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## DANIEL DERONDA - 1921 STYLE

by Kathleen Adams

While we are still awaiting news of the completion of a new film of *Daniel Deronda*, something that has been in the pipeline for some years, it is interesting to discover that in 1921, a cinema film of the novel was made by Butcher's Film Services Ltd of Camera House, Farringdon Avenue, London EC4. In the 5,500 feet of film Butcher's made a gallant attempt to transfer George Eliot's last great novel onto the screen but previews seemed somewhat disenchanted with the results. The *Kinematograph Weekly* of 19 May 1921 reported that 'Although George Eliot is not ideally suited to the screen, the producer of this picture, with a poor scenario, has made a film that possesses high technical value . . . . George Eliot's novel is, however, too mid-Victorian to make a really notable film; it is, with all its merits, slow and rather tedious. The film tells two stories. As neither is essential to the other, the scenarioist ought to have concentrated on the main story of Daniel Deronda . . . . There is no real necessity for the love tangle of Mallinger Grandcourt nor the introduction of Ezra, the violinist [!] brother'. Later, the reviewer, perhaps to sugar his bitter pill, goes on to say 'Audiences that are not too discriminating will be pleased with this'. Having patronized his less 'discriminating' audience, he does not go on to say what lovers of George Eliot's novel will make of it.

The scenario and production are by W. C. Rowden, who makes a fair attempt to tell a very complex tale, although inevitably much truncated. It begins with Alcharisi taking her twelve-year-old son, Daniel, to Sir Hugo Mallinger for his safe keeping and education. The story moves on fifteen years and we find Daniel telling Sir Hugo that he has saved the life of Mirah and has left her with his friends in Chelsea. Daniel watching Gwendolen gambling is included, also the episode of her returned necklace, but Daniel does not see her again until her wedding to Grandcourt. Mutual recognition alerts Grandcourt to what he sees as an intrigue between his new wife and the young man.

The search for Mirah's brother, Ezra's death, Deronda's trip to meet his mother, and his discovery that he is a Jew are all featured. While in Venice (perhaps Genoa was not photogenic enough!) he receives an urgent call from Gwendolen who is distracted by her husband's brutal treatment of her. Gwendolen declares her love for Deronda and begs him to take her away. Grandcourt returns to the house to find his suspicions about the two of them apparently confirmed. He draws a pistol from his pocket and fires to kill Deronda but the bullet strikes his wife instead and, rendered temporarily insane by this act, he turns the pistol on himself. Despite this travesty of an ending for Grandcourt and Gwendolen, Rowden allows Daniel to return to Mirah; he asks her to be his wife and she gladly consents.

If any of the 1921 cinemagoers troubled to read the novel afterwards they would find very little of Rowden's version in its many pages. After seventy-eight years it is very unlikely that we shall ever discover their views on either book or film, but, if they did not exactly rave about the action, the views of Venice, 'cleverly photographed and beautifully tinted', we are told by the *Kinematograph Weekly*, 'will charm all who see the film'. The review goes on to praise the cast which included Reginald Fox as Daniel Deronda, Dorothy Fane as Gwendolen Harleth, Ann Trevor as Mirah Lapidoth, Madame Duquette as Mrs Glasher, and 'the best of the male

members of the cast undoubtedly Clive Brook' as Mallinger Grandcourt.

When the eagerly-awaited new film eventually appears I think we may expect a story which relates more closely to the one George Eliot wrote. I think we can be certain that Gwendolen and Grandcourt will not die by the bullet.