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George Eliot's Visual Moments

## The Construction and Development of Character in Daniel Deronda

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George Eliot's Visual Moments:  
The Construction and Development of Character in *Daniel Deronda*

In George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, the narrator comments: "And often the grand meaning of faces as well as of written words may lie chiefly in the impressions of those who look on them" (158). The comment relates, in particular, to the titular hero's physiognomy, but its relevance for the entire novel is evident. *Daniel Deronda* is insistently concerned with the visual and with the problematics of looking. Like many of Eliot's novels, it examines the visual in relation to notions of reliability, perspective, interpretation, representation, the subjective versus the objective, and the relation between observation and imagination.

This paper is concerned with the creation and development of character as unveiled through visual moments within the diegesis. While a great deal of previous scholarship on visuality in Eliot is concerned with ekphrasis, our focus is on the function of the visual between characters. We propose that visual moments – understood as the combination of looker, "looker", the manner of looking or seeing, the context of looking and the form of narration – significantly contribute to characterisation. Furthermore, we suggest that George Eliot, to a large extent, locates characters' personal beliefs and ideologies in visual exchanges.

We have identified visual moments in *Daniel Deronda* with the aid of corpus linguistic methods, which has allowed us, not only to pinpoint the frequency and range of lexical items related to the visual, but which has also proven valuable to the systematicity and objectivity in the analysis and to the close reading of visual moments in the text. By systematically analysing and categorising visual exchanges, we trace and unravel character construction and development, thereby complementing or qualifying the composition of character as presented through the combination of direct speech, free indirect discourse and the agency of a reflective and analytical narrative voice.

*Biographical note:*

**Sara Håkansson** holds a PhD in English literature from Lund University. Her thesis, *Narratorial Commentary in George Eliot's Novels*, was published in 2009 and since then she has worked on various projects related to George Eliot, the latest being "The Function of Dogs in George Eliot's Fiction" which is forthcoming in the bicentennial collection *George Eliot: Interdisciplinary Essays* edited by Jean Arnold and Lila Harper. She is currently involved in a research project which studies aspects of the visual in George Eliot's novels with a particular focus on the significance of the visual in relation to characterisation.

**Mats Johansson** holds a PhD in English linguistics and has worked on corpus construction and, different uses of digital corpora, mostly on the use of translation corpora and parallel corpora. More recently he has taken an interest in corpus stylistics, focussing in particular on corpus methods as a means of empirically verifying literary analyses, as well as generating useful hypotheses about significant aspects of literary works. He is currently involved in collaborative work that studies the use of words and phrases in *Daniel Deronda* that relate to the gaze of and particularly between main characters in the novel.