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Daniel Deronda by George Eliot

Oxford University Press 1988 Price £3.95

In writing of this edition of my favourite of George Eliot's novels edited by Graham Handley, a man to whom the George Eliot Fellowship owes so much and for whom we feel a particular warmth for his exceptional work as one of the two leaders of our Study Group and as one of the Review's two editors (the one with all the academic know-how!), I cannot help but admit a bias. Dr. Handley's Introduction to this edition is so clear, so interesting, so comprehensive and well researched and so readable that the reader cannot fail to have his reading of this last of George Eliot's novels greatly enhanced. We are introduced to the ideas, the books and the men who created in George Eliot her interest in and wide knowledge of Judaism.

We are told of her meticulous research into the legal aspects of the story and of the places she visited where she was to set her scenes. Dr. Handley also reminds us of the times in which the novel was written and of the author's often flagging confidence as the writing progressed. Part-publication meant that the earlier episodes were being read while the later ones were being written. Despite many criticisms of Daniel Deronda leading one to imagine that the novel was a 'remarkable failure, a flawed success, or even an aberration unredeemed by incisive insights or distinguished writing' (Introduction, pp. xiii and xiv) I applaud Dr. Handley's positive contention that Daniel Deronda needs no apology. He goes on to discuss the story in all its parts and the wide variety of its characters fully and with that infectious enthusiasm we have come to associate with his journeys along many paths into English Literature. How can the reader subsequently fail to understand the complexities of a complex novel or to enjoy the branches of the story - branches of a tree which, surely, was never meant to be chopped down the middle and one half to be left to grow on its own.

World's Classics are presenting the texts of famous novels and illuminating introductions and notes at a reasonable price. If the Clarendon Edition is out of the reach of many pockets, these World's Classics are certainly not.