When Hunt took ship for the Holy Land in January of 1854, the Brotherhood had dissolved. As Christina Rossetti had written the previous year, "So rivers merge in the perpetual sea; / So luscious fruit must fall when overripe; / And so the consummated P.R.B." ("The P.R.B.").

And yet, with the irony that marks the history of the Brotherhood, it is Hunt's journey to Palestine of 1854 that must be seen as the consummation of the original aims of the group. As early as October 1850, the Brothers had discussed illustrating biblical events through paintings done in situ. At that time, Hunt had seriously considered "going to Jerusalem" to paint the subject of Ruth and Boaz "on the spot," and Rossetti, even against the "infidel" objections of his brother and Woolner, had wanted to join him (PRBJ, 73).

But by 1854, a joint expedition to Palestine by Rossetti and Hunt was unthinkable. Hunt alone was to carry on the work of the Brotherhood, his vision of sacramental realism shared neither by a Brotherhood of fellow artists nor by his audience. In 1856, Hunt returned from the Holy Land to exhibit in the Royal Academy show of that year the chief result of his trip, The Scapegoat. The perplexed, often hostile public response to the painting indicates some of the reasons why the figuralism practiced by Hunt and the Brotherhood, as well as by Carlyle and Ruskin, ultimately failed to establish a vital form of religious art in mid-nineteenth-century England.

The Scapegoat epitomizes Brotherhood figuralism. The subject is an actual scriptural event that has a clear typological meaning. The animal described in the Old Testament as sent into the wilderness bearing the sins of the Israelites (Lev. 16:22) prefigures the events of the New Testament, specifically the crucified Christ as Scapegoat bearing the sins of the world. The canvas, then, shows a historically possible, typologically significant event; the goat, expelled from the Temple, has wandered to the Dead Sea and flounders in the salt of the shore.

Hunt's methods also present an extreme case of the Brotherhood desire to achieve both scientific and historical accuracy. His zeal for Ruskinian truth drove him to Palestine in a quest that
stands on the narrow edge between heroism and obsession. To reach the Dead Sea, he traveled through lawless country armed only with a pistol and a sublime confidence in the sanctity of Englishmen. Once there he painted by the marshy shore, encountering heat and insects so uncomfortable that even Arab brigands withdrew before the sublime madness of this Englishman. This effort to paint in situ no matter what the cost extends that same desire to emulate the direct experimental observation of the scientist that had sent Ruskin to the Alps or the Brothers in search of the perfect brick wall. With the zeal of the Victorian geologist, Hunt painted from direct observation the geological truth of the strata of the hills and the salt formation of the shore. To achieve biological truth, Hunt painted the goat from the proper Palestinian species, but at a studio in Jerusalem. To achieve historical truth, he timed his visit to coincide with the period of the Day of Atonement so as to represent the particular quality of light at the time the goat was released from the Temple. The finished canvas, then, is as nearly as possible a representation of what an ancient Israelite might have seen had he been standing on the shores of the Dead Sea a short time after the Day of Atonement. Yet, this exacting scientific documentation is a means toward sacramental enlightenment—the representation of a possible scriptural event as historical truth should, in theory, provide the audience with fresh awareness of the figural quality of Scripture.

Hunt’s heroic efforts were, however, appreciated by only a few associated with the Brotherhood circle. Ruskin praised Hunt’s ardor, but his words, like Hunt’s actions, now appear more droll than elevating:

While the hills of the Crimea were white with tents of war, and the fiercest passions of the nations of Europe burned in high funeral flames over their innumerable dead, one peaceful English tent was pitched beside a shipless sea, and the whole strength of an English heart spent in painting a weary goat, dying upon its salt sand. . . . [It is a] scene of which it might seem most desirable to give a perfect idea to those who cannot see it for themselves; it is that also which fewest travellers are able to see; and which I suppose, no one but Mr. Hunt himself would ever have dreamed of making the subject of a close pictorial study. (14:62)

Ruskin judged the painting as valuable in its religious intentions, but as not realizing the full fusion of moral purpose and mimetic accuracy: “I acknowledge the good purposes of this picture, yet, inasmuch as there is no good hair painting, nor hoof painting in it, I hold it to be good only as an omen not as an achievement” (14:65). William Michael Rossetti, however,
praised the painting for presenting what Carlyle termed an "intrinsic" symbol: "Its symbolism is of the highest kind of all,—that where the symbol is a truth, accurate and consistent in all its details, which the thing symbolized underlies and endows with life" (Fine Art, 243). For William Michael Rossetti, as for Ruskin and for Hunt, there is no doubt as to the sacramental nature of the historical events described in Scripture, no doubt that the figural quality could be communicated through art: "The goat in the picture is a religious type in precisely the same manner in which the goat wandering or perishing in the wilderness was one" (Fine Art, 243).

The reviewers in the general periodicals were, however, generally hostile. They did not attack Hunt's mimetic skill; few had the assurance of a Ruskin to judge the representation of a landscape they had never seen. But all agreed that if here was a religious painting that must be valued for its symbolic significance, the work failed in being far too difficult to read. Ruskin characteristically blamed the audience for insufficient knowledge of Scripture, but other critics blamed the painting itself for not being more clearly self-explanatory in spite of the biblical glosses on the frame. The Times said, "The distance is given well, and the colour is very good, the mountains are most lovingly painted; in the eye of the scapegoat, too, as it comes to drink the waters of the Dead Sea, there is a profound feeling, but altogether the scene is not impressive, and were it not for the title annexed it would be rather difficult to divine the nature of the subject." Had there been an iconographic tradition of doleful goats as a type of Christ, the meaning of the painting might have been more available. But here, Hunt's continuing effort to revitalize religious iconography leads to symbols that are highly original, yet virtually indecipherable. Even the scientifically detailed landscape is intended to have typical significance:

The Sea is heaven's own blue like a diamond more lovely in a king's diadem than in the mines of the Indies but as it gushes up through the broken ice-like salt on the beach, it is black, full of asphalt ocum—and in the hand slimy, and smarting as a sting. No one can stand and say it is not accursed of God. If in all there are sensible figures of men's secret deeds and thoughts, then is this the horrible figure of Sin—a varnished deceit—earth's joys at hand but Hell gaping behind, a stealthy, terrible enemy for ever.

But since these facts of landscape have no clear correspondence with traditional iconography, this sacred purpose remains unavailable to most viewers. With the transcendental significance hidden by Hunt's essentially private symbolism, the emotive
quality becomes dominant. The representation of a single living being trapped in a sterile wasteland represented in preternaturally vivid colors creates an almost hallucinatory sense of isolation and despair.

If Hunt's art rests on faith in a sacramental universe in which even a trapped goat can manifest a transcendental principle, the reviews make it clear that although the contemporary critics could understand Hunt's religious intentions, they no longer shared the metaphysical assumptions upon which his figural style depends. The remarkably perceptive review in the *Athenaeum* expresses the related philosophical and stylistic issues exactly: "The question is simply this,—here is a dying goat, which, as a mere goat, has no more interest for us than the sheep that furnished our yesterday's dinner—but it is a type of the Saviour, says Mr. Hunt, and quotes the Talmud. Here we join issue, for it is impossible to paint a goat, though its eyes were upturned with human passion, that could explain any allegory or hidden type." To this reviewer, the correspondence between the Scapegoat and Christ, between the Palestinian goat and the spiritual principle of redemption, is not stylistically unclear; it is philosophically impossible.

The profound differences between Hunt and his periodical critics suggest that in the effort to revive religious art by using the contemporary methods of scientific and historicist accuracy, the true enemy was not Academic conventions but scientific materialism, the belief in a purely physical universe in which transcendental correspondences can have no real existence. The reviewers confront *The Scapegoat* as Peter Bell did the primrose. The *Athenaeum* concludes, "The goat is but a goat, and we have no right to consider it an allegorical animal." The *Art-Journal* agrees: "A Goat is here, that is all." For the *Art-Journal*, the main interest is scientific, but an interest no longer derived from a religious science that moves from detailed observation to knowledge of God. Instead, Hunt's landscape satisfies a geological curiosity occupied only with physical truth: "The only point in the picture that has any interest at all is the deposit of salt; this is interesting, if the representation be true: for ourselves, we have often read of this, but never have seen anything like a truthful picture of it." "

Although *The Scapegoat* "was the theme of eloquent eulogy on the part of more than one member of the Episcopal bench," it failed to achieve religious significance for most viewers because the transcendental belief upon which such meaning depends had become as exhausted as the traditional symbolic language of
art that Hunt and the Brotherhood had hoped to revitalize. If Hunt’s intentions were traditional in wishing to fashion a visual symbol with as definite a typological meaning as the symbols in early Italian painting, to an audience that no longer shared his transcendental assumptions, the goat appeared only as an image, an accurate representation of a natural fact that may or may not have some private significance to the artist. The Athenaeum review notes, “Of course, the salt may be sin, and the sea sorrow, and the clouds eternal rebukings of pride, and so on,—but we might spin these fancies from anything—from an old wall, a centaur’s beard, or a green duck pond.” In the example of The Scapegoat, the critic sees the central problem facing the Victorian artist after mid-century. Once natural fact is no longer seen figurally, no longer felt to have an inherent or “intrinsic” metaphysical correspondence to a specific spiritual fact, then any physical object can serve equally well to represent any general principle or emotional state and the way is open for the private mythologies and symboliste methods that characterize art and literature from the later nineteenth century to the present day.

1. 3 May 1856, p. 9.
2. Quoted in Staley, p. 68. Italics added.
4. N. s.2 (1 June 1856): 170.
5. Times, 5 May 1856, p. 5.