

TWO ASPECTS OF NATURALISM: RUSKIN AND PATER

In 1851, Ruskin wrote Pre-Raphaelitism in answer to those violent attacks which had been made in the Press on the first exhibited pictures of the three original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Holman Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti. He tells us in his "Preface":

Eight years ago, in the close of the first volume of "Modern Painters," I ventured to give the following advice to the young artists of England:-

"They should go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thought but how best to penetrate her meaning; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing." Advice which, whether bad or good, involved infinite labour and humiliation in the following it; and was therefore, for the most part, rejected.

It has, however, at last been carried out, to the very letter, by a group of men who, for their reward, have been assailed with the most scurrilous abuse which I ever recollect seeing issue from the public press. I have, therefore, thought it due to them to contradict the directly false statements which have been made respecting their works; and to point out the kind of merit which, however deficient in some respects, those works possess beyond the possibility of dispute.

In reading what Ruskin has to say, we see that, in his view, Pre-Raphaelitism means "sincerity in art," a combined fidelity to external data and to one's own special talent no matter how modest. He urges that artists be as humble and as happy in their work as those medieval artisans who contributed perhaps only a few gargoyles to a cathedral.¹ Ruskin writes (7): "People usually reason in some such fashion as this: 'I don't seem quite fit for a head-manager in the firm of ----- & Co., therefore, in all probability, I am fit to be Chancellor of the Exchequer.' Whereas, they ought rather to reason thus: 'I don't seem quite fit to be head-manager in the firm of ----- & Co., but I dare say I might do something in a small greengrocery business; I used to be a good judge of peas....'" What Ruskin tells us about the grotesque is very important to this discussion, expanding as it does the limits of acceptable art so as to make room for "inferior" work. He writes ("Of the True Ideal: Thirdly, Grotesque", Modern Painters, III, Part IV, viii):