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Corpus stylistics and literary characterisation

Visual moments in George Eliot

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Corpus stylistics and literary characterisation: Visual moments in George Eliot.

This paper focuses on the creation and development of literary characters as unveiled through what we refer to as visual moments within literary texts. Such moments are identified as portions of the narrative where characters are engaged in visual interaction. Each visual moment can be described in terms of a looker, a “looker”, a description of the manner of looking or seeing, the context of looking, and the form of narration, as well as other textual clues.

While a great deal of previous scholarship on visibility in George Eliot’s fiction is concerned with ekphrasis, our focus is on the function of visual interaction between characters. Specifically, we propose that visual moments significantly contribute to literary characterisation. Furthermore, we suggest that George Eliot, to a large extent, locates characters’ personal beliefs and ideologies in visual exchanges.

We identify visual moments in Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* through the use of fairly simple corpus linguistic methods, to wit KWIC concordances, which not only allows us to reveal the frequency and range of lexical items related to the visual, but also proves 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.

Keywords: character, corpus stylistics, visibility, George Eliot, Daniel Deronda