

Discussion Questions

- 1** The novel opens in a German casino, introducing the main characters and a set of recurring themes: gambling, chance and game-playing. Who are the biggest gamblers in the novel and what are the stakes? Who are the most adept game-players? Are these characters admirable or not?
- 2** What words describe Gwendolyn Harleth at the novel's opening? At its close? Did you find her character's transformation believable? Would Gwendolyn have found happiness with Deronda? Can she have a happy ending without him?
- 3** Gwendolyn, Mirah, and Mordecai all look to Deronda as a savior. What draws each of these characters to him, and what motivates him to "save" them? What does he give them that they could not have found on their own? How well does he understand his own motives and actions? Is Deronda too good to be true?
- 4** Who is the heroine of the novel, Gwendolyn or Mirah? How is each woman a foil for the other? Compare their characteristics and experiences. If you could spend an hour with one of them, whom would you choose, and why?
- 5** *Daniel Deronda* was written by a woman (Mary Ann Evans) who felt compelled to publish her work under a man's name (George Eliot). How does the novel illustrate the limits placed on women in Victorian England? How much freedom does each female character have to determine her own future? Consider social norms, class, marriage, legal rights, and so on. Are there 21st century equivalents to Gwendolyn, Mirah, Mrs. Glasher, Miss Arrowpoint, or Deronda's mother? Why or why not?
- 6** Contemporary audiences were surprised by George Eliot's choice to write a novel about Jewish characters. What was your reaction to her presentation of London's Jewish community? Is it balanced, romanticized, stereotyped? If the book is an accurate guide to 19th century attitudes in England, what was it like to be Jewish in that place and time?
- 7** The novel moves back and forth between two worlds, one set in the aristocratic realm, the other in the urban Jewish community. The title character, Deronda, moves between these distinct spheres and is a point of connection for the two plot lines. Why did Eliot structure the novel this way? How do the story lines work with each other? Consider how well each would work on its own. What would be lost if *Daniel Deronda* were two novels instead of one? How does Eliot's depiction of each world inform our understanding of the other?

- 8 In a letter about *Daniel Deronda* Eliot wrote: “I mean everything in the book to be related to everything else.” Close study reveals many parallel scenes and situations: lost parents, illegitimate children, jewelry deliveries, rescues, revelations of identity. Identify and examine examples of related incidents or circumstances. How does Eliot’s method work? What does a comparison of the characters and situations reveal? As you read, were the parallels obvious, or does she build her “web” imperceptibly?
- 9 In the novel, Eliot narrates subtle shifts in feeling within and between characters, informing us about unexpressed ideas and emotions that move the action forward and deepen our understanding of the characters and their choices. What have the filmmakers done to bring Eliot’s narration to the screen? How are the thoughts and feelings on the page translated into film? What can a novel do that film cannot and vice versa?
- 10 Did the novel end as you expected it to? Were you satisfied with the ending? Does the film and the book end in the same way? Compare the novel’s close to other 19th century novels you have read and then to modern novels. Does the film end with the same scene that the book does?

Daniel Deronda, by George Eliot, was first published in 1876. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *Daniel Deronda* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/deronda/index.html>. For a *Daniel Deronda Teacher’s Guide*, go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/deronda/tguide.html>.



You can purchase the *Daniel Deronda* DVD from shoppbs.org. Enter code BOOKANDFILM during checkout to receive a 15% discount.

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