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## Review of A George Eliot Chronology

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Timothy Hands

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## BOOK REVIEWS

by *Graham Handley*

### A George Eliot Chronology

By Timothy Hands. (Macmillan Author Chronologies, Macmillan Press, 1989) £29.50

On the face of it this is a much needed book, and certainly it makes a considerable contribution in a portable way to our ease of reference when we want to look up something in George Eliot's life or writing. But I am doubtful about the method used here of incorporating into the chronology historical or other facts. For example, on the first page (which covers the years 1819-27 in George Eliot's life) we find entries which say: 1821 (29 Jan) Death of George III. Accession of George IV (Regent since 1811): (17 Aug) Death of Queen Caroline. 1824 (19 April) Death of Byron. 1825 (27 Sep) Opening of Stockton and Darlington railway.

These facts are imbedded in the George Eliot sequence, and they vary from important historical events (like the death of Palmerston or her concern about the American War) to seemingly irrelevant or at least unconnected notes, like the birth of A.E.Housman on 26 March 1859. After all, it is a George Eliot Chronology. The size of the volume does not allow for what is so much better - the general dates in a column opposite those which are specifically concerned with an author or a group of writers, artists etc. Having said that, Timothy Hands is to be commended for the informed selection in relation to George Eliot. Quotations from the Letters are telling, summaries of important events or developments are succinct or deftly and expressively clipped. In fact, this is more than just a reference book, it is a kind of mini-biography without the obtrusion of the biographer. There are occasional errors, but they are minor ones. The bibliography is useful though by no means comprehensive, and there is an almost complete absence of any significant modern criticism. I was pleased to see that Blanche Colton Williams's book had been consulted, but puzzled by another omission. This is of modern annotated texts of George Eliot's work which provide both the student and the general reader with information of a scholarly and critical kind. Unless you are a collector, the modern editions are certainly to be preferred and, in any case, are more available than the majority of editions referred to here.