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TWO SEQUELS TO DANIEL DERONDA
By John Rignall

The two sequels of my title are a seven page satirical squib in Mr Punch's Pocket-Book for 1877 entitled 'Daniel Deronda, Book IX',¹ and a short novel or long story of around 50,000 words - much the same length as 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story' - Gwendolen: or, Reclaimed: A Sequel to Daniel Deronda published in Boston, Mass., in 1878. The novel was published anonymously but there is one edition published by William F. Gill with a variant title page giving the author as one Anna Clay Beecher;² whose identity remains a mystery.³ Both these texts have been contextualized, discussed and illumined by the Harvard scholar John Picker in a fine article of 2006 which contains the information about the variant title page.⁴ This paper is no more than a modest supplement to Picker's article.

A sequel can be an act of homage, a tribute to the narrative and imaginative power of the original which has generated an interest so strong that it has been left unsatisfied at the end of the work. This is not the case at all with the Punch satire and barely so for Gwendolen; and both could better be described in the terms Picker has proposed of the sequel as reproach. With Gwendolen it is both a reproach and a correction in that, as the title suggests, the sequel dismantles the frustrating obstacles raised by the Jewish plot and finally reunites the heroine with the man she has so long desired. The Punch piece, on the other hand, is a comprehensively irreverent and mocking dismissal of the original, played for cheap laughs and fired by a ferocious antisemitism that finds nothing worth redeeming or correcting in Daniel Deronda at all, since clearly its unforgivable sin is to have been centred on a Jew in the first place. What the two sequels have in common is that they indicate the strength of the wide-spread prejudice that George Eliot was boldly confronting in her attempt to treat Jews and judaism with sympathy and understanding. Perhaps, indeed, their primary interest is as social documents that throw light on the attitudes and prejudices of their day.

The Punch satire does not merit extensive discussion since it is not much more than a tissue of anti-Jewish slurs and jokes about pork and usury. It is set in Constantinople where Mirah is off sketching with Hans Meyrick while Deronda, wearing only an oriental long shirt or Jellabah on account of the sweltering heat, is addressing a gathering of Rabbis, beginning with an alleged psalm in Sanscrit that sets the anti-semitic tone of the whole satire: 'Rachel may weep to lose her sheep, and can't tell where to find them; issue a loan and they'll come home and bring their tribes behind them' (190). Scripture is irreverently reduced to nursery rhyme, spelling out the intellectual level on which the piece is pitched. Daniel's address sends the Rabbis to sleep, and when they eventually leave, one, whose resemblance to Mirah indicates that he is Lapidoth in a new incarnation, stays behind and then disappears with Daniel's western clothes, boots and of course pocket-book. Deronda reacts in crude comic-strip fashion, 'Shelp me Motheth' (191), displaying the lisp of the caricatured Jew. He then receives a letter from Mirah, who is lunching with Hans on, inevitably, pork chops and sausages. Declaring that she will go off with Hans if he asks her, she tells Deronda that 'As you once saved me from the water of the Thames, has Hans now saved me from the ditch-water of your prose' (191). Furthermore, Hans has a Greek nose and no trace of Greece in his hair. Penniless and potentially wifeless, Daniel reacts stoically with the one flicker of wit in the whole piece: 'I will try to think of it not as the spoiling of one wife, but as a preparation for another' (191). The chapter ends with a kind of mock-epiphany:
A flush rose like morning light on the bridge of his curving nose; touched all the salient scarpments of his impressive face, and flooding the roots of his curling hair, passed off into the region of departed sunsets. Deronda was his old self again. (192)

Hans and Mirah go rowing in a small boat on the Bosphorous, collide with a British ironclad and sink it. The ensuing vortex drags the pair under to their death. Deronda’s reaction when he hears the news is that, if he had had his boots on he might have been in time to save them, and also that ‘they might have known how tender a British ironclad is’ (193). Punch’s irreverence extends to the Royal Navy’s latest warships and presumably alludes to an incident in August 1875 when two ironclads, HMS Iron Duke and HMS Vanguard, collided in thick fog in the Irish Sea resulting in the sinking of the Vanguard.

Deronda is then of course reunited with Gwendolen, now rich as Croesus from a coalfield left her by Grandcourt, and there is a final grotesque scene of the pair of them crouching together on their knees by a coal fire in tears of happiness, she wiping away his tears with a handkerchief taken from his tail-pocket, and he wiping hers with a corner of the hearthrug. The scene is illustrated by Tenniel and shows Daniel as a caricature of a Jew with a huge hooked nose cuddling up to the Aryan Gwendolen.

Tenniel had form in anti-Semitic caricature, especially of Disraeli whom Punch dubbed the ‘Jew Premier’. And the parallel is spelled out in the last lines of the skit when Deronda resolves to stand for Parliament as a member for Buckinghamshire (Disraeli’s county), although the piece closes with us being told that ‘Thank heaven he did not get in!’ (195). So here GE’s attempt, as she put it in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, to treat Jews ‘with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain’, meets with the resistance of vulgar prejudice, the stock response to Jews and Judaism of the unenlightened section of the British public.

The prejudice shown by the American sequel is no less strong but less crudely expressed in a short novel that seems to aspire to cheap romance rather than cheap satire. Although Picker maintains that the plot is remarkably similar to Punch’s, the similarity really only extends to two basic elements, the death of Mirah and the reunion of Daniel and Gwendolen. In the novel sequel, Mirah dies not flirting in Constantinople but giving birth to a still-born child in Cairo, and the process by which Daniel comes to be reunited with Gwendolen is long and wearisomely tortuous.

The novel begins seriously enough with an introduction that reprints nearly all of a review of Daniel Deronda by E. P. Whipple first published in the North American Review of 1877; a review that G. H. Lewes thought ‘one of the very best’ that had appeared (Letters: VI, 354). I say nearly all, because the introduction truncates the last paragraph in which Whipple declares that the chief defect in the story is that it suddenly stops rather than artistically ends, which provides Ann Clay Beecher with her starting point and justification in that she seeks to correct this defect. But she omits Whipple’s qualification later in the paragraph that the ending nevertheless ‘works without condescending to gratify the natural curiosity in readers which she has laboured so successfully to excite’ (52).

But however serious the introduction, the novel that follows bears many of the characteristics of the silly novels by lady novelists so memorably skewered by the young George Eliot in her review essay twenty years or so earlier just before she began to write fiction. Of the particular qualities of silliness that essay begins by identifying – ‘the frothy, the
prosy, the pious’, and the ‘pedantic’ (301) – the ‘prosy’ is the one that most obviously applies to Gwendolen. Here is how it begins:

What is happiness? Who can claim it as their own? What is its substance, is it material or is it a fancy – a phantom which lures to pursuit, but vanishes at the touch – that attracts with its sound, and disappoints with its substance – whose blossoms delight – but whose fruits destroy – a fairy myth to those that are in pursuit, and a destroying fiend to those possessed? Is it the fickle goddess whom the philosopher woos in wisdom, whom the cavalier pursues in pleasure, whom the sentimentalist seeks in love – who encourages each, and rewards each with destruction? Disgrace follows ambition for power. Disgust rewards avarice for wealth, and ingratitude strangles love for happiness. (ch. 1)

This smacks of a schoolroom exercise in rhetoric, with its laboured antitheses and rhetorical questions all in the service of an affectation of world-weary wisdom. The redundant verbiage could scarcely be further from the concise question that opens Daniel Deronda itself in medias res: ‘Was she beautiful or not beautiful?’ The attempt to convey wisdom through vacuous generalization in Gwendolen resembles those ‘moral comments’ (309) that George Eliot in her essay on ‘Silly Novels’ singles out as examples of silliness in their banality: ‘It is a fact, no less true than melancholy, that all people, more or less, richer or poorer, are swayed by bad example’; ‘Vice can too often borrow the language of virtue’ (309). And Gwendolen continues in just that vein, trying, one imagines, to emulate the discourse of George Eliot’s narrators but falling embarrassingly short into wordy banality:

No mortal being is free from the inexorable law of nature, which presents the divers hindrances and oppositions to complete felicity. It is the fate of humanity to be beset by storms and calumnies; our fortunes rise and fall even in the ebb and flow of dejection and happiness, infirmities and joy, like those distant orbs which oscillate around their several axes, direct, retrograde, apogee, perigee, occidental, feral or freer. We are most happy when we are content and acknowledge it; we are most miserable when we sorrow, and give way to it. Life is but a span, a short day-dream, eternity is at hand while we are crawling out of our chrysalis. Our whole life is a bitter-sweet passion; distress seems to be an inevitable necessity; being mortal we must suffer mortal pains. Some people imagine themselves more miserable than others, but this is only the construction of a sensitive feeling. (ch. 7)

As George Eliot contends in ‘Silly Novels: ‘There is doubtless a class of readers to whom these remarks appear peculiarly pointed and pungent; for we often find them doubly and trebly scored with the pencil, and delicate hands giving in their determined adhesion to these hardy novelies by a distinct très vrai, emphasized by many notes of exclamation’ (309), but I doubt whether any modern readers of Gwendolen belong to that class. What she says about the oracular silly novel The Enigma could apply to this passage: the style is ‘quite as lofty as its purpose; indeed, some passages on which we have spent patient study are quite beyond our reach’ (311), in particular the list of axes which appears to degenerate into gibberish. In addition to this kind of verbal redundancy, Anna Clay Beecher also has recourse to what George Eliot calls ‘edifying periphrasis’ particularly when, like the silly novelists, she refers to Shakespeare. George Eliot cites a young lady stealing away and devouring ‘with rapture the inspired page of the great magician’ (309), and a volume on a table referred to as ‘that fund of human thought and feeling that teaches the heart through the little name “Shakspeare”’ (312).
Similarly Deronda, in a Hamlet-like mood exclaims in _Gwendolen_: ‘Now do I appreciate the master delineator of human nature, in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy’ (ch. 7).

In matters of style, then, _Gwendolen_ is all too similar to the prosy kind of silly novel by a lady novelist. Anna Clay Beecher could be said, to use George Eliot’s words, to ‘mistake vagueness for depth, bombast for eloquence, and affectation for originality’ (316). But the similarity also extends to the characters and the plot, so that like _The Enigma_, the sequel suffers from a confusion of purpose. It is on the one hand ‘a story of quite modern drawing-room society [...] yet we have characters, and incidents, and traits of manner introduced, which are mere shreds from the most heterogeneous romances’ (314). These are not quite the blind Irish harper and the crazy gypsy of _The Enigma_ but not far removed. Gwendolen’s mother, Mrs Davilow, is for instance, given a new history. To begin with she turns out not to be Gwendolen’s mother at all, but her aunt and stepmother. Mr Harleth’s first wife was her sister who died when Gwendolen was still a baby. Mrs Davilow and her mother then moved in with the bereaved father to look after the child, and when the mother died some time later, Mr Harleth, thinking it improper and a likely cause of scandal to go on living with an unchaperoned young woman in his house, proposed to her and was accepted. The American author shows her unfamiliarity with English law in all this, since between the Marriage Act of 1835 and 1907, marriage to one’s deceased wife’s sister was actually illegal (there were attempts to repeal the Act which Matthew Arnold inveighs against as examples of the liberalism he deplored in _Culture and Anarchy_). Mr Harleth thus avoids impropriety only by embracing illegality; and it would in fact have been impossible for him to marry legally without going abroad, of which there is no mention.

But before all this, as a young girl on holiday with her mother in the mountains of North Wales, the future Mrs Davilow meets an attractive young man, an artist, and falls romantically in love. He asks for a flower from her as a memento of their acquaintance and says on parting ‘If wishes come to pass, we shall meet again’ (ch. 2). But ten years pass without word of him and in that time Mrs Davilow accepts the unromantic passionless proposal of her brother-in-law. Sometime after her marriage her husband announces the visit of an old classmate of his, who turns out of course to be the artist, whose name is Roland. It turns out he has been imprisoned for ten years, and when pressed for the reason for his incarceration, simply says it was for the ideas he held which he was man enough to express. The author’s ignorance of English law seems to be in evidence again if we are to assume he was imprisoned in England, and there is no indication to the contrary. There seems to be an American prejudice at work here, so that the country which the mid-nineteenth century provided a haven for all kinds of exiles and would-be revolutionaries, free to speak out in their radical causes, seems to be subject to a ban on free speech that is the general mark of European despotism.

What all this does is introduce into the plot a kind of romantic Byronic hero, a man of loneliness and misery with a mysterious past and the burden of a frustrated love that leads him into the solitary existence of an exile. He belongs in the land of romance rather than Gwendolen’s drawing-room society, but he plays a crucial part in bringing about the final reunion.

This new history for Mrs Davilow is woven together with another new history, that of Hans Meyrick, who not only has a German first name but is here given a German father and a German birthplace, a village called Mansbach somewhere in Southern Germany where he is supposed to have spent a happy childhood close to nature. But before considering how this is
related to Gwendolen and Mrs Davilow, it is necessary to fill in the story of Deronda. Eight months after his marriage and before Mirah’s sudden death from childbirth, he is shown to be finding living in the East irksome and to be harbouring doubts about restoring the Jews to nationhood. He has come to the conclusion that ‘they had been scattered for cause’ (ch. 1); and unsurprisingly the age-old prejudice surfaces that ‘the Jew only nourishes at the expense of other people’ (Ibid), as if usury and speculation are the only activities that he is capable of. As a result a Jewish nation would require a preponderating number of Gentiles to feed it since, we are told

The fact remains, that the Jews are not given to industrial or mechanical pursuits. It is upon the labour of the farmer, the mechanic, that the Jew, with his present notions of subsistence and living, must thrive. (ch.1)

Thus rank conventional prejudice is accorded the status of fact, and George Eliot’s attempt to treat the Jewish people, their history and their faith with intelligent understanding and sympathy is summarily aborted.

After Mirah’s death, Deronda returns to Genoa to bury Mirah next to her brother, since, as an apparently inattentive reader of George Eliot’s novel, the author of the sequel believes Mordecai to have been interred there rather than in London. A few days after the funeral while visiting Mirah’s grave, Deronda sees two rabbinical figures about to bury another body in an unmarked grave as someone who has died outside of the faith. It turns out to be Daniel’s mother, and this treatment of his mother’s remains provokes his final angry break with Judaism and he ends up by having both his mother and Mirah reburied in ‘Christian sod’ (ch. 4).

Returning north, Deronda runs into Hans Meyrick in Munich and is taken by him to his ancestral village of Mansbach. High above the village are the ruins of a castle and a church, ‘crumbling remnants of past pomp and glory [...] in all their solemn majesty and phantomic awe’ (ch. 12) which the pair climb up to see; and in this palpably gothic setting, while Hans sketches, Deronda goes to muse under the gothic arches of the ruined church where he is approached by a mysterious stranger in a cloak which he holds folded across his breast. He calls Deronda by name, hands him a casket and disappears into the ruins. The stranger, as one can guess, turns out later to be the Byronic hero-artist Roland, now allegedly a professor in some unnamed discipline, who, by chance and the wonderful workings of romance, has chosen to live alone in seclusion in a hidden, sumptuously furnished chamber amid the ruins of Mansbach castle. Moreover, having seen Gwendolen on a cross-channel packet and heard about her story, he has taken upon himself the task of ensuring that she and Daniel do not suffer the separation that has blighted his and Mrs Davilow’s lives. The Byronic hero serves as a deus ex machina. When Deronda later opens the casket he finds Gwendolen’s bracelet which in George Eliot’s novel he had retrieved from the pawnbroker in Leubronn, except that it was not then a bracelet but a necklace – another indication of how poor a reader of George Eliot Anna Clay Beecher is, even if Gwendolen does on one occasion wind the necklace around her wrist in Daniel Deronda. How Roland came to be in possession of the bracelet or necklace is never made clear, and it is a mark of the slapdash silliness of the whole thing that a few pages later, Gwendolen in Paris, having lost her pocket-book, pawns the same bracelet a second time to pay her hotel bill while Deronda in another part of the city is wandering around with it in his pocket. And the bracelet is on several occasions of returning authorial memory referred to as a necklace.
Thus the banal devices of romance are used with no attempt at logic or consistency to bring about the eventual reunion of Gwendolen and Daniel. That reunion is wearily delayed by various interpolated stories – among them Rex Gascoigne’s account of his love affair with the sister of a communard in Paris; Hans Meyrick falling in love unsuccessfully in Munich; and the tale of a young woman encountered by Gwendolen in Strasbourg cathedral who then drowns herself in the Rhine. Strasbourg cathedral is also the occasion for the expression of another authorial prejudice when Deronda arrives there (he and Gwendolen roam around the same European cities just missing each other). This time the prejudice concerns not Judaism but Catholicism: ‘Deronda looked with loathing at the hypocritical sanctimony of these cringing murmurers of paternosters, and he disdained the ignorant superstition which bowed down to brazen images, and [...] the servile fanaticism which kissed the marble pave trodden by bigoted and greedy priests’ (ch. 14). Deronda may have returned to Christianity but only to a severely Protestant form of it, coloured no doubt by the New England Puritanism we can reasonably ascribe to the author.

Deronda and Roland eventually become friends as a result of another antisemitic episode: Deronda witnesses a sick Jew being violently expelled from a Jewish community, with execrations and spitting, in a town near Mansbach until rescued by a good Samaritan in the person of Roland. It turns out that the sick man’s handsome wife, now dead from grief after her baby son was taken away from its parents, had fallen foul of the community by not having her head shaven of its beautiful golden hair upon their marriage. He had stood by her and was anathematized as a result.

Finally, through Roland’s good offices and surreptitious assistance, Deronda at last catches up with Gwendolen in a German spa, just in time it seems since she appears to be dying from unrequited love, and they are romantically reunited. The novel closes as follows:

The moon rose from out of the fog-enveloped hills, a large, pale-faced targe, and ascended slowly, into the dark-blue ambient of the cloudless sky. A phosphoric sparkling danced over the mirrored surface of the lake, further and further upon the monotonous ripples, till, finally, the reflection lit up from shore to shore. Gwendolen and Deronda are still upon the balcony. They speak of former days, and feast upon each other’s looks. What a reclamation! Those only who, like them, have stood upon the brink of despair, who, like them, have been restored – to life, to hope, and to happiness, can judge their emotions and sentiment at this time. And when, at last, Deronda confessed his undying devotion and love, she sank beneath gratitude and joy, into the expanded arms of her adored lover, – RECLAIMED.

Reclaimed, that is, for the readers of cheap romance who prefer to have their prejudices endorsed and their minds unchallenged, rather than face up to the intellectual demands made by an uncompromising great novelist writing at the height of her powers with a life-time’s erudition at her service.

It is difficult to find anything respectful to say about Gwendolen: or, Reclaimed. Cunningly marketed, as Picker points out, to look like a volume in Harper’s Library Edition of George Eliot’s works, it has apparently sometimes been catalogued as by the novelist herself – an assumption which, as I hope I have made clear, could not outlast the reading of a mere paragraph or two. Not only does it take George Eliot’s work and characters back to, as it were, the infantile stage of the novel’s development in the nineteenth century, so powerfully
eviscerated in 'Silly Novels', but it is directly opposed to the direction in which she is heading in the work that succeeds Daniel Deronda, stressing as she does in Theophrastus Such, to use Nancy Henry’s words, the correspondences between the English and Jewish peoples, ‘the continuities of their religions’ and ‘the similarities of their modern diasporas’. A truer sequel to Daniel Deronda is to be found, I suggest, in ‘The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!’.

Notes

This is the text of a paper given at the George Eliot Conference at Senate House in London on 7 November 2015.

1 ‘Daniel Deronda Book IX’, Mr Punch’s Pocket-Book for 1877 (London, 1877), pp. 188-195. Page references to this article will be given in the text.

2 Anna Clay Beecher, Gwendolen: or, Reclaimed. A Sequel to ‘Daniel Deronda’. By George Eliot (Boston MA; William F. Gill, 1878). There is a recent paperback facsimile of this edition published by General Books of Memphis, USA, available on Amazon.

3 I can find no evidence to support my speculation that she may have been related to the Kentucky abolitionist Cassius Marcellus Clay and had married into the abolitionist Beecher family of New England.


