

## GENDERED INCONGRUITIES IN GEORGE ELIOT'S PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTINGS

Sophia Andres

Already in Book One in *Daniel Deronda*, when the narrator attempts to draw a portrait of Gwendolen in her archery dress, she subtly identifies her painterly technique by distinguishing herself from other painters:

It was the fashion to dance in the archery dress, throwing off the jacket; and the simplicity of her white cashmere with its border of pale green set off her form to the utmost. A thin line of gold round her neck, and the gold star on her breast were her only ornaments. Her smooth soft hair piled up into a grand crown made a clear line about her brow. Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth in change--only to give stability to one beautiful moment. (151)

Though ostensibly a comparison between Sir Joshua Reynolds's task and that of the historian, the distinction between "truth in change" and stability of the moment also refers to the way the Pre-Raphaelites distinguished themselves from the eighteenth-century renowned master, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Like her Pre-Raphaelite contemporaries, the narrator here implicitly describes the goal she pursues throughout the novel to capture the subject's idiosyncratic distinction, rather than her universal appeal, and in the process to represent realistic change rather than idealized permanence. And like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that rebelled against the dictates of Sir Joshua Reynolds, or Sir "Sloshua," as John Everett Millais nicknamed him, the narrator seems to declare that in her own literary paintings she will avoid anything "sloshy," that is, "any thing or person of a commonplace and conventional kind" (Hilton 46). Hugh Witemeyer specifically explains George Eliot's Pre-Raphaelite tendency to "avoid slosh" by painting from "new pictorial models and from the direct observation of nature." In her literary portraits, he points out, we perceive fundamental Pre-Raphaelite qualities: "fresh perspectives and real knowledge of character rather than occasions for effusive sentiment" (Witemeyer 44).

Throughout her fiction Eliot seems to transform Pre-Raphaelite painterly techniques into narrative strategies or Pre-Raphaelite subjects into literary portraits.

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