

TWO UNFINISHED PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTINGS:  
D. G. ROSSETTI'S "FOUND"  
AND FORD MADOX BROWN'S "TAKE YOUR SON, SIR!"

Apropos of the sublime, Edmund Burke argued that the imagination is affected more strongly by what is suggested or hinted at in visual objects than by what is plainly stated. "It is our ignorance of things that causes our admiration."<sup>1</sup> Transfer this thought to unfinished paintings, and we find that, if not always sublime, such works tantalize us and cause us to wonder. What would the finished work have been like? What was the artist's intention when he began working? What prevented him from completing the work? Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Found" and Ford Madox Brown's "Take Your Son, Sir!" are two such unfinished works. The interest in these pictures focuses not so much on what they might have been like if entire, because each was carried out far enough so that the completed shape of the painting can be inferred, but on why neither picture was finished. Before I attempt to account for the reasons that might have prevented Rossetti and Brown from carrying these pictures to completion, a few general comments about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's motives and intentions might help explain the choice of theme by Rossetti and Brown in these particular cases.

The Pre-Raphaelite interest in contemporary subjects, especially social issues, is often overlooked by those who remember the works of the Brotherhood only for their studious rendering of minute historic and botanic details and their quasi-religious romantic aura; but a series of articles published in the Pre-Raphaelite journal The Germ had, in fact, sounded a clarion call for social realism. For example, in "The Subject of Art," John L. Tupper argued that the subjects of high art should "address and excite the activity of man's rational and benevolent powers."<sup>2</sup> The author cited Millais' "The Rescue" as an example of a painting that depends for much of its effect on the ordinary nature of the danger it describes and the action it depicts -- a fireman saving a child in a burning building. Summarizing the intentions of the Pre-Raphaelites, William Michael Rossetti said that one of their first principles was "to have genuine ideas to express" along with an ability "to sympathize with what is heartfelt, direct, and serious in previous art and to exclude what is conventional and learned by rote."<sup>3</sup>

Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti in "Found" and Ford Madox Brown in "Take Your Son, Sir!" went far beyond Millais' treatment of an ordinary danger; they each chose as subject a danger to society that was far more sinister and shocking than a melodramatic conflagration. Their pictures are concerned with two widespread misdemeanors of the