

The Eliot Family c. 1746 Sir Joshua Reynolds Oil on canvas

This is Reynolds' most ambitious painting for the Eliot family. Richard Eliot is seated on the right next to his wife, Harriot Craggs. In the middle stands their eldest son Edward. His younger brother Richard runs in from the left, grabbing at the coat of John Hamilton, who stands next to Mrs Goldsworthy (both family friends). Ann Eliot is in front of her, and Harriot Eliot is at the far right. Catherine Eliot is probably the child on Hamilton's back. John and Elizabeth Eliot are playing in the foreground.

The obvious model for Reynolds' composition is Van Dyck's famous group portrait, The Pembroke Family (1635) at Wilton House, which had inspired a number of artists to emulate it, including Reynolds' master Thomas Hudson. Yet the mood here is more about amiability than family dynasties. Indeed, on the urn is the Latin word 'Amiticia', meaning friendship - highlighting the Eliot family's welcome of their two friends into the family circle.

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