

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

---

1989

## Review of Reclaimed

Graham Handley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

Handley, Graham, "Review of Reclaimed" (1989). *The George Eliot Review*. 121.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/121>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## RECLAIMED.

by *Graham Handley*

When Middlemarch was being issued in Eight Parts from December 1871 until December 1872, there was a strong readership interest in the fact that Dorothea and Lydgate had made, in each instance, a wrong choice of marriage mate. It went farther than this, some readers even expressing the view that Dorothea and Lydgate would have been ideally suited. With Daniel Deronda, which was also issued in parts from February to September 1876, readership sympathy was also involved. There was much dissatisfaction in Daniel's forsaking of Gwendolen at the end ('I said I should be forsaken,' says Gwendolen in her anguish) and going off to marry Mirah, embrace Judaism, and perhaps come back 'some time.' Indeed, so strong was this sense of frustration in one reader, that he/she wrote a sequel to Daniel Deronda. It was published in 1878. The title-page has Gwendolen: A Sequel to George Eliot's Daniel Deronda. Library Edition. Ira Bradley and Company. 1878, but the first page of the novel has the word RECLAIMED at the top, followed by the first chapter, the latter headed by a motto in the George Eliot manner. The binding of the volume, incidentally, is exactly the same as that of the two-volume American edition of Daniel Deronda published by Harper and Brothers in 1876. I had heard about the sequel vaguely some years ago, and was excited when I found this copy in Coventry Central Library during my visit last October.

The notorious Newby did not issue his sequel Adam Bede Jr, either because of the threat of legal proceedings or because it didn't get written. Unhappily, Reclaimed got written and my excitement on opening it quickly cooled. The opening is sensational enough, the author's wish-fulfilment being quickly translated into fictional fact. Daniel is initially happy with Mirah, but abandons his Jewish views 'consequent upon his observing Jewish life in reality.' We are told that 'the East was growing irksome to him'. He goes on a journey (the journeys in this novel are always fraught with crisis and discovery), having left Mirah in Cairo. He is summoned back: Mirah's child dies, followed shortly afterwards by Mirah herself, at the end of the first chapter. Daniel, whose memory extends back to his first meeting with Mirah on the Thames at Richmond, recites the words he was then singing. The author's translation of these words is given in a footnote, just like the original footnote in Daniel Deronda. An eerie feeling comes over the reader (or perhaps I should say this reader) at this stage. Imagine all the sequels that could have been written after certain novels, and I don't mean sequels like Jean Rhys's to Jane Eyre, for Wide Sargasso Sea has its own fascinations and a particularised artistic independence. But think of a sequel to Tess of the D'Urbervilles. What kind of domestic life did Angel Clare and Liza Lu have? Was she always throwing his love for Tess in his face? Or suppose there was a sequel to Women in Love. Who else did Gudrun help to destroy? Is it possible that she might have an affair with Birkin? I remember in the 1960's a romantic novelist called, I think, Patricia Robins, producing a sequel to the most discussed novel of that decade. She called it Lady Chatterley's Daughter. It was salacious and almost permissive. Reclaimed is dull and Gothic. Gwendolen (unrecognisably dull, conscience-stricken, unvibrant despite the author's use of the word 'elasticity') is brooding.

She broods even more when Mrs Davilow, who still has a 'careworn cheek', chooses this moment to reveal to her that she is really her stepmother. Mrs Davilow then enters upon a long retrospective sequence about her own lost love, who was called Roland. After her confession we switch back to Deronda, who has now returned to Genoa, since Mirah had expressed a wish to be buried next to her brother. He meets two men, who tell him that his mother has been buried in an

unmarked grave. Daniel, always sensitive, collapses at this news, but recovers and learns that his mother had died condemning her own race. (Since she'd done it in life in the real Daniel Deronda, this is not inconsistent). When he has assessed the situation we are told, at the end of the chapter, that 'The resolution which he had formed was carried into effect the very next day. The bodies of his wife and mother were placed in Christian sod, and a fitting monument erected over them.' In the swings-and-roundabouts pattern of Reclaimed we now return to Gwendolen, still brooding, but deciding to spend some time in Dieppe with Anna Gascoigne. She learns, through a letter from Mr Gascoigne, that Daniel has returned from the East and that Mirah is dead. Back to Daniel, brooding in Milan, but determining to go to Switzerland and Germany. He decides that 'Mirah must be forgotten'. We are told that the decision was "the unquenchable void of unrequited happiness", whatever this may mean. The author of Reclaimed is full of wordy sentiment, most of it incomprehensible, a mass of verbiage wrapping up spurious wisdom. Daniel now meets Hans, who is also somewhat obsessed by Gwendolen, for he is painting 'The Vandyke Duchess, in ideal'. Gwendolen meets Mrs Glasher in passing, and Hans takes Deronda to his childhood home in Mansbach. Meanwhile a mysterious stranger - the Gothic overtones are very strong from now onwards - hands Daniel Gwendolen's bracelet. Daniel at once goes in search of Gwendolen, inwardly acknowledging his love for her, while Gwendolen, in her turn, meets a young woman who also has a miserable story to tell of a lost love. Hans becomes a successful artist in Paris. There he meets Rex Gascoigne. The latter is apparently experiencing the kind of identity crisis suffered by Alan Bennett's fictional Virginia Woolf outside the London Library in Forty Years On. 'What, Rex, you here?' said Hans, rising and extending his hand....'Yes, Hans, it is I, although I often doubt it myself.' Rex later tells Hans the story of his life. Deronda goes to Leubronn, meets Mr Vandernoodt, who points out Gwendolen: as we might expect, she is gambling. We are back to square one or, if you like, *in medias res*, the first chapter of the real Daniel Deronda. Gwendolen passes Daniel as she moves out of the salon, but without acknowledgement. The next day he gets the following letter:

"I quail before the spectre of my own imagination; I flee before the consummation of a destiny which, although I have long prayed for, I have not the courage to meet. I am not unkind or ungrateful; I only desire now to spare both you and myself the pain of another meeting. I hope never again to cloud your prospects of happiness; perhaps I may never see you again. Inexorable fate decrees, I obey! GWENDOLEN."

Gwendolen has indeed come a long way. She has learned, one is tempted to say, how to murder the English language. Still following her, Deronda passes through Eberfeld, where he witnesses the extremes of Jewish fanaticism. Roland reappears and is instrumental in bringing Deronda and Gwendolen together. When they finally meet, Gwendolen is so ill that only Daniel's confession of love can bring her round - hence, one supposes, the title of the novel!

As he bent over her closer, a tear trickled down his cheek and fell upon the cold face he deplored. He inwardly asked, Is this Gwendolen Harleth? Is this she who but a few short months ago moved among the chosen few with unequalled grace, adorned with ideal beauty, who was looked upon as the first of women, and to whom proud men paid homage, and sought to unite their destinies, as a goal to render their destiny happy?....One look told him all - in this look was blended love, gratitude, and pity. But, as if ashamed of this sudden betrayal of her long-guarded secret, she withdrew her hand, and cast herself upon Mrs Davilow's neck, and sobbed through tears of joy, "He loves me."

Indeed he does, though his declaration of it is best summarised by the cliché 'Let us forgive and forget.'

George Eliot's sympathetic appraisal of Judaism obviously roused the ire of the writer of this novel (if it can be dignified by that name). Reclaimed is strongly anti-semitic. Deronda is summarily brought to his senses. He is reclaimed himself from Judaism. The tone is nasty, biased, inexcusable. What is incredible to us today is that the novel should have been published at all. The chapter mottoes are uniformly mediocre. There are imitations of George Eliot's style which are really bathetic (and pathetic) parodies. The Gothic manifestations and pseudo-rhetorical profundities are absurd platitudes. But it is an interesting relic. It shows, I think, how strong were the feelings aroused by Daniel Deronda. Of George Eliot's humanism in her novel one could never have been, I would have thought, in doubt. Yet the sentiments expressed in Reclaimed, built on a basis of incipient hatred and rooted prejudice, reached a terrible holocaust in our own century. Reclaimed is a bad and bigoted work, but its disservice to the practice and memory of George Eliot is not merely a literary one. It is an offence against the lasting codes of humanitarian tolerance and enlightenment by which she wrote and lived.