

THE RAINBOW IN MILLAIS' THE BLIND GIRL
AND OTHER SELECTED WORKS OF ART

In 1977 George Landow published an article entitled "The Rainbow: A Problematic Image."¹ In this essay he observes rightly that by the Victorian period the Biblical iconographic meaning of the rainbow had become very attenuated (Genesis 9:11-17):

And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud.

And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Here the rainbow is a sign of hope because it comes at the end of a catastrophe with the promise that it will not be renewed. From the New Testament perspective, the rainbow is even more full of promise because it is a reminder that God's next judgment of man will be tempered by the fact of Christ's Redemption.

Landow says that this context has lost its hermeneutic power by the Victorian period. He points out that if we (as was true of the average Victorian spectator) encounter a landscape with a rain-