

“FEARLESS CONNECTIONS”:  
NOEL PATON AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITE PARADIGM

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*Musings from the Editor's Desk*

The author of the first survey of Noel Paton's art surprises us when he cautions that Paton was not wholly a Pre-Raphaelite: “There is one respect in which the Scottish artist is almost as wide as the poles asunder from the Pre-Raphaelites. Their doctrine – ‘select nothing, reject nothing,’ is totally at variance with Sir Noel's conviction that selection and rejection lies at the very root of all worthy design in Art” (102). The year was 1895, and Alfred T. Story is quoting John Ruskin from more than forty years earlier, when Ruskin had mounted the first spirited defence of the Pre-Raphaelites in 1851. Ruskin believed the young artists were following his advice to “go to nature in all singleness of heart..., rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing,” but practising a “loving fidelity to the thing studied” without “fanciful or ornamental modifications” (*Works* 12:339). Though Ruskin considered himself a Pre-Raphaelite (labelling himself as “We P.R.B.s”),<sup>1</sup> his “select nothing, reject nothing” doctrine was utterly misleading in relation to all the works of art by Dante Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, as well as Noel Paton, because “fanciful” and “ornamental modifications” are exactly what the Pre-Raphaelites practised.

Indeed, the best artists, Oscar Wilde insisted, are the least “trammelled by the shackles of verisimilitude” (“Critic” 68). Still, despite the anti-mimetic perspectives of the long-reigning post-isms of our own era, the relationship between art and life continues to be a contentious issue. The stage and film director Robert Lepage recently felt the need to raise this warning: “When we try to show what is normal we are following the wrong path” (qtd in Littler E 6). And yet, each year manuscripts steadily arrive at the office of *The Journal* that start with the premise that Ruskin's fidelity to nature is the defining doctrine of the Pre-Raphaelites. Wilde knew better, observing with approval