

Hinterland/y Gwyll (2013-2016) is a crime drama set in West Wales. In season one, episode one (Devil's Bridge, part one), we are immediately drawn into an identity crisis of all things Welsh as there is an over-emphasis that screams out for Welsh culture and heritage to be recognised. Whilst not a bad thing this could have been delivered in a more tactful and subtle manner.

From the opening scene and throughout we are shown wide landscapes of coastline, rolling hills, open fields, natural waterfalls and wild, unruly wooded areas. All architecture from the churches to the council estates look dated and leaves the viewer wondering if the series was shot as late as nineteen-eighties. All of the buildings seen in this episode look old and well worn and with the dated views mentioned, does little to promote the series as a contemporary drama. It's over-all look and feel looks more like a holiday brochure that may appeal more to the older, retired generations than to a younger audience needing more energy and action orientated pacing. Every outdoor shot or view from a window paints a vision of doom and gloom as every skyline is dull and grey or raining and drizzling. There is not one shot of sunlight or even a glimmer of a shadow cast by a tree or building.

In general, the characters are weak and very two-dimensional. You expect this in a season one, episode one of any new series but what hinders the credibility of the characters is some very poor, predictable dialogue. For instance, when DCI Tom Mathias (Richard Harrington) and DI Mared Rhys (Mali Harries) first interview Catrin John (Sara Lloyd-Gregory), she asks the detectives to keep quiet because she has just put her baby down to sleep. In the same scene about a minute later she then

prompts the officers to leave because it's the baby's feeding time. As for predictability, there was then another scene with DCI Mathias and DI Rhys travelling by car. A close up of Rhys was used as Mathias gave a line off-screen and even before he finished delivering the line you knew there would be a beat and then Rhys would turn to look at him with no words spoken.

Despite the 'new series scenario' of actors getting into their characters, some of the performances were a pleasure to watch. In particular, the characters of Jenny James (Sarah Lloyd), Hywel Maybury (Paul Morgans), DS Sian Owen (Hannah Daniel) and the aforementioned Catrin John (Sara Lloyd-Gregory) were all played convincingly and credibly. But the names of the characters themselves were also pushing "This is a Welsh production" to extremes with very Welsh forenames *and* surnames. Of the seventeen credits given on IMDb, only about five were non-Welsh sounding.

The story also relies on the old folklore tale of *The Devil's Bridge*, an 11th Century tale of an old Welsh woman who tricked the devil. While the tale itself is quaint it seems quite obvious that it may have used in sub-story form to again push the fact that the production is Welsh. It does add a little bit of spice to the main story of the episode but I would have thought that this would have been more of a main point to it as it seems to get lost within everything else that has tried to be put across to us. There is also a Celtic circle in the episode which is a mound of stones in a spiral form. I cannot find anything online to tell what exactly they represent but this story seems to use the point as another means to remind us of the productions identity and any of the mysticism that may have peaked the viewer's interest seems to be lost.

Episode two (Devil's Bridge, part two), seems to follow the same formula as episode one; the characters are wearing the same clothes, the new characters fit the same glove as those in episode one, the dialogue is unrealistic, the set-ups are the same, there's still the association of the historic, the skies are still gloomy (except for one sunset scene) and the characters are again two dimensional (even more so than in episode one). Nevertheless, both episodes have a redeeming quality in that they keep you riveted – if only to the point of being able to say, "There. I told you so." When an action or piece of dialogue is precisely as you predicted. There were also the various minor twists again that lead to the conclusion of each which were not as direct as you seen in most other crime dramas. In most cases, such dramas show the motives of the criminal in a fairly direct and logical manner but both episodes of *Hinterland* seem to have taken that a refreshing step further by going deeper into causes and reasoning of why the crime was committed. Also in these dramas the crime usually revolves around vengeance or greed but these episodes centred more on the humane aspect of people wanting what they have lost; a child in episode one and land which should have been inherited in the second.

So far, the series seems to be influenced by *True Detective*, *Heartbeat* and *Emmerdale Farm* on a rainy day. The camerawork seems 'bog standard' with the exception of one or two supposedly clever shots with pulling focus; episode one, an out of focus shot through a door frame to Mathias in another room and episode two where photos are laid out on a bed table and then pulling into focus on Enid Roberts (Valmai Jones). There were also a couple of uncomfortable shots in both episodes and both involving DI Rhys. These were the final shot of the scenes where the actor

holds a pose or facial expression to allow room for cutting/editing and in both cases her facial expression was held for an excessive amount of time before the cut.

As with the many facets of this series some of the cutaways also looked/felt out of place or didn't seem to fit. There was too much emphasis on shots of the landscape, photos, weather and more and everything looked uncared for, dirty or dilapidated. As far as promoting Welsh or Celtic culture I feel the series, so far, paints an almost unpalatable and off-putting view of what can be expected to anyone who may wish to visit. All its characters seem introverted and paranoid and as though they probably wouldn't to be around outsiders anyway. The series definitely needs a lighter approach even in only the smallest amount to give it some credibility. As extreme as the series *Gavin & Stacey* is, it at least shows something of normality in terms of current trends and attitudes. Even the wardrobe of *Hinterland* looks dated and a prime example of that is when in episode two, Mathias is talking to Nia Morgan (Eiry Thomas) on the seafront where she is wearing a flower-patterned coat that looks like it's been around since the nineteen sixties.

If the rest of the series (three seasons) is anything to go by from the first two episodes then I am quite surprised it lasted as long as it did.

My conclusion for the series may look all too negative but in fact, I am looking forward to watching more. Despite the niggling annoyances and its seemingly desperate attempt to shout out to the world that Wales exists, there is something quite gripping about it that I can't put my finger on. On a personal level, I like the humane aspect and the way it delves deeper in human drives and motivations (if

only when the crime has been solved). The aforementioned little twists are also appealing and I'm looking forward to more of them and how the writer(s) can come up with more ways to defy the straight, logical approach of other such series. It's a pity we couldn't have that same insight into the main (currently two-dimensional) characters to a small degree at this early stage. I suspect that will happen more as further episodes progress but I do believe it is important to have that with main characters right from the start so that the viewer can relate to them. I believe this is more down to the writing than to the actors themselves as they look more than capable of taking on the depth. In fact, I should think they probably found it quite difficult to develop their characters with so little to work with.

If the latter two episodes of season one are anything like the first two, I will have enjoyed the first season enough to purchase the following two seasons. If nothing else it will satisfy my curiosity into just how deep the characters will become.

Actually... If nothing else... At least I'll get to see if the coffee machine in the police station gets fixed/replaced or the users of it will finally learn to not use it at all!

(1,498 words)

References:

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