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***Silas Marner* on BBC Radio 4**

Unheralded in the *Radio Times* and elsewhere, *Silas Marner*, dramatized by Richard Cameron, was broadcast as the Classic Serial on Radio 4 in two one-hour instalments on 16 and 23 October 2011. I was pleased that I spotted it. George Eliot has been favourably treated on radio and television, especially in the past twenty years or so. We've had televised versions of *Silas Marner*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *The Lifted Veil* and *Daniel Deronda* have all been serialized on the radio. Radio 7 recently repeated a broadcast of *Silas Marner* with the late Michael Williams in the title role. Even *Felix Holt* was dramatized on Radio 4 in 2007 – Dinny Thorold reviewed it in the 2009 number of this periodical. *Silas Marner* was the subject of a discussion on Radio 4 in January 2010 in Melvyn Bragg's 'In Our Time', when Rosemary Ashton, Dinah Birch and Valentine Cunningham talked about its relevance to today's readers. (This programme may still be available on the BBC iplayer.)

This Classic Serial adaptation was engaging. The course of the narrative and the dialogue were close to the original text. The accents of the rural characters were convincing but had a touch of northern English. Godfrey (Conrad Nelson) and Dunsey (James Nickerson) spoke in more educated tones, although when they quarrelled they sounded angrier than George Eliot probably intended. As we now expect in broadcast drama, the cast (some of whom took more than one role) was excellent. George Costigan was a melancholy, anxious and loving Silas Marner, Deborah McAndrew a reassuring and wise Dolly, and Terence Wilton an irascible and down-to-earth Squire. The different moods and opinions of the Rainbow chorus, led by Mr Macey (Seamus O'Neill), energetically punctuated the proceedings.

Sounds and music enhanced the drama. The noisy death of Dunsey's horse was immediately contrasted with Silas's quietly spoken pleasure in handling his gold coins. Aaron sang 'God rest you, merry gentlemen' in a clear treble. Distant church bells, a moaning wind and the whimpering baby accompanied Molly's exhausted trudging through the snow. Quiet joyous strings were heard as Silas stroked the little girl's golden curls and strains of Bach's cello music lay behind tense moments. The novelist's reflections were missing, as when she sternly writes of Godfrey's trusting to luck: 'Favourable Chance, I fancy, is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in'. Description was lacking as well, so we lost the opening evocation of the world of Raveloe: 'orchards looking lazy with neglected plenty', the large church, 'the purple-faced farmers jogging along the lanes', and so on. For these elements of George Eliot's art, we must turn to the richness of the novel. But let's be grateful for the pleasures that this dramatization offered: the variety of characters, the turns and contrasts in the story, the implied humane philosophy and a rural atmosphere. The producer and director was Pauline Harris.

Donald Hawes