

## ELIZABETH GASKELL'S RE-PRESENTATIONS OF PRE-RAPHAELITE GENDERED BOUNDARIES

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The Pre-Raphaelite convergence of the verbal and the visual was not limited to the extensively documented amalgamation of poems and paintings. It also transpired in yet another significant contemporary genre--the Victorian novel. Novelists as diverse as Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, whose philosophical and literary perspectives differed considerably, were all fascinated by the Pre-Raphaelites, corresponded with them, visited their studios, and quite often commissioned them to illustrate their novels. But beyond explicit visual illustrations that accompanied the text, the Pre-Raphaelites entered the Victorian novel in more subtle and implicit ways. Embedded within the text we may frequently discover Pre-Raphaelite paintings reconfigured by Victorian novelists and transformed into narrative images (see Schor, Frick, Brewer, Nicholes, Byerly).

In *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* Alison Byerly contends that allusions to paintings in Victorian novels are attempts to establish "an imaginative space where the fictional world and the real world come together" (121). Yet besides grounding their novels in reality, Victorian novelists, I believe, through their allusions to Pre-Raphaelite paintings, sought to participate in contemporary debates on gender and on various sociopolitical issues. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated in the work of George Eliot and Wilkie Collins that the intersection of Pre-Raphaelite painting and narrative at times disclosed ideological contradictions, often emanating gender conflicts (Andres). Such conflicts may be perceived in Elizabeth Gaskell's controversial novel, *Ruth*, where Gaskell has chosen narrative images reminiscent of paintings by the most famous and popular Pre-Raphaelites. Her choice of these paintings, as I hope to demonstrate, is a deliberate attempt to

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