

BAA-LAMBS AND SCAPEGOATS: A NOTE ON THE ROLE OF
ANIMALS IN PRE-RAPHAELITE ART

The youthful Pre-Raphaelite brethren ridiculed as 'monkeyana' the popular paintings of animals burlesquing human life. The term came from Tom Landseer, brother of the famous Sir Edwin Landseer (Victoria's favorite painter). Tom had published in 1827-8 a series of twenty-four etchings taken from his own drawings, showing monkeys in human roles and entitled Monkey-ana, or Men in Miniature.¹ The PRB probably included Sir Edwin in their raillery, since he had done many paintings using animals for what Ruskin called "the sake of a pretty thought or a pleasant jest." The prints we see today in souvenir shops of gambling dogs are an inheritance from Landseer, and we tend to share the Pre-Raphaelite scorn.

Landseer also did paintings of animals which show them as noble creatures in their natural environments. Some of these paintings deserve our respect. Two of his serious canvases, The Sanctuary (1842) and Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before (The Challenge) exh. 1844), have been compared by Allen Staley² to William Holman Hunt's The Scapegoat, suggesting that some of Landseer's work had perhaps a closer affinity with the PRB's aims than the Brotherhood wished to acknowledge.

Other Pre-Raphaelite paintings besides The Scapegoat include animals importantly. While the Pre-Raphaelites often used animals in much the same way that Landseer did, they sometimes transcended the didacticism so dear to the Victorians and expressed a delight in nature that has genuine appeal for modern viewers.

Landseer (1802-73), influenced directly by George Stubbs who died in 1806, worked in a long tradition of animal painting. Both artists knew animal anatomy, having performed many dissections (Landseer inherited Stubbs' definitive anatomic drawings of the horse), and both could render musculature, skin, hair, etc., with meticulous realism. To understand why Landseer's painting is open to the charge of 'monkeyana' and Stubbs's is not, one need only contrast the eighteenth-century artist's Green Monkey (1798) with Landseer's The Monkey Who Has Seen the World (1827). The former shows a monkey in a natural pose and environment; the latter, as described by Campbell Lennie, shows

a kind of local monkey made good, . . . dressed as a Regency buck in cocked hat, cravat, square-cut coat, satin breeches, silk stockings and buckled shoes; his naked stay-at-home fellow-monkeys regard him with drop-jawed envy and wonder, one of them sampling his snuff-box.³