was their son's entrepreneurial talent that underwrote his expansion and elevation of the property's aesthetic into an even more impressive estate. Tissot—ever the savvy businessman and marketer—missed no opportunity to reinforce his professional accomplishments and commercial acumen.

The Château de Buillon

Three major metropolitan cities were critical to Tissot's development as an artist: Nantes, where he was born in 1836;²⁶ Paris, where he launched his career in 1855 and to which he returned after Kathleen Newton's death in 1882;²⁷ and London, where he lived for an especially productive decade of his life (1871–1882).²⁸ One additional location, far removed from any of these cities, played a major role in his life: Buillon, located in the department

²⁵ The studio-house at number 44 (formerly number 17) Grove End Road was home to two of Victorian London's most productive immigrant artists: Tissot and, later, to his Dutch-born colleague Lawrence Alma-Tadema. See Charlotte Gere, 'The Alma-Tademas' Two Homes in London,' in Elizabeth Prettejohn and Peter Trippi, eds., *Lawrence Alma-Tadema: At Home in Antiquity*, exh. cat. (New York: Prestel, 2016), 74–97; Melissa Buron, 'Grove End Road: A Tale of Two Artists,' *British Art Studies* 9 (August 2018), www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-9/artists-houses-conversation.

²⁶ For more on Tissot's early years, see Cyrille Sciamia, 'James Tissot's Youth in Nantes,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 22–25.

²⁷ For more on Tissot's career in Paris, see Léa Saint-Raymond, 'Tissot and the French Market,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 38–39.

²⁸ For the most comprehensive source on Tissot's London years, see Nancy Rose Marshall, *'Transcripts of Modern Life': The London Paintings of James Tissot, 1871–1882* (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1997).

of Doubs in a region of eastern France called the Jura.²⁹ This last location is where he most often retreated to in order to work during the final decades of his career. So important was this location and the works that Tissot created there that the first paragraph of his obituary in *The Times* pronounced:

The career of this eminent artist ... may be divided into two clearly defined periods, the one before the 'Vie de notre Seigneur Jesus Christ,' the other entirely dominated by the all-absorbing task of the completion of this masterpiece. In order to carry through his great work ... Tissot retired to the ruins of an old abbey at Buillon in the Doubs, where he worked up the notes which he had collected during some years of travel and study in Palestine. It is at Buillon that he has died, while still engaged on the illustration of the Old Testament.³⁰

Close to the artist Gustave Courbet's birthplace of Ornans, Buillon is today approximately an hour by car to the Swiss border. The nearest major metropolitan area in France is the city of Besançon, which is approximately twenty kilometres from Buillon. After Tissot's death, parts of his collection were gifted by his extended family to the Besançon museum—the oldest public museum in France, which is known today as the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie.³¹ Attesting to this area's significance to Tissot at the end of his life, and as a sign of affinity between Nantes, the city of his birth, and Besançon, the closest city to Buillon, the museums in both cities were also gifted as complete sets of his prints as possible in accordance with the artist's will.³²

Tissot actually split his time between Paris and Buillon when he returned from his three separate travels to the Holy Land (October 1886–March 1887, October 1888–April

²⁹ This French region in the Jura has historically also been called the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté.

³⁰ 'Death of M. James Tissot,' *The Times*, 11 August 1902.

³¹ In 1920, Albert Bichet, the brother of Tissot's sister-in-law Claire Bichet, bequeathed Tissot's *Portrait of Reverend Père B*** [Bichet], Missionary of Gabon* (ca. 1884–1885, Musée d'Arts de Nantes), which depicts the donor's brother, to what was then the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes, and *A Nimrod* (also known as *The Little Nimrod*, ca. 1882–1883), to the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon. The latter depicts Kathleen Newton's children and their cousins, and it was perhaps donated to a regional museum to avoid renewed rumours about her relationship with Tissot.

³² Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 326.

1889, and February/March–November 1896). His fashionable residence in Paris was described in 1894 by the American journalist Theodore Stanton:

[A] handsome, secluded home, situated at the head of a quiet lane within a stone's throw of the Bois de Boulogne ... [where he] gave himself up entirely to his thoughts, his books, his collections, and his art. He pored over musty old commentaries on the Bible, studied archaeology, mastered the Talmud, devoured books of Eastern travel, read the history of the Jews and Arabs, and went over the scriptures again and again in the Vulgate and in the French and English translations. Nor did he neglect his Apocrypha.³³

Tissot's research and creative practices would have been similarly stimulated, if not even more productive, in the isolation of his family's sprawling estate outside the remote village of Buillon. This out-of-the-way and tranquil place, with its significant history as the former location of a Catholic monastic community, is where he purportedly created many of his biblical illustrations between his three Holy Land pilgrimages. The artist's relationship with the property in the final years of his career is described by the current owner of the Château de Buillon as being the product of an artistic vision:

Although [Tissot] seemed to have been little concerned with historical accuracy, he exposed vestiges of the past through a décor born of his imagination. He infused the estate with a charm that only an artist could offer, mixing styles in ways that were sometimes surprising but always refined.³⁴

Tissot's taste for luxurious décor was evident in the sophisticated environments that he created at his residence in London and at his villa in Paris. The property in Buillon became similarly sumptuous under his ownership. This proclivity for opulent interiors was reflected in his paintings, where well-appointed interiors became a hallmark of his style. This is especially evident in his portraits, such as *Portrait of the Marquise de Miramon, née Thérèse Feuillant* (1866, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), in which he featured a Japanese screen from his own collection that made its way to the Buillon estate, where it remains today. Like

³³ Theodore Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels,' *Century Magazine* 48, no. 2 (June 1894): 244.

³⁴ Manton, 'Final Years at the Buillon Estate,' 77.

his homes in London and Paris, the family estate in Buillon was transformed through Tissot's attention to detail and taste for high-quality materials, which challenges the image of an ascetic spiritual retreat that Tissot crafted in interviews.³⁵

Today, the trip to Chenecey-Buillon is a day's excursion from Paris. In Tissot's time, it was far removed from Paris and its fashionable society.³⁶ The newly discovered photographs of the Buillon estate nonetheless document a select group of visitors to this location, who will be discussed later in this chapter, revealing that Tissot must have encouraged his friends and business partners (who were often one and the same) to make the journey in order to spend time with him and to see his lavish environs. His homes in London and Paris were also showpieces, so it is not surprising that Tissot would want to make the Château de Buillon similarly spectacular in keeping with the reputation of a sophisticated and successful artist, which he had developed by this point in his career. This identity conflicts with the persona of a religious hermit that Tissot cultivated in media promotions about *The Life of Christ*, such as the *McClure's* interview with Moffett: 'From gay *salons* he made his way to moldering churches. His city house and his splendid château in the country were given up, and he declared himself ready to spend months or years in poor and mean surroundings. ...'³⁷ These dissimilar profiles reinforce the argument that he had a penchant for embracing seemingly divergent identities and interests, such as his simultaneous belief in Spiritualism and Catholicism.

³⁵ One other example of Tissot's taste for expensive materials is that he often painted on mahogany panels. See Sarah Kleiner, 'Tissot's Paintings Techniques,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 238–245.

³⁶ From the Besançon train station, the estate grounds are about an hour by car, which would have been an even more significant voyage for Tissot and his guests in the nineteenth century.

³⁷ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 388.

During his absences from Paris and London, Tissot's seclusion at the Château de Buillon's isolated location contributed to what Moffett described as 'much gossip about him in Paris and London,' since 'people who had known him well saw little of him now.'³⁸ A number of stories, beginning around 1894 and continuing after the artist's death, speculated about where he could be spending his time.³⁹ Some hypotheses 'rumoured that he had entered a monastery.'⁴⁰ Tales circulated that he 'lived as a virtual recluse' and had abandoned society to take up religious life as a monk.⁴¹ There is no evidence in any of the known press reports that Tissot worked to contradict these stories, of which there were several by the time the biblical illustrations were published. In fact, some of the reports seem to corroborate rather than dispel the rumours. According to Stanton's 1894 profile on the artist's exhibition of the *Life of Christ* watercolours at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 'Society lost its charms for him. He who had been a *mondaine* now became almost a recluse.'⁴² Tissot, who had always demonstrated a keen awareness of how to market himself, promoted this connection between his lifestyle and the subject matter of the watercolours.

Tissot also went so far as to sign his correspondence as coming from the 'abbaye de Buillon,'⁴³ as if he were writing from an active monastery, which contributed to the confusion about his location. Even former friends and London associates, like the artist Louise Jopling, lost track of him. In her memoirs, *Twenty Years of My Life* (1925), Rowe claimed that after 'leaving London, [Tissot] went to Rome, and joined the Society of Trappist monks. I believe

³⁸ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 388.

³⁹ For a comprehensive list, see, Judith F. Dolkart, ed., *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ,'* exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2009), 32n19.

⁴⁰ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 388.

⁴¹ Russell Ash, *James Tissot* (London: Pavilion, 1995).

⁴² Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 244.

⁴³ For the reference to his correspondence, see Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 181n16.

they take a vow of silence, and one of their occupations is to dig their own graves.⁴⁴ One story that appeared in 1894 in the popular Spiritualist periodical *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* suggested that Tissot planned to join the Carthusian order at an eleventh-century abbey near Grenoble and become 'a monk of La Grande Chartreuse. The illustrious painter has ... practically lived the life of a recluse and an ascetic during the seven years he was engaged on his charming work.'⁴⁵ Tissot may indeed have harboured such aspirations since his youth. His *Portrait of a Monk* (ca. 1860, Fig. 4.2) could be an early self-portrait, given the physical similarities of the subject to the young artist.⁴⁶ Created when Tissot was in his twenties, this painting might even be interpreted as a harbinger of his later transformation from society painter to religious artist. The early *Portrait of a Monk* offers an interesting comparison to his watercolour self-portrait *Portrait of the Pilgrim* (also known as *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 4.3), from *The Life of Christ*, created closer to the end of the artist's life, and discussed later in this chapter, when he had achieved tremendous commercial success as a painter.

Photographs show that the experience of approaching the impressive Château de Buillon estate during Tissot's lifetime was similar to what it is like today. Visitors first encounter an imposing gatehouse at the property's entrance (Figs. 4.4a–b). Evoking the spires of a medieval castle, the gatehouse sets the tone for the elegant property beyond.⁴⁷ Tissot also added a pinstriped gable that recalls an English Tudor lodge, another architectural motif that runs throughout Tissot's additions to the property. Although this style was representative of

⁴⁴ Louise Jopling, *Twenty Years of My Life, 1867–1887* (London: John Lane, 1925), 61.

⁴⁵ Untitled, *Light: A Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* XIV, no. 710 (18 August 1894): 391.

⁴⁶ See, for example, *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1865, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco).

⁴⁷ Photographs of the gatehouse before and after renovations reveal that Tissot made several adjustments, including the addition of weather vane with the letter *T* on it. He would reuse this motif in several other places across the estate, where he displayed his initials and the 'JTJ' monogram in prominent locations, demonstrating his tendency to imprint his creative identity directly onto his properties.

the wider French architectural taste at the time, it may also have been an homage to the decade that he spent living in London. Tissot was thus importing elements from his former life with Kathleen Newton by bringing this part of his past to Buillon. He likewise transported the memory of Newton to Buillon via several paintings of her, which will be discussed later in this chapter. This merging of two worlds—London and Buillon—demonstrates the contradictions that Tissot often embodied, from the distinct belief systems (Spiritualism and Catholicism) that he brings together in *The Life of Christ*, to the merger of English and French architectural styles in Buillon, reinforcing the interpretation that Tissot was continuously an artist who was "twixt two worlds."

The densely forested road beyond the gatehouse meanders along the Loue River. Today this route takes about five to ten minutes by car. It would have been a dramatic denouement for visitors during Tissot's lifetime, for whom the arrival would have concluded a long journey. Visible from the road is a ruined tower that Tissot commissioned—a picturesque folly that was built high up on a hillside, enhancing the mysterious aura of the location (Fig. 4.5). Tissot must have delighted at the prospect of showing off these enchanting points of interest to guests who made the lengthy expedition to visit him in Buillon. After the dramatic approach, the shaded road eventually opens up into a clearing, where the property's buildings come into view on the left, appearing today much as they did during Tissot's lifetime (Fig. 4.6). These scenic elements, set in the 'wonderful lonely valley, shaped like a vast amphitheatre, where the wind blows always and a little river runs,' reveal why Tissot declared the site 'one of nature's worship spots, where reverence is in the air.'⁴⁸ Tissot could have been thinking about the French term *révérence*, which is effectively interchangeable with the English *reverence* but which also carries the additional definition of

⁴⁸ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

curtsy or *bow*. Tissot thus acknowledges a respect for both the natural beauty and the religious history of Buillon. Similar to his ability to find parallels between Spiritualism and Catholicism, Tissot admired the dual importance of nature and religion in Buillon.

The reverent atmosphere of the secluded estate in Buillon is reinforced by its religious history, which bestows it with a rich spiritual legacy. From the *abbatiale* to the Cistercian chapel ruins to the Tissot family chapel, visitors are reminded of the site's hallowed past. These associations are critical to understanding the role the Château de Buillon plays in the greater project of Tissot's biblical watercolour illustrations. The fact that the estate's structures were built on the site of a former Cistercian monastery was well known to the Tissot family, who were fascinated by the history and significance of the Château de Buillon. Having amassed substantial wealth from their business in Nantes, Tissot's parents acquired the property on 11 July 1845. It is located in a region historically connected to the Tissot family's ancestry;⁴⁹ Tissot's father, Marcel Théodore, was born in 1807 in the French town of Trévillers, approximately one hundred kilometres northeast of Buillon. In 1865 Marcel Théodore published a short history of the monastery and the environs of the estate in an introduction to his publication *Le Manoir et le Monastère; histoire franc-comtoise du quatorzième siècle* (1865), in which he wrote:

Everything [there] inspires the greatest calm, the most irresistible and gentle melancholy. This residence is as if buried in the depths of a desert, where a wall of immense sheer rocks form a barrier against the storms of time, the gaze of men and even against their passions.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The Tissot name is associated with the region, most notably with the Swiss watchmaker Charles-Félicien Tissot and his son Charles-Émile Tissot. They founded their company in 1853 in the Swiss city of Le Locle, in the Neuchâtel area of the Jura Mountains, which is approximately one hundred kilometres from Chenecey-Buillon. Although they were contemporaries, there is no known connection between Charles-Émile Tissot and James Tissot.

⁵⁰ 'La position du château de Buillon, ses alentours, la rivière de la Loue, la vallée agreste,—tout, en ces lieux, inspire le calme le plus grand, la mélancolie la plus irrésistible et la plus douce. Cette résidence est comme ensevelie dans les profondeurs d'un désert, où une ceinture d'immenses rochers à pic lui forment un barrière contre les orages du temps, le regard des hommes et presque contre leurs passions.' Marcel Tissot, *Le Manoir et le Monastère* (Paris: Charles Blériot, 1865), 5. English translation mine.

James Tissot's description of Buillon as 'one of nature's worship spots' echoes these impressions of the serene and remote location, which the artist emphasised in the marketing of *The Life of Christ*.

In addition to authoring other publications about the region, such as a history about two fourteenth-century knights,⁵¹ Tissot's father was an avid conchologist whose collection is thought to have inspired the background display in *The Prodigal Son in Modern Life: The Departure* (1880, see Fig. 2.8).⁵² Several photographs in the Buillon archives depict the elder Tissot in his study surrounded by his collection of shells (Fig. 4.7). Since relatively little documentation about Tissot's father exists, these photographs provide valuable insight into the extensive collection cultivated by the elder Monsieur Tissot. Marcel Théodore's impulse to gather, record, and study may have influenced his son's collecting habits and his pursuit to surround himself with objects of curiosity and beauty, such as the masks and figurines revealed in the studio photographs. This attention to classification is also how Tissot approached *The Life of Christ*, most evident in the first-hand documentary research he performed in the Holy Land. The photographs of Marcel Théodore Tissot thus provide another previously unknown aspect of the environment that James Tissot was surrounded by in his lifetime.

Tissot's mother's legacy is commemorated by the chapel Marie Tissot built on the property in 1848 (Fig. 4.8). The proximity of the chapel to the twelfth-century church ruins

⁵¹ Marcel Tissot, *Montmahoux et Passavent: Histoire de Deux Chevaliers Franc-Comtois au XIV^{me} Siècle* (Paris: Blériot Frères, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1881).

⁵² As discussed in Chapter 2, toward the end of Tissot's residency in London (1871–1882), he revisited the subject depicted in a pair of paintings from his first Paris period in the 1860s: the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. The compositions in the later quartet, set in modern times, may be semi-autobiographical; the eponymous young man resembles Tissot, and his adventures in foreign lands resonate with Tissot's own journey from Paris to London and perhaps anticipated his travels in the Holy Land.

creates a direct physical and spiritual connection between the property's historic past and the Tissot family's devout Catholicism. While it is not as architecturally imposing as the other buildings on the estate, the chapel was a peaceful space for private spiritual devotion. In the introduction to *The Life of Christ*, Tissot described his father as a 'Christian of the old-fashioned sort, and a devout Catholic,' suggesting that the elder Tissot was traditional in his beliefs and understanding of Catholicism.⁵³ As discussed in Chapter 2, his mother was apparently similarly devout, if not more so. The construction of the chapel in Buillon also demonstrates this commitment to their faith and it bears certain details that are symbolic in relation to Tissot's family. Statues of Saints Marcel and Bernard (Fig. 4.9) on the building's façade correlate to the subjects of Tissot's earliest exhibited paintings, shown at the Salon of 1859, *Saint Jacques-le-Majeur and Saint Bernard* (1859, see Fig. 2.5a) and *Saint Marcel and Saint Olivier* (1859, see Fig. 2.5b). The subjects depicted by the statues and in the paintings are unambiguously representative of the Tissot family and of the estate itself: Marcel is the name of both the artist's father and his older brother, and Bernard refers to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who, according to Tissot *père*, accepted the charter to build the Buillon monastery and was present at the monastery church's consecration around 1135.⁵⁴ It is significant that Tissot chose to depict these saints that relate to his family and to the Buillon estate for his debut at the Salon. Even early in his career, his oeuvre was punctuated with religious images, which disrupts the perception of Tissot as merely a society painter of pretty women and debonair men.

⁵³ James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 1, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), IX.

⁵⁴ A third brother, Albert François, who only lived from 1838–1840, is not represented by these figures.

As previously mentioned, the property's origin as a site of religious veneration dates to the twelfth century. The ruins near Marie Tissot's chapel, which are still visible today, are of the apse and altar of the Cistercian monks' church. Chapter 2 established Tissot's attraction to church interiors, and several photographs that show Tissot supervising the reconstruction of the ruins suggest that he was especially interested in its restoration. Although the scale and intimate atmosphere of the nearby Buillon chapel are dissimilar from that of the grand Church of Saint-Sulpice, Tissot drew inspiration from both types of religious buildings. Whereas he was motivated to create *Inner Voices* (also known as *Christ the Comforter* or *The Ruins*, 1885, see Fig. 2.1) after witnessing a mystical vision of Christ in Saint-Sulpice, the Buillon chapel inspired a more traditional pair of religious artworks in *Saint Jacques-le-Majeur and Saint Bernard* and *Saint Marcel and Saint Olivier*. Each of these paintings was a direct result of Tissot's time spent in Catholic churches, which reflects his attraction to religious subjects throughout his career—from his first Salon paintings to the biblical illustrations that consumed the final two decades of his life.

As a pilgrim to the Holy Land himself, Tissot may have also connected his journeys with the teachings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cistercian monk present at the site's consecration, and who compelled many Christians to embark for the Holy Land during the Second Crusade (1146–1149). Remembered for his contemplative mysticism, Saint Bernard was closely associated with a type of visionary Catholicism.⁵⁵ His teachings resonate with Tissot's own penchant for mystical Catholicism, which the artist disclosed through anecdotes about his purported visionary religious experiences, such as his vision of Christ in Saint-Sulpice. In particular, Saint Bernard was venerated for having a vision of the Virgin Mary,

⁵⁵ For more on Saint Bernard, see Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1940).

which was so famous that it was depicted in Italian Renaissance paintings such as Filippino Lippi's *Apparition of the Virgin to St. Bernard* (1485–1487, Badia, Florence) and Pietro Perugino's *The Vision of St. Bernard* (1490, Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Saint Bernard was so connected to this vision that the fourteenth-century Italian author Dante Alighieri imagined the saint to be his last guide to the heavenly vision of Mary in *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso* (1472). Tissot must have found particular symbolism, when returning to Buillon to complete an ambitious series of visionary religious illustrations, in the atmosphere of this site with associations to Saint Bernard.

In Tissot's painting *Saint Jacques-le-Majeur and Saint Bernard*, Saint Bernard holds a small chapel that bears a striking resemblance to Marie Tissot's building on the grounds of Buillon, as Tissot scholars Willard Misfeldt and Michael Wentworth have both noted.⁵⁶ Although Misfeldt points to a disparity—the Buillon chapel only has two windows (the third niche is filled in on both sides), while the chapel in the painting has three—it is possible that Misfeldt misinterpreted this detail, since he had not seen the actual painting, which he categorises as unlocated, when his article was published.⁵⁷ Both *Saint Jacques-le-Majeur and Saint Bernard* and *Saint Marcel and Saint Olivier* are currently in a private collection, allowing for close inspection. It is now possible to discern that the three niches depicted by Tissot are of similar scale and unidentifiable as either windows or stone niches.⁵⁸ This detail strengthens the ties between Tissot's paintings and the chapel in Buillon, demonstrating that the estate had a longstanding influence on his work that intensified in his final years.

⁵⁶ Misfeldt, 'James Tissot's Abbaye de Buillon': 26; Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 18.

⁵⁷ Misfeldt, 'James Tissot's Abbaye de Buillon': 26.

⁵⁸ If the paintings were indeed studies for the stained-glass windows of the chapel, this idea was never realised in Tissot's lifetime, as period photographs held in the Buillon archives confirm.

Black-and-white photographs of the Buillon chapel's interior show an elaborately painted decorative scheme by an unknown artist covering the walls, some of which was painted over in the intervening years and is no longer visible today (Fig. 4.10). Several of the ornamental objects are still in situ, however, such as a sculpture of a Madonna and Child by the Belgian sculptor Jean-Baptiste-Joseph de Bay, which graces an elaborately decorated niche behind the altar. The altar itself was once adorned with six tall, tapered candles and flanked by two sculptures of kneeling angels, one of which remains to this day. Photographs reveal that there were once more extensive painted inscriptions on the chapel's walls, including 'Regina Apostolorum' (Queen of Apostles) as well as some existing lettering that reads 'Ave Maria.' These ornate features demonstrate the level of detail with which the chapel was decorated and the symbolic significance of the decorative scheme in reference to Tissot's mother's name (Marie), with its connection to the Virgin Mary. The decorations in the chapel—particularly the references to the Virgin Mary—reinforce the religious and specifically Catholic atmosphere of Buillon.

The most important part of the chapel in relation to Tissot's biblical watercolours is the inscription on his grave marker (Fig. 4.11), which reads:

Ici Repose
J. James Tissot
Auteur de la Vie de Jesus
Chevalier de la
Légion d'Honneur
Décédé le 8 Août MCMII
Dans sa 66e Année
Requiescat in Pace⁵⁹

Most significant is the mention of Tissot as the author of *The Life of Christ* (Auteur de la Vie de Jesus), which is followed by a reference to him having been made a Chevalier of the

⁵⁹ 'Here Rests / J. James Tissot / Author of the Life of Jesus / Knight of the / Legion of Honor / Deceased on the 8th of August, 1902 / In his 66th Year / Rest in Peace.' English translation mine.

Légion d'Honneur, France's highest civilian honour. The inscription recalls the aforementioned *Portrait of the Pilgrim*, which appears as the final illustration in the published version of *The Life of Christ* and is accompanied by a plea for the reader to pray for him:

Ye who have read these volumes written for your benefit and have perhaps been moved by what they contain, as ye close them, say this prayer for their author: Oh God, have mercy on the soul of him who wrote this book, cause Thy light to shine upon him and grant to him eternal rest. Amen.⁶⁰

In this watercolour, set in a dark, mysterious setting, the artist stands between a prominently displayed crucifix and a large wreath bearing his own monogram. He is surrounded by funereal religious articles, including two tall tapers, a draped coffin, and a silver aspersorium. His hand is lifted in a signal of blessing—a Christlike gesture typically used by religious officials. As discussed in Chapter 2, church interiors were a setting that Tissot used as a device to infuse his works with religious overtones (see Figs. 2.22–2.23), and this theme is reiterated in *Portrait of the Pilgrim*. It is possible that Tissot may have had the interior of his mother's chapel in mind when creating this painting, since it recalls the dark and intimate interior of the Buillon chapel, which further connects the Buillon estate as a source of inspiration for the *Life of Christ* watercolours.

The *abbatiale* that Tissot turned into a studio is the crown jewel of the buildings that still stand on the property today (Fig. 4.12). The experience of encountering this space for the first time is no less impressive in the twenty-first century than it must have been for those who encountered it in the late nineteenth century. The studio is accessed via a narrow spiral staircase in the attached tower that probably dates to the original medieval building. After

⁶⁰ James Tissot, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Three Hundred and Sixty-five Compositions from the Four Gospels with Notes and Explanatory Drawings*, vol. 3, notes trans. by Mrs. Arthur Bell (New York: The Werner Company, 1903), 516.

ascending to the landing, the studio is entered via an antechamber room, where the current owner displays an array of Tissot letters and ephemera in cases. The studio itself is a spectacular space, dominated by a nearly floor-to-ceiling window of stained glass that was completed in 1894.⁶¹ The most surprising decorations that still exists are the huge flag props that were probably studied for pictures from the London period, such as *The Ball on Shipboard* (ca. 1874, Tate, London). Like the gatehouse to the property, Tissot brought the two worlds of London and Buillon together through these decorative elements. A visually commanding green ceramic fireplace presides over both the studio and the entrance to the château, adding eccentric embellishments to both spaces and signifying Tissot's taste for elaborate decoration, a hallmark feature of his compositions. The fireplaces also connect the two separate areas for work and entertaining, signifying that Tissot considered both as extensions of his commercial success and showrooms for his wealth in addition to being places for solitary spiritual inspiration.

An amusing reminiscence by Stanton about Tissot's lack of concern for physical comfort at his studio in Paris contrasts with the existence of these practical but showy elements in Buillon:

Tissot could not or would not keep his house properly heated. So you would find him dressed in a heavy English tweed morning suit, with a big Scotch shawl, several times doubled, thrown around his shoulders, while he bent over his table engaged on one of those highly finished Biblical water-colours. His existence almost recalled that of the monks whom he so much admired and whose seclusion he more than once thought seriously of sharing.⁶²

⁶¹ The date of the stained glass is recorded on one of the panes, while the overall construction was finished by 1895. The similarity between one of the panes and a design from Tissot's painting *Young Women Looking at the Chinese Temple* (1869, private collection) suggests that he may have copied this design element from his Paris home.

⁶² Theodore Stanton, 'Literary Notes from Paris,' *The Critic: An Illustrated Monthly Review of Literature, Art & Life* 41 (July–December 1902): 367.

This anecdote suggests that Tissot's level of focus while working on his religious watercolours was so intense that he had a high threshold for physical discomfort. The quote moreover reveals that, despite his interviews insinuating otherwise, Tissot did not create these illustrations exclusively in Buillon, which is not surprising given that he worked on them for close to a decade. Having returned from the Holy Land via Paris, he probably wanted to commit as much of his research from memory to page without delay. With the environment at Buillon under renovation after 1888, and especially after 1894, it is also not surprising that Tissot would often find his way to supervise alterations at the impressive studio in Buillon, which was under construction while he worked in Paris. The fact that he was working out of more than one place also indicates that Tissot was most comfortable living between the two worlds of society and seclusion.

Another incongruity in this period is the fact that Tissot devoted both time and resources to showcasing the Château de Buillon as an opulent symbol of his commercial success as well as viewing it as an isolated site conducive to the creation of his religious illustrations. The former elegance of the château is evident in the building that remains, although it needs substantive architectural repair. The impressive central stone staircase still creates a dramatic entry into the château, but the dining room and library have suffered damage commensurate with the building's age. Photographs from the Buillon archives provide glimpses into the building's former state, including the book-laden library and a billiard room draped in exotic fabrics, some of which are still intact today. Hallways punctuated by sculptures and paintings rounded out the elegant spaces that Tissot cultivated. Photographs also establish that the main entrance prior to any alterations was a set of simple doors with shutters but that after Tissot's interventions, one entered through a colonnaded portico, making the entrance far more impressive. Additional transformations included a

semi-circular balcony above the portico with an intricate iron railing added to the upper floor, and more decorative elements positioned at the building's entryway, including urns and two sphynxes, which proved popular as posing companions for Tissot and his family and which augment the impressive sense of grandeur that Tissot wished to promote. Indeed, Tissot transformed the property that he inherited from his father and turned it into something entirely his own, much as he transformed the visual languages of Spiritualism and Catholicism into his own interpretation of the life of Christ. This private property was a showcase for his wealth, and, contrary to his claims of seeking out Buillon for solitude, photographs from the archives show that he invited close family and guests associated with his biblical illustration work to visit him there.

A separate location on the property was perhaps the artist's most personal space for reflection and entertaining guests: a mill that once featured three large wheels. About a ten-minute walk toward the Loue River from the *abbatiale* studio and adjacent château and just past the barn for the property's livestock, guests encounter this building, which still features a working example of the large mill wheels, along the banks of the river. Unpublished period photographs show the enormous restorations that Tissot undertook to transform this building (Figs. 4.13a–b). These before-and-after images illustrate the extent of the renovations, especially the manicured landscaping and elegant architectural updates. Photographs taken inside show that art from his Old Testament series hung above the piano and on the wall. Tissot's prominent display of these images suggests he wanted to reinforce the religious atmosphere of Buillon and its role as a primary site of creation for this personally significant body of work.

An additional personalised religious element that Tissot added to the property grounds was the Japanese *torii*. Several photographs in the Buillon archives show this gate in progressive stages of construction from a variety of angles, indicating the significance of its creation.⁶³ Although the photographer behind these images is unknown, it was probably Tissot himself who either directed the composition or captured the actual image, since he does not appear in this series of photographs. The finished *torii* is artfully framed between the tall trees on the property as if it, too, is an organic element of the estate (Fig. 4.14). A traditional symbol marking the entrance and transition to a sacred space, often the entrance of a Shintō shrine, this architectural element harkens back to Tissot's enduring fascination with Asian objects, which appear in many photographs of the Buillon property interiors. This interest manifested itself in his art beginning in the 1860s, when he was actively making compositions that belong to the style known as *Japonisme*. As part of this movement, Western artists experimented with elements clearly indebted to Japanese art, such as compositional asymmetry. In 1853, after more than two hundred years of trade isolation, Japan began to export goods such as prints and porcelain to the West. Some artists, including Tissot and his friends Edgar Degas and James McNeill Whistler, amassed significant personal collections of Asian objects, and artefacts possibly personally owned by Tissot appear in his paintings, such as *Young Women Looking at Japanese Objects* (1869, Cincinnati Art Museum), *Young Women Looking at the Chinese Temple* (1869, private collection), *The Fan* (ca. 1875, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut), and *The Japanese Scroll* (1872–1873, private collection). The shape of a *torii* also appears on a textile in the foreground of *Hide and Seek* (ca. 1877, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), which depicts Kathleen Newton in an armchair reading a newspaper,

⁶³ In a letter dated 5 August 1901, to his 'cher ami' Maurice de Brunhoff, Tissot dates the construction of the *torii* to 1901. Huntington Library, San Marino, HM 20593.

suggesting that Tissot was aware of the symbol many years before he had the structure erected in Buillon.⁶⁴ His interest in Asian art and curiosity about non-Christian spirituality represent another facet of Tissot's complexity and defiance of straightforward categorisation.

Further documenting the layered interests that inspired Tissot were the collections that he was surrounded by when staying at Buillon. Photographs reveal that *The Apparition* was displayed prominently in his studio—where he worked on paintings, including illustrations for *The Life of Christ*—on a tall easel. Rather than having been lost or destroyed, as once was thought, *The Apparition* commanded a prominent physical presence in Buillon. In one group of photographs, which presumably show Tissot's nieces and nephew in the studio, it almost appears as if Newton and William Eglinton's spirit guide 'Ernest' are a part of the family's pose (Fig. 4.15). In another (Fig. 4.16), *The Apparition* is positioned behind Tissot's nephew Henri as he nonchalantly reads a newspaper, which demonstrates the extended family's comfort level in living with this painting depicting conjured spirits at a séance. A later photograph taken at the time of the 1964 auction of the property's remaining contents shows a corner of the studio where *The Apparition* hangs on the wall to the left of a Japanese screen and between Japanese paper lanterns (Fig. 4.17). It is positioned directly under a large banner advertising the 1896–1898 exhibition of the *Life of Christ* illustrations at the Lemercier Gallery, London, tying Tissot's various interests together in this display. Photographs such as these attest to the painting's conspicuous display in Buillon, where it was apparently stored until the 1964 sale after the death of his niece Jeanne, his last surviving heir.

⁶⁴ This aesthetic may have also reminded Tissot of Newton and the prints of her by Tissot in the Japanese *Bijin-ga* style, which is a broad term for images of beautiful women, especially the woodblock prints of the *ukiyo-e* genre. See Wentworth, *James Tissot: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints*, 122–125.

Unlike many other photographs in the archives, Tissot does not appear in the group of pictures showing his family with *The Apparition*, which suggests that he might have been the photographer. In one particularly interesting image, a man who is presumably Henri is shown standing next to *The Apparition*, which is adjacent to him on an easel (Fig. 4.18). The photograph is taken from an angle such that both subjects appear in the reflection of a tall standing mirror. The rattan chair in the foreground is suggestive of both a presence and an absence. It is strikingly similar to the chair in which Newton was posed in several of Tissot's paintings that depict the signs of her illness as she succumbed to tuberculosis, such as *Summer Evening* (also known as *The Dreamer*, 1881–1882, see Fig. 1.20), and freely painted oil sketches such as *Mrs. Newton Asleep in a Conservatory Chair* (1881–1882, see Fig. 1.22) and *Mrs. Newton Resting on a Chaise-longue* (ca. 1881–1882, see Fig. 1.19).⁶⁵ The empty chair, flanked by two paintings that directly copy photographs depicting different views of the Buillon estate, emphasises the poignancy of Newton's manifestation in *The Apparition* and, consequently, her physical absence in Buillon. The way in which Tissot decorated and used his Buillon studio—a place where he claimed to do his best work on the *Life of Christ* illustrations—demonstrates his ability to simultaneously embrace Spiritualism and Catholicism. The dichotomy of Newton's presence and absence also recalls Tissot's attempts to conjure her spirit at séances, which he most probably continued to experiment with in Buillon.

Indeed, the ghost of Newton was fairly present in Buillon, manifested through her image in paintings as well as in the existence of objects that may have belonged to her. Although it is unclear exactly which painting he is referring to, Misfeldt claims that a

⁶⁵ This chair may have found its way from London to the Buillon studio, although it is difficult to determine from the photographs whether it is the exact same piece of furniture.

composition featuring Newton and her niece Lilian, titled *Le Conte*, was displayed prominently in the château for so long that it left a large 'ghost outline ... on the second floor in the stair hall that provided a mute testimony of the years that the picture ... had dominated the more private quarters of the château.'⁶⁶ A photograph from the 1964 auction (Fig. 4.19a) reveals a glimpse of Newton in a watercolour version of *At the Louvre* (ca. 1879–1880, Fig. 4.19b) on the wall to the left of the doorframe. Yet another photograph from the time of the auction (Fig. 4.20) shows a Japanese-style parasol that looks very similar to one that Newton holds in several paintings, such as *Mrs. Newton with a Parasol* (ca. 1878, Musée Baron Martin, Gray, France) and *The Hammock* (ca. 1878–1879, private collection).⁶⁷ These photographs provide tantalising clues that Newton's memory continued to live on throughout the estate in Buillon even after her death.

In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), published approximately a decade after Newton's death, the subject in the titular painting 'lives' on behalf of the subject it represents, becoming a substitute for the person it portrays. In this same way, paintings of Newton at Buillon may have acted as stand-ins for the woman herself, conjuring up the presence of the deceased like the medium Eglinton did at his Spiritualist séances. Eglinton's own description of *The Apparition* interprets this aspect of the work through a Spiritualist lens: 'As an artistic production, it is, perhaps, one of the finest mezzotints of modern times, and, as a prominent member of the Royal Academy said to me recently, "That picture will

⁶⁶ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 323. Misfeldt later stated that it was *The Garden Bench* (see Fig. 1.29) that hung in the central stair hall. Willard Misfeldt, *J. J. Tissot: Prints from the Gotlieb Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 1991), 154. Although he thought it must have been there since Tissot's time, it possibly only came to Buillon after the 1903 sale following the artist's death.

⁶⁷ It is impossible to know whether it was Newton's parasol that was still among the contents of the Buillon estate in 1964, but the resemblance is nonetheless striking. A similar observation is made by Misfeldt without identifying specific artworks by Tissot. Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 285.

live as an art production long after we are dead." In this I fully agree.⁶⁸ Although Eglinton is referring here to the print version of *The Apparition*, the concept of images 'living' after the death of their subjects seems appropriate for a work meant to prove the existence of life after death—a belief found in both Spiritualism and Christianity. Similarly, in Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Vivian Grey* (1826), which Wilde may have drawn inspiration from, there is a scene in which the eyes in the portrait of a beautiful subject move when its subject perishes. Both authors describe the works of art in their novels as living entities that have mysterious powers and operate under supernatural circumstances, recalling the paranormal events that inspired *The Apparition*. That Tissot lived with *The Apparition* in the location where he was also creating his biblical illustrations further demonstrates the artist's ability to accommodate the tenets of both Spiritualism and Catholicism. In fact, Tissot reinforced his blended spiritualities by emphasising the religious history of Buillon coupled with the mysticism that he enhanced there via Newton's presence in *The Apparition*.

The newspaper reports detailing the contents of the 1964 sale of Tissot's Buillon library further document the artist's interest in the occult and that he brought this curiosity with him to Buillon. Volumes of proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research found in the library confirm that Spiritualist publications enriched his knowledge of alternative spiritualities.⁶⁹ The pamphlets, signed with his name on the front page of each volume, date from October 1882 (the month before Newton died) to July 1884. A clipping covering the sale described the collection of five thousand books as including publications demonstrating that Tissot

had a weakness for ectoplasms, turntables, esotericism and spiritualism. Several hundreds of volumes are collected dealing with these subjects ... the Empire-style

⁶⁸ William Eglinton, "The "Apparition Mediunimique,"" *The Medium and Daybreak: A Weekly Journal Devoted to the History, Phenomena, Philosophy, and Teachings of Spiritualism* XVII, no. 831 (5 March 1886): 153.

⁶⁹ Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France.

tripod pedestal tables ... may have been used for the invocation of spirits. One feels that James Tissot had brought back from his long stay in England a taste ... for ... ghosts haunting the romantic castles.⁷⁰

With *The Apparition* so prominently displayed in the artist's collection among a variety of publications about occult subjects, it could be inferred that Tissot welcomed and perhaps even invited the haunting of his romantic castle in Buillon. He may have especially hoped that such a haunting might once again manifest Newton's spirit.

In addition to the possibility of attracting ghostly visitors to Buillon, Tissot also hosted living guests there. Although he was rumoured to be a religious recluse, in reality his absence from public life in Paris was intermittent. He continued to frequent select social gatherings, such as a party given by the Princess de Polignac, which was depicted in an etching by the artist Paul Helleu (ca. 1893). The composition shows Tissot surrounded by a coterie of attractive young women.⁷¹ Moreover, despite Tissot's reputation as a hermit and his professed attraction to the solitude in Buillon, newly discovered, previously unpublished photographs reveal that he entertained various friends and family members at the château.

Notwithstanding his claims of seeking isolation in Buillon, numerous photographs show Tissot entertaining guests in various locations across the property. Most of these visitors have connections to his career in London and Paris as well as to his work on *The Life*

⁷⁰ 'Il avait un faible pour les ectoplasmes, les tables tournantes, l'ésotérisme et le spiritisme. Plusieurs centaines de volumes sont rassemblés traitant de ces matières ainsi que de la sorcellerie et des artifices du démon. Certains d'entre eux remontent au XVII et au XVIII siècles, tels a L'histoire des imaginations extravagantes et le Traité de Jean Boduc de la démonomaine contre les sorciers. Parmi les guéridons tripodes de style Empire qui se vendirent si cher, certains ont sans doute servi à l'invocation des esprits. On sent que James Tissot avait ramené de son long séjour en Angleterre un goût marqué pour les phénomènes de l'au-de-là et les fantômes hantant les châteaux romantiques. J. Vartier, 'Derniers "meubles" a quitter le château de Buillon. Les 5,000 Volumes de la Bibliothèque de James Tissot.' Undated newspaper clipping, Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France. English translation mine.

⁷¹ Misfeldt suggests that Helleu may have depicted Tissot's three nieces, Marie, Louise, and Jeanne. Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 322, 431.

of Christ, reinforcing the impression that Tissot deftly navigated the two worlds of cosmopolitan society and remote seclusion during this period. In addition to enjoying an environment that stimulated his creative output, the other primary reason for Tissot's presence in Buillon would have been the supervision required by the property's architectural restorations. Integral to these projects was Tissot's friend from his London days, the Scottish architect John McKean Brydon, who is identifiable in several photographs (Fig. 4.21). Brydon had designed the interior of Tissot's home and studio at 17 Grove End Road in the London suburb of St. John's Wood, which received some notoriety when it was illustrated in 1874 in the journal *Building News*.⁷² Their creative collaboration extended across a decade; Brydon extensively repaired and enlarged the Château de Buillon starting around 1894 after Tissot inherited it in 1888. The playful nature of their poses in the photographs attests to their close relationship.⁷³

Another important visitor to Buillon was the publisher of Tissot's Old Testament illustrations, Maurice de Brunhoff, who, according to multiple photographs, made repeated visits to the property (Fig. 4.22).⁷⁴ Coming, as he did, from a theatrical and artistic family, de Brunhoff was a natural candidate to work with Tissot on the Old Testament publication.⁷⁵ De Brunhoff had worked for Lemercier & Cie, the specialist chromolithographic printers who had produced the *Life of Christ* illustrations for the book publishers Mame & fils. Tissot tried

⁷² James Akerman, 'Studio for James Tissot Esqre, Grove End Road: J. M. Brydon, Architect,' *Building News*, 15 May 1874, 526.

⁷³ Although the photographs are not dated, one depicts the same quartet of Tissot, Brydon and two unidentified women in a different pose with all four of the subjects standing. One of the women is holding a copy of the monthly British literary periodical *Pall Mall Magazine*, which began circulating in 1893, which dates the photograph to an eight-year window before the architect's death in 1901.

⁷⁴ While the photographs cannot be dated precisely, one of the photographs with de Brunhoff shows a bearded Tissot seated at the piano in the *moulin*. A pencil notation by an unknown hand dates the photo to 1901, which would match Tissot's aged appearance (he is sporting a long, white beard). The maturation of subjects across the photographs demonstrates that de Brunhoff visited over a number of years, rather than making an isolated trip, which contradicts Tissot's claims about seeking solitude in Buillon.

⁷⁵ Jean de Brunhoff, Maurice's fourth and youngest son, created the popular children's book character Babar, a fictional elephant.

to persuade Mame to publish his Old Testament illustrations, but *The Life of Christ* had been more expensive and complicated than they had anticipated. Accordingly, de Brunhoff fell out with Lemercier and left the company but continued his friendship with Tissot and later agreed to help Tissot publish the Old Testament illustrations, hence his appearance in a number of photographs at the estate. Several posed photographs show de Brunhoff and Tissot with other gentlemen who may be business associates or perhaps some of the artists that de Brunhoff contracted to finish the Old Testament watercolours after Tissot's death.⁷⁶ Tissot's elegant clothing and nonchalant poses show a man far removed from the religious recluse that rumours made him out to be. If anything, the social and professional connections represented by these images reveal Tissot's investment in sustaining his business contacts, such as de Brunhoff, even when he was at the remote location of the château.

Many photographs of Tissot's visitors include the children of his deceased brother Marcel, who died in 1877: his nephew Henri and his nieces Jeanne and Louise. Images taken along the banks of the Loue River show Jeanne and Louise with their uncle Father Georges Bichet, the brother of Tissot's sister-in-law, Claire (Fig. 4.23). Father Bichet is the subject of Tissot's *Portrait of Reverend Père B*** [Bichet], Missionary of Gabon*, (ca. 1884–1885, Musée d'Arts de Nantes), which Tissot gifted to the subject's sister. Claire was the widow of Tissot's older brother, Marcel, with whom he had been close. Bichet's wide-brimmed hat and dark robes in Tissot's portrait identify him as the bearded priest in several photographs in the Buillon archives. In the painted likeness, the extent of Bichet's missionary travels across central Africa are conveyed through spread-out maps, while a crucifix signifies his Christian faith. Wentworth suggests that Father Bichet could have been instrumental in Tissot's

⁷⁶ Some of these names included Henri Bellery-Desfontaines, Auguste François Gorguet, Charles Hoffbauer, Alphonse de Parys, Michel Simonidy, and Georges Bertin Scott.

connection to the Catholic church.⁷⁷ A mutual interest in spirituality and their experiences with long-distance travel in pursuit of religious pilgrimage may have fostered a relationship between the two men that resulted in Tissot's portrait. These photographs shed new light on Bichet's familiarity with Tissot, since they show that he was one of a select group of guests to the remote château during the period when Tissot was creating his biblical illustrations. The estate thus became a home for the synthesis of Tissot's religious ideas, which was part of the whole project he was engaged in, demonstrating that his life and art were colliding. Père Bichet's presence at the Château de Buillon also stands as proof that Tissot kept religion as a part of his life; he retained his connection to Catholicism and used the estate as one way to nurture this relationship while he was simultaneously experimenting with Spiritualism.

A similarly important religious visitor to Buillon who is pictured in several photographs is the Dominican priest Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, O.P., whose associations with Tissot must have been closer than previously thought if the priest made the long journey from Paris. The religious history and significance of Buillon may have attracted Sertillanges, who appears in a series of photographs probably taken near a natural spring on the property, which was thought to have been blessed by Saint Bernard.⁷⁸ In two of the photographs, Sertillanges raises a glass that appears to contain water from the spring. Other photographs show the Catholic philosopher reclining in the grass next to Tissot and engaging in a conversation with the artist, who is gesticulating toward Sertillanges with his walking stick in mid-air to emphasise his point (Fig. 4.24). It is possible that this visit included planning for and discussion about the ambitious scheme for a monumental painting of the aforementioned *Christ Pantocrator* that Tissot created for the Dominican Church of the Annunciation

⁷⁷ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 172n48.

⁷⁸ Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 283.

(Chapelle du couvent des Dominicains) in Paris, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Among the archive's photographs are approximately thirty-four that depict landscapes, which appear to be taken in the Holy Land. As previously discussed, Tissot often used photography while he was travelling. In his *McClure's* interview with Moffett, Tissot mentioned that he 'made many sketches in the villages, and took photographs which were useful as documents.'⁷⁹ Misfeldt surmised that 'it is also probable that Tissot made liberal use of the camera during his trips to the Holy Land ... although seemingly no such photographs have survived.'⁸⁰ Despite this claim, the thirty-four Holy Land photographs currently in the Buillon archives are probably a fraction of the full range of images that Tissot originally had at his disposal. Indeed, in Tissot's interview with Theodore Stanton, the author indicates that during the artist's second trip to the Holy Land, he 'utilised instantaneous photography, which was then first becoming known in France, and was thus able to bring back with him quantities of characteristic types, scenes, and landscapes.'⁸¹ It is perhaps this type of 'instantaneous photography' that Tissot utilised in Buillon, in addition to a method of photographic development using glass plate negatives, of which there are many extant examples in the archives. Given Tissot's attention to costume and physiognomy in the final watercolours, it is a curious lacuna that no figure studies for *The Life of Christ* are among the photographs in the collection today. The only photographs depicting people in the Holy Land are of Tissot himself, with attendants who may have been his guides. This does not prove that Tissot did not use photography for these images. If the photographs existed, however, they have yet to be discovered.

⁷⁹ Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ': 396.

⁸⁰ Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot*, 9.

⁸¹ Stanton, 'Tissot's Illustrations of the Gospels': 244.

Christ Pantocrator

One of the many paradoxes that James Tissot embodied is the tension between his private life and public persona. For example, he professed that a religious vision sent him far afield, on a solo mission to the Holy Land and to the remote setting of Buillon, where he needed solitude to create hundreds of biblical illustrations. Yet he also celebrated his religious watercolours in public presentations and through an international exhibition tour, for which he participated in generating widespread press coverage. The *Life of Christ* exhibition tour, which will be discussed further in the Conclusion to this thesis, consisted of a spectacular display of hundreds of images. Drove of visitors flocked to experience the illustrations first-hand. Although he spent a great deal of time relatively secluded in Buillon, according to an early biographer, Georges Bastard, Tissot also planned to make a large panorama for the Exposition Universelle of 1900 in Paris.⁸² Given that the subject matter of his work at this time was almost exclusively religious, it is possible that the panorama might have depicted a sacred theme—perhaps similar to *The Life of Christ*. The contemporary public enthusiasm for immersive visual experiences, such as panoramas,⁸³ made the display of hundreds of biblical watercolours and enormous religious subjects, such as Tissot's *Christ Pantocrator*, yet another example of the artist's understanding of the public's aesthetic tastes and his ability to cater to them.

In addition to the panorama mentioned by Bastard, Tissot had also apparently planned to exhibit his Bible illustrations in their own pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, demonstrating the duality between his private religious interests and a desire to publicly

⁸² George Bastard, 'James Tissot: Notes Intimes,' *Revue de Bretagne et de Vendée*, 2nd ser. 36 (November 1906): 277.

⁸³ For more on this subject, see Bernard Comment, *The Painted Panorama* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999).

exhibit the works of art that this conviction inspired. Two architectural designs, by noted French architect Henri Paul Nénot, were presumably rejected, as Tissot's pavilion was never built.⁸⁴ The tented design may have been intended for the display of Tissot's *Life of Christ* and Old Testament illustrations combined—some four hundred images with additional pen-and-ink drawings—although this pavilion may have also displayed other examples of his work, since the design's title, 'Musée des oeuvres de James Tissot,' does not refer to a specific subset of his career. The lower level has what looks like auditorium seating and a stage, which may have been for dioramas or lantern-slide presentations. It is possible that plans for the pavilion were cancelled when the *Life of Christ* watercolours were acquired by public subscription at a cost of \$60,000 for the Brooklyn Museum in 1900.

A further public display of Tissot's religious art commenced around 1895, when Tissot began an enormous painted *Christ Pantocrator* for the hemicycle in the apse above the high altar of the Dominican Church of the Annunciation (Chapelle du couvent des Dominicains) on the rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris. Built between 1877 and 1897, the neo-Romanesque church was part of a flourishing and fashionable neighbourhood. The church is approximately a thirty-minute walk from the location of Tissot's Paris home at 64, avenue du Bois de Boulogne (formerly de l'Impératrice, now avenue Foch), and about ten minutes from the Parc Monceau, home to the famous colonnade that the artist re-created in his London gardens.⁸⁵ Tissot's *Christ Pantocrator*, with its related decorative scheme of symbolic flowers in urns separated by a band with grapes on a vine—a motif that also appears inside and on the binding of some versions of Tissot's *The Life of Christ* and his Old Testament illustrations—was dedicated on 3 December 1897. This was the same year in

⁸⁴ See Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, 70, figs. 62–63.

⁸⁵ See Charlotte Gere, 'Tissot's Houses in Saint John's Wood, London,' in Buron, *James Tissot*, 52–53.

which Tissot exhibited his *Life of Christ* illustrations at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and when *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* was first published in London. The dedication ceremony for the *Christ Pantocrator* featured organ music played by the eminent composer Charles-Marie Jean Albert Widor, the organist for Saint-Sulpice, where Tissot's religious vision of Christ consoling two peasants occurred (see Chapter 2).

According to Wentworth, the German-born French history painter Henri Lehmann was originally commissioned for the *Christ Pantocrator* project, but he died before the work began.⁸⁶ A pupil of the acclaimed Neoclassical painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and a professor at the École des Beaux-Arts, Lehmann was an obvious choice, having been awarded commissions for other large-scale and prominent murals, such as at the Hôtel de Ville and the Palais du Luxembourg. Due to the fame that Tissot earned as a religious artist after debuting the *Life of Christ* watercolours, he probably emerged as an attractive replacement after Lehmann's death in 1882. Having been trained in his early career as a student in the tradition of Ingres by Jean-Hippolyte Flandrin and Louis Lamothe, Tissot was a descendant in the same aesthetic vein as Lehmann and would have been a logical substitute for him.

Tissot may have met Père Sertillanges through the *Christ Pantocrator* commission or perhaps when the latter published articles about Tissot's biblical illustrations for *Le Correspondant* in 1896.⁸⁷ The photos of Sertillanges and Tissot in Buillon signal a deeper level of connection, however, suggesting that the two men had an intellectual relationship through their respective biblical scholarship. As evidence of this connection, Sertillanges

⁸⁶ Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 193n50.

⁸⁷ Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, O.P., 'L'Œuvre de J.-J. Tissot et "l'édition Mame,"' *Le Correspondant*, 25 February 1896, 789–806.

mentions Tissot in his book, originally published in French in 1930 as *Ce que Jésus voyait du haut de la croix* (*What Jesus Saw from the Cross*), which recalls the similar title of Tissot's most striking watercolour from the *Life of Christ* series (see Fig. 3.2). There is a compelling resonance in the analogous approaches taken by Sertillanges and Tissot in their interpretations of Christ's Passion. Both men used precise attention to detail—both written and visual—to re-create the events from a first-person documentary point of view. In his aforementioned book, Sertillanges specifically references one of Tissot's most mystical illustrations, *Consummatum Est (It Is Finished)* (ca. 1886–1894, see Fig. 3.6), in which Tissot 'depicts Christ on the Cross as raised in a sort of ecstasy. Around Him in a circle are the ancient prophets, scrolls in hand, and among them those two [the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah] who appeared in the cloud of Mount Tabor, discussing with Him the event that was shortly to be accomplished.'⁸⁸ It is intriguing that the Dominican priest singles out one of Tissot's most overtly supernatural images from *The Life of Christ*, which suggests that their rapport most probably included a shared interest in religious mysticism. His account continues with a description of Jesus looking 'with tenderness upon Zion, that mysterious link between two worlds,' which recalls the title of John Stephen Farmer's 1886 biography of Eglinton, *'Twixt Two Worlds*.⁸⁹ It is possible that Tissot and Sertillanges conversed about the aspects of spiritual mysticism that so appealed to the artist. Contemporaries noted that the Dominican priest's comments were very sensitive toward Tissot's work, further indicating a sincere intellectual respect and shared interest in Catholic mysticism.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, O.P., *Ce que Jésus voyait du haut de la croix (What Jesus Saw from the Cross)*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1996), 29.

⁸⁹ Sertillanges, O.P., *Ce que Jésus voyait du haut de la croix*, 29.

⁹⁰ Public presentations by Sertillanges about Tissot's art were 'très délicat de l'oeuvre de M. Tissot.' Père Jacques le Tilly, *Evocations de cent ans: centenaire 1874–1974 du Convent des Dominicaines. Deux causeries, les 12 & 19 Novembre 1974*, 7.

Tissot and Sertillanges also shared a mutual interest in research and travel to the Holy Land. In 1892, Sertillanges visited the École Pratique d'études Biblique, a school for biblical studies, founded in 1890 by his fellow Dominican priest Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange, which aimed to foster study of the Bible in Jerusalem.⁹¹ Sertillanges also lived in Jerusalem in 1923. In his preface to the publication of Tissot's Old Testament illustrations, *La Sainte Bible: Ancien Testament* (1904), Sertillanges comments on Buillon's importance as the place where Tissot drew strength and inspiration:

We had seen Tissot in good health a few months before, when he left his beautiful workshop in the Avenue du Bois to go and breathe the pine air in his charming Byzantine valley. Furnished with so much love, neat like a painting to which he added without ceasing a touch, his 'abbey,' as he called it, annually renewed his strength.⁹²

In contrast to this bucolic memory, the preface begins with a more sombre declaration:

'Tissot is dead. When this news broke, a big question arose for all of us, his friends, and it did not stop being distressing. Would the work appear?'⁹³ By 'the work,' Sertillanges means the Old Testament illustrations, which did indeed appear, although Tissot was not even associated with some of them.⁹⁴ It is impossible to know how this second ambitious illustration project would have materialised if Tissot had lived to see it come to fruition.

⁹¹ Richard Thomson, *The Troubled Republic: Visual Culture and Social Debate in France 1889–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 144.

⁹² 'Nous avons vu Tissot en pleine santé, peu de mois auparavant, lorsqu'il quittait son bel atelier de l'Avenue du Bois pour aller respirer l'air des pins dans sa charmante vallée bizantine. Aménagée avec tant d'amour, soignée comme un tableau auquel il ajoutait sans cesse une touche, son "abbaye", ainsi qu'il l'appelait, lui refaisait annuellement ses forces, épuisées par un long labeur.' Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, 'Preface,' in *La Sainte Bible (Ancien Testament): Quatre-Cents Compositions par J. James Tissot* (Paris: M. de Brunoff & Cie., 1904), no page number. English translation mine.

⁹³ 'Tissot est mort. Quand eclata cette nouvelle, une grande question se posait pour nous tous, ses amis, et elle ne laissait pas de se faire angoissante. L'oeuvre paraissait-elle?' Sertillanges, 'Preface,' in *La Sainte Bible*, no page number. English translation mine.

⁹⁴ A forthcoming exhibition titled *Prophets, Priests, and Kings: James Tissot's Illustrations of the Old Testament*, slated to open at the BYU Museum of Art in Provo, Utah, in spring 2022 (6 May–31 December 2022), may resolve some of the lingering questions of authorship of these Old Testament illustrations.

La Sainte Bible: Ancien Testament (The Old Testament)

The success of *The Life of Christ* encouraged Tissot to commence an illustration series for the Old Testament, which he began around 1896, with a third and final trip to the Holy Land (February/March–November 1896). Tissot used these pilgrimages for the direct observation of people and places, which he construed as a way to lend historical accuracy to his images. He also conducted extensive research for his biblical illustrations when he returned to Paris. His efforts included writing to the director of the Louvre on 28 March 1899, introducing himself as the author of 'la Vie de N.S. Jesus Christ.'⁹⁵ He suggested that the director knew the *Life of Christ* illustrations from their exhibition at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars, and asked for permission to obtain photographs of Egyptian and Assyrian objects from the Louvre's collection for his studies. Ninety-five of Tissot's illustrations for the Old Testament were exhibited in Paris in 1901 at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, one year before he died. According to Sertillanges, Tissot's Old Testament work was as impactful as *The Life of Christ*, since, in his estimation: 'With patience, with love, with passion, with, also, a sense of nature ... and the colour of centuries that was never exceeded, Tissot brings the biblical times back to life.'⁹⁶ This idea that Tissot was bringing past history 'back to life' conjures associations with the artist's attempts to bring Kathleen Newton back to life via Spiritualist séances. Here again, as discussed in the previous chapters, Tissot could be characterised as being in the role of a medium, summoning his visions into life.

⁹⁵ Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris, 1972-A.325.

⁹⁶ 'Avec patience, avec amour, avec passion, avec, aussi, un sens de la nature, de la vie haute d'autrefois et de la couleur des siècles qui ne fut jamais dépassé, Tissot fait revivre les temps bibliques.' Sertillanges, 'Preface,' in *La Sainte Bible*, no page number. English translation mine.

There are numerous photographs in the Buillon archives that document the figure studies Tissot used in his planning for the Old Testament illustrations (Fig. 4.25a).⁹⁷ In these images, models dressed in loosely historical costumes appear in a repetition of poses. The three models who appear most frequently are an elderly man, a younger man, and a child. These photographs appear to have been taken in the conservatory of Tissot's Paris home, given the similarity to the brick wall that appears behind the figure in *The Convalescent* (1872, Fig. 4.25b), a painting from his first Paris period (1855–1871). Tissot may have relocated from Buillon to Paris when he needed access to live models. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he also continued to accept portrait commissions from fashionable members of society, including many made in pastel, such as the portrait *Clotilde Briatte, Comtesse Pillet-Will* (ca. 1882–1902, private collection).⁹⁸ The duality of Tissot's interests—in this case between fashionable portraits and religious illustrations—is a recurrent theme that distinguishes Tissot from many of his peers who strongly identified with particular artistic trends or movements. Although he is often categorised as a one-dimensional artist whose elegant subjects represent his superficial aesthetic tastes, in reality Tissot was an artist whose oeuvre is characterised by many contradictions, rendering his career more complex than has previously been considered.

A preface to Tissot's *The Old Testament* (1904), authored by 'The Publishers,' which included Maurice de Brunhoff, comments that 'the heliograph and chromolithograph processes ... have developed enormously since the publication of "The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ" [and] enable us to reproduce M. Tissot's originals with faithful exactness; thus giving

⁹⁷ See also Geneviève Aitken, et. al., *James Tissot (1836–1902), l'ambigu moderne*, exh. cat. (Paris: Établissement public des musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie, 2020), 226–227.

⁹⁸ For more, see Misfeldt, *The Albums of James Tissot*, 71–78, 103–112.

to the two volumes ... an altogether exceptional artistic character.⁹⁹ This emphasis on the faithfulness to the colouring of the original artworks is written much like a marketing promotion. Tissot himself might have approached the campaign to publicise these illustrations with enthusiasm. According to de Brunhoff, Tissot announced his second religious watercolour illustration campaign with the zeal of a confident spokesperson:

It is settled, dear friend! I have decided and resolved to undertake the enormous work of which I have spoken to you, it will be hard ... but with God's aid I shall succeed. Anyhow, you know that for me to work is to live, and I am never so happy as when I have mountains or years of labour before me. I have abandoned the idea of illustration. The 'Life of Joan of Arc,' also renounced the 'Bonaparte Intime,' this would have been very interesting to reconstruct, but when one has passed ten years of his life on the most sacred subject that exists all else appears puerile and commonplace. Even the most extraordinary adventures of mere human beings then leave you cold and indifferent, and further I believe in 'Inner Voices.' Do not smile, I pray you, I believe in the irresistible destiny which urges one to act in one way or another, and at the time that I am now speaking to you, I am under the influence of this obsession of thought which I know will not abandon me. It is necessary for me to advance, and go forward, and I will!¹⁰⁰

It is impossible to know whether this was a direct quote from Tissot or de Brunhoff's imaginative reconstruction. It is nonetheless quite probable that Tissot would have kept going with this pursuit had he not taken ill and died suddenly at age sixty-six, while in the midst of working on the Old Testament illustrations.

The misfortune of Tissot's untimely death before he completed this opus is highlighted in the publishers' preface: 'During eight years of constant labour, M. Tissot devoted every available moment to this task, and though he did not have the satisfaction of seeing his last work engraved and published, he passed away with the conviction that his last

⁹⁹ Preface, James Tissot, *The Old Testament: Three Hundred and Ninety-Six Compositions Illustrating the Old Testament* (Paris: M. De Brunhoff & Co., Art Publishers, 1904), no page number. Chromolithography is a chemical process method for making multicolour prints, which became the most successful method of nineteenth-century colour printing.

¹⁰⁰ Introduction, Tissot, *The Old Testament*, no page number.

and favourite work would see the light.¹⁰¹ Had Tissot lived to complete the entire series, perhaps it would have been as great a triumph as *The Life of Christ*. The Old Testament illustrations were exhibited in America and subsequently acquired by the banker, collector, and philanthropist Jacob H. Schiff, who donated them to the New York Public Library in 1909. They were later transferred to New York's Jewish Museum in 1952. They were exhibited once, in 1982, when it was rumoured that filmmakers associated with the 1981 movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* saw the illustrations for Tissot's Ark of the Covenant, which inspired the design of the film's ark prop—just one example of Tissot's lasting impact on visual culture.

Conclusion

As a final testament to the connection between the Château de Buillon and Tissot's biblical illustrations, according to his will, drawn up in January 1898, the proceeds and continued revenue from sales of *The Life of Christ* were to be used for improvements to the château and its grounds.¹⁰² At that time, he had not yet finished the Old Testament illustrations, and he had no reason to believe that he would not complete them. His sudden death four years later, on 8 August 1902, left this project unfinished. The property in Buillon, however, would be cared for as a direct beneficiary of the successful *Life of Christ* project, which fused Tissot's religious and Spiritualist visions much like the estate did.

In November 1964, after the death of Tissot's niece Jeanne, the Château de Buillon and all of its contents were inherited by a local couple, who engaged the Besançon-based dealer Renoud-Grappin to sell the bulk of the estate. Through a massive public auction,

¹⁰¹ Introduction, Tissot, *The Old Testament*, no page number.

¹⁰² Misfeldt, *James Jacques Joseph Tissot*, 326.

which occurred over a period of several weeks, the majority of James Tissot's remaining personal effects, including art and furniture, were sold.¹⁰³ The first two days of the sale (8–9 November) focused on the château's furniture, while the third sale, which took place on 14–15 November, dealt with the contents of the property's *moulin* and *abbatiale*. A flyer for the sale advertised that even works by Tissot himself—oil paintings, watercolours, and prints—would be available.¹⁰⁴ It took an entire weekend to auction the contents of the library, which was promoted as containing approximately five thousand books. The flyer called special attention to 'James Tissot's Bible, the original watercolours of which were sold to the publisher for one million francs in 1896.'¹⁰⁵ Although the Renoud-Grappin auction house is still in business, there is no complete record of the auction's sales accessible today.

Photographs documenting the sale (see Figs. 4.17 and 4.19a) show curious observers eyeing the contents of the rooms that were once a magnificent testament to the elegant artist who had inherited the estate, personalised it, and made it his own. Despite the reduction of the property's contents as a result of the 1964 sale, many items remained on the property or ended up in local collections. Like Tissot, the property's current owner inherited the estate from his father, and today he works tirelessly and with passionate determination to acquire documents and ephemera that might return a glimmer of the atmosphere that was so carefully cultivated by Tissot. With the artist's London home having been altered by its subsequent owner, Alma-Tadema, and then later divided into flats during the twentieth century, and with Tissot's Paris villa having been since torn down, the impressive Château de Buillon is all that

¹⁰³ Tissot's eighty-eight-year-old niece Jeanne died unmarried and without any heirs on 10 July 1964. The auctions started almost exactly four months after her death, on 8 November, and continued over two subsequent weekends.

¹⁰⁴ Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France.

¹⁰⁵ 'Bible de James Tissot dont les aquarelles originales furent vendues un million de francs a l'editeur en 1896.' Auction flyer, Frédéric Manton Archives, Buillon, France. English translation mine

remains as proof of how Tissot created working environments that supported and embodied his creative practice and varied interests.

Although the property's spectacular grandeur has eroded somewhat since the period when Tissot inhabited the premises, the extent to which his commercial success enabled him to renovate the estate is apparent through many features that still exist today. Beyond its physical splendour, the religious history and sublime natural environment of Buillon rendered it a uniquely meaningful place for Tissot to complete his biblical illustrations. He found a source of inspiration in his family's estate, which was compulsively captured in thousands of previously undocumented photographs. This chapter employs these primary documents as a lens through which Tissot's final decades come into greater focus. To an artist for whom success and spectacle were closely intertwined, the Château de Buillon represented a particularly personal manifestation of his affinity for an elegant lifestyle combined with religious and Spiritualist pursuits. In effect, as the property's current owner so evocatively states, 'So profound was the mark that Tissot made on the estate, fashioning it with as much care and style as he did his beautiful paintings, that he still seems present there—so much so that one might expect to pass him, quite naturally, at the bend of a path.'¹⁰⁶ It is fitting that Tissot's final legacy—his renovation and restoration of the estate in Buillon, which was nearly forgotten after his death—allows for new interpretations about the artist and his interests at the end of his life.

¹⁰⁶ Manton, 'Final Years at the Buillon Estate,' 77.

Conclusion

The Afterlife of Tissot's Biblical Images in Film

Let me not give the idea that there is anything abnormal about M. Tissot. He simply possesses in a high degree the sensitiveness to colour impulses of the brain that is enjoyed by many artists and gives them, literally, the power of beholding visions.⁵³⁴

—Cleveland Moffett (1899)

In his lifetime, James Tissot was an international celebrity who garnered commercial and critical success on both sides of the English Channel. Today, Tissot's work is represented in major collections worldwide. He was an artist both firmly of as well as ahead of his time. His fascinating life could be material for a period film, while his astute painted observations on the social complexities of modern life could illustrate the pages of a Victorian novel. As this thesis discusses, Tissot's late-in-life enthusiasm for Catholicism and Spiritualism consumed the final two decades of his career. During this period, he produced approximately five hundred watercolour interpretations of scenes from the Old Testament and the New Testament, which are often collectively referred to as the 'Tissot Bible.' Although these illustrations are among the artist's least-known works today, they made him more famous and commercially successful than any other period in his prosperous career. New scholarship presented in this thesis demonstrates that Tissot's narrative biblical compositions reveal rich and complex commentary on nineteenth-century religious and occult themes. Furthermore, these watercolours anticipated the visual power of moving pictures and, consequently, would have a lasting impact on film that extends into the twenty-first century.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Cleveland Moffett, 'J. J. Tissot and His Paintings of the Life of Christ,' *McClure's* 12, no. 5 (March 1899): 394.

⁵³⁵ For a further consideration of the connection between Tissot and religious cinema, see Valentine Robert, 'The Resurrection of Painting: Tissot and Cinema,' in Melissa E. Buron, ed., *James Tissot*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2019), 72–75. Robert's essay weaves compelling threads between Tissot's compositions and multiple films, from the work of the pioneering female director Alice Guy-Blaché to modern works by Franco Zeffirelli.

Between 1885 and 1902, the year of his death, Tissot expressed a renewed fervour for orthodox religion while also exhibiting a deep attraction to the occult philosophies of Spiritualism and attending séances. As this thesis demonstrates, the artist's works *The Apparition* (also known as *The Mediumistic Apparition*, 1885, see Fig. 1.1) and *Inner Voices* (also known as *Christ the Comforter* or *The Ruins*, 1885, Fig. 2.1) as well as his biblical illustrations are best considered as part of a greater trend in nineteenth-century culture in which otherworldly visions were often reported and widely accepted. Tissot himself claimed to have witnessed a materialisation of his deceased companion, Kathleen Newton, at a séance in 1885. That same year, he described seeing a vision of Christ in the Church of Saint-Sulpice. He also professed that his later religious watercolours were products of otherworldly visions.

Rather than functioning as objects of private and personal devotion, Tissot's biblical watercolours were extensively exhibited and toured. The considerable public response to them is reflective of the period; projects that spectacularised the Bible were in vogue. Attuned to this trend, Tissot worked to promote his religious images, characterising trips he took to the Holy Land as pilgrimages made on behalf of research and in pursuit of authenticity. In 1894 he exhibited 270 New Testament watercolours from *The Life of Christ* in Paris at the Salon du Champ-de-Mars, where they were met with astonishment and positive critical assessments. Also extremely popular was a display of 350 watercolours in London from 1896–1897, at the newly renovated and renamed Lemercier Gallery. The tremendous success of these New Testament works encouraged Tissot to return to the Holy

Land for a third time in 1896 to prepare illustrations for the Old Testament, a series left incomplete when he died.⁵³⁶

Despite his claims of seeking solitude at his family estate, the Château de Buillon, in his final years, Tissot continued to advertise his biblical illustrations on an international exhibition tour, which involved a conspicuous press circuit and numerous interviews. There is no doubt that these efforts contributed to the incredible popularity of the *Life of Christ* watercolours as they toured from city to city. The works were received with great reverence by those who were attracted to both orthodox and occult religions. Some accounts described viewers dropping to their knees in prayer in front of Tissot's illustrations. An 1897 article in the Spiritualist periodical *Borderland* titled 'The Gospel in Pictures by a Spiritualist' recounts their extraordinary reception:

When the Whole of these pictures were exhibited in Paris, they created an unprecedented sensation of a religious character. People were seen to go away weeping; women made the tour of the rooms on their knees. ... It partook, indeed, towards the end ... the character of a pilgrimage.⁵³⁷

Similarly, according to the journalist Robert H. Sherard:

It may be said without exaggeration that rarely has any artistic exhibit created so profound an impression on the public at large as this series of illustrations. ... Some extraordinary scenes revealing the deep impression produced were frequently to be seen. Even the callous and the sceptical were observed to remove their hats as, slowly and with marked attention, they passed from one picture to the other. ... Women were seen to sink down on their knees as though impelled by a superior force, and literally crawl round the rooms in this position, as though in adoration.⁵³⁸

The popular reception of *The Life of Christ* highlights the tension between public and private that Tissot capitalised on throughout his career. On the one hand, he discussed the

⁵³⁶ Yochanan Muffs and Gert Schiff, eds., *J. James Tissot: Biblical Paintings*, exh. cat. (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1982).

⁵³⁷ William Thomas Stead, ed., 'The Gospel in Pictures by a Spiritualist,' *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index* (London: Mowbray House, 1897): 178.

⁵³⁸ Robert H. Sherard, 'James Tissot and His "Life of Christ,"' *Magazine of Art* 18 (January 1895), 1–2.

project as an expression of personal devotion and a manifestation of his devout faith and contemplation. On the other, he aggressively promoted the works via an international tour, bringing him enormous fame and wealth. He also knew how to align his art with prevailing cultural trends. It was surely no accident that the triumph of Tissot's biblical watercolour exhibitions coincided with the growing enthusiasm for events such as the Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria, Germany. These performances were initiated in 1634 and presented spoken text, music, and *tableaux vivants* recreating the Passion of Jesus—the period from his entry into Jerusalem up to his crucifixion—which Tissot similarly featured in *The Life of Christ*. They were so popular by the end of the nineteenth century that they had begun to attract pilgrims from other European countries as well as the United States. Tissot's illustrations were even mimicked by Passion Play posters, linking the two forms of religious spectacle.⁵³⁹

The Life of Christ garnered even greater fame after arriving in the United States in 1898. The series toured various American cities, including New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and St. Louis.⁵⁴⁰ The remarkable displays often included lectures, light projections, music and dialogue about the works. Again, reports described great crowds moved to their knees in reverent veneration. Tissot earned \$100,000 from the tour admission fees alone. In 1900 the Brooklyn Museum acquired *The Life of Christ* by public subscription at a cost of \$60,000, and the watercolours were displayed there in purpose-built galleries until the 1930s. This fundraising, which had never been attempted at this level by any other American municipality, was heralded by the president of the Brooklyn

⁵³⁹ See Fig. 61 in Buron, *James Tissot*, 68.

⁵⁴⁰ Judith F. Dolkart, ed., *James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ,'* exh. cat. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2009), 39.

Museum's board of trustees, A. Augustus Healy, as such an important acquisition that 'the popular interest in them will be permanent and [the] galleries ... which will contain them, will be the most crowded of the building.'⁵⁴¹ Their value to the museum as a popular attraction was expressed in a contemporary newspaper report: '[I]t is well ... to acquire works of this kind, if only to maintain [the museum's] popularity just as it is desirable that while it gives orchestral concerts it should also capture audiences by recitals, songs, magic lantern exhibitions and elocutionary entertainments.'⁵⁴² Accordingly, when the works were ultimately displayed in their dedicated galleries at the museum, celebratory announcements advertised that flowers and palms would embellish the galleries and that a boy soprano named Earl Gulick would sing hymns and selections from oratorios relating to the life of Christ.⁵⁴³ The images were a signature offering of the Brooklyn Museum's collection in the decades when they were on public view.

The public reception of Tissot's watercolours is reflective of a period when spectacular biblical projects were quite popular, and helps explain the works' subsequent impact on early cinema, especially on films that treated biblical themes. When re-exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 2009, one *New York Times* journalist commented, 'The paintings are like stills from a Hollywood movie spectacular.'⁵⁴⁴ Michael Wentworth, one of the twentieth century's preeminent Tissot scholars, even compared Tissot to a casting director.⁵⁴⁵ Indeed, the pre-cinematic qualities of Tissot's images—especially the manner in which they alternate from bird's-eye views to zoomed-in close-ups—made the works well-suited for

⁵⁴¹ Dolkart, *James Tissot*, 37, 39.

⁵⁴² Dolkart, *James Tissot*, 38.

⁵⁴³ Dolkart, *James Tissot*, 43.

⁵⁴⁴ Ken Johnson, 'Jesus, Illustrated: Tissot's New Testament,' *New York Times*, 17 December 2009.

⁵⁴⁵ Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 182.

modern quotation in twentieth- and twenty-first-century films. The illustrations can be credited with inspiring biblical epics directed by Hollywood icons such as Cecil B. DeMille and D. W. Griffith, including Griffith's *Intolerance* (USA, 1916), as well as visual passages in Sidney Olcott's silent film *From the Manger to the Cross* (USA, 1912), the Crucifixion scene in William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (USA, 1959), the appearance of the gilded iconic prop for the Ark of the Covenant in Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (USA, 1981), and the graphic details of Jesus's suffering from Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (USA, 2004). It is not just the subject matter of Tissot's biblical images that is echoed in these films; the artist's unique perspectives, detailed costumes, as well as the sequential nature of the format in which the images unfold made his works specifically attractive to filmmakers. Due to these innovative features, Tissot's two-dimensional images were able to bridge the two worlds of static museum display and motion pictures.

One of the most evident examples of Tissot's legacy in film is *From the Manger to the Cross*, which the National Film Preservation Foundation considers the most important silent film to portray the life of Christ, and which is listed in the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress, attesting to its significance in the history of early cinema.⁵⁴⁶ Olcott used Tissot's watercolours as a sourcebook, and many of his shots were directly based on the artist's illustrations.⁵⁴⁷ The film's five reels are also structured in the same sequential sectioning as Tissot's Bible: Holy Childhood, The Ministry, Holy Week, the Passion, and the Resurrection. It has been suggested that 'biblical films made a bid for legitimacy at a time when the new film medium was not yet fully accepted by social and educated elites.'⁵⁴⁸ By

⁵⁴⁶ See <http://www.filmsite.org/filmreg.html>.

⁵⁴⁷ Richard Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2012), 70.

⁵⁴⁸ Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, 70.

basing scenes on Tissot's pre-existing Bible images, Olcott was able to ground the spectacle of his movie in an art-historical foundation, lending it greater authenticity. Future directors would continue to capitalise on this effect throughout the twentieth century.

Comments made by the American actor Joseph Henabery, who appeared as Abraham Lincoln in D. W. Griffith's silent film *Birth of a Nation* (USA, 1915) and who also provided directorial assistance to Griffith for *Intolerance*, speak to this important legacy. Henabery credited Tissot as the source for the scenes of Christ's Passion in *Intolerance*: 'We followed extremely carefully the garments that [Tissot] painted in his *Life of Christ*. I had many books relating to the period, and I couldn't find any equal to his. ... Something happened in his life and he became religious, and the great authority on the life of Christ.'⁵⁴⁹ Further attesting to the widespread impact that *The Life of Christ* made on twentieth-century filmmakers, for the 1927 film *The King of Kings* (USA), publicised as director Cecil B. DeMille's 'supreme dramatic spectacle,' it is Tissot's illustrations that provided the most obvious parallels to the actor H. B. Warner's portrayal of Christ. By this time, even as their fame began to wane in the popular consciousness, the illustrations were an integral part of the 'visual tradition inherited by DeMille and his audiences.'⁵⁵⁰

Perhaps the best-known and most original composition in Tissot's *The Life of Christ* is *What Our Saviour Saw from the Cross*, (ca. 1886–1894, Fig. 3.2) which is depicted from the vantage point of the crucified Christ's perspective. Through this device, Tissot encourages viewers to imagine themselves as Christ and, by extension, to share in his physical and

⁵⁴⁹ Bernard Hanson, 'D. W. Griffith: Some Sources,' *The Art Bulletin* 54, no. 4 (December 1972): 499.

⁵⁵⁰ Adele Reinhartz, ed., *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 174.

emotional suffering. By focusing on the spectators, Tissot is able to highlight the range of emotions in the crowd, from concern and anguish to morbid curiosity. This survey of human feeling in response to Christ's crucifixion accounts for the image's uniquely powerful impact among the hundreds of scenes from the Bible that Tissot illustrated. In Wyler's *Ben-Hur*, the camera angle during the crucifixion raises to a similar bird's-eye view at the same time as the cross is lifted, so that the ultimate perspective is from above, with the panorama of the crowd below. These cinematic allusions to Tissot's illustrations demonstrate the lasting impact the artist's *magnum opus* had on subsequent generations, even if their recognition as artworks has diminished.

Tissot wrote to his publisher Maurice de Brunhoff from Jerusalem during his final trip to the Holy Land, in 1896. In this letter he reiterated the deep conviction, mysticism, and devout belief behind his biblical illustrations: 'I was moved in Jerusalem ... the old remembrances, everything based on faith, one is in a special state of mind. ... I feel a certain presence around me, intuition is developed, one dematerializes oneself, one is constantly moved.'⁵⁵¹ Using this intuition, Tissot created an ambitious and innovative series of works that deftly articulates his unique syncretism of established religious iconography and motifs from Spiritualism. A reconsideration of these late illustrations reveals a complex artist who transcends the characterisation of being a mere chronicler of fashionable society. Tissot combined his own convictions with the religious and cultural atmosphere of his time to create

⁵⁵¹ 'J'ai ressenti la même émotion dans Jérusalem, au saint Sepulcre, le lieu même, les vieux souvenirs, tout sur la foi, on entre certainement là dans un état d'âme spécial, on sent, ou plutôt je sens une certaine présence autour de soi que nous pénètre particulièrement, l'intuition se développe certainement on se dématerialise, on s'attendrit sans cesse.' Tissot to Maurice de Brunhoff, 6 April, 1896. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, Record ID: 116297. Cited in Buron, *James Tissot*, 326n53.

a body of work that is more important—both to his oeuvre and to subsequent artists—than has previously been considered.

James Tissot was one of the most celebrated French artists during the nineteenth century, yet he is overshadowed by many of his contemporaries today. Presenting new scholarship on the artist's late oeuvre, this thesis provides a critical reassessment of select images from Tissot's *The Life of Christ* series, which demonstrates their relationship to the visual culture of nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the prevalence of visions during this period. The features of these works that have been most derided and even overlooked—their unique combination of Tissot's blended spiritual beliefs—are ultimately what make them so exceptional. By considering Tissot's biblical images within the framework of Spiritualism and the end of the century's Catholic Revival as well as their lasting impact on cinema, it is evident that Tissot's uniquely syncretic visual language in these images had an enduring resonance that made it particularly primed for a legacy of influence into the twenty-first century.

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