

HOGARTH AND THE VICTORIANS

George P. Landow

At first thought, William Hogarth would seem to be the artist least congenial to the Victorians, and in many ways he was – at least to some Victorians. His emphasis upon sexuality, his grotesques, and his anti-aristocratic bent, like his lack of delicacy and his violation of rules taught by the nineteenth-century Academy schools, certainly did not fit well with artistic ideals of aristocratic culture that revered Raphael and Claude. It also seemed out of touch with the rival culture of the New men, the upstart mill-owners and merchants of the industrial North – the John Thorntons of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the men who read John Ruskin and bought work by the Pre-Raphaelites and the purveyors of realism like W.P. Frith or Frank Holl. Therefore, it is especially surprising that Ruskin himself, the would-be art revolutionaries of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who followed him, and the conservative critics of *The Art-Journal* all looked to Hogarth as one of the founders of true English painting. Equally important, both the Pre-Raphaelites and their rivals in the Academy relied upon many of Hogarth's characteristic techniques.

The Englishness of Hogarth, a Father of English Painting

Both Ruskin and the periodical critics who so rarely agreed with him believed that Hogarth was a courageous, independent-minded artist of great originality who founded, or was one of the principal founders of, English art. One encounters these judgements both in unexpected places, such as discussions of fashion or Japanese art, as well as in articles about Hogarth himself or the art of his time. Thus, the 1858 *Art-Journal*, typically proclaims:

No artist ever deserved the name of a "national painter" more truthfully than William Hogarth. The queen in whose reign he began his career had declared to one of her earliest parliaments that "her heart was entirely English," and her saying was commemorated on a medal. Hogarth's heart was equally English; his works are his medals, and will be as enduring as the metal of his sovereign.

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