

Research in context

Question 6:

With an emphasis on the welsh language, culture or identity choose a theme or focus on creative practitioners relevant to your field of study and critically analyse your choices. This essay can be presented in welsh or English in discussion with your tutor.

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The Welsh Collier (image one) was painted in 1926 by Evan Walters a welsh artist who was born on 27th November in Llangyfelach, Wales. The painting is an oil on canvas, and measures 77cm x 63.9cm, it is currently on view in the Glynn Vivian Art gallery in Swansea. I think the artist's main thesis is to portray a feeling of sadness and empathy towards the collier, while the key ideas are to draw attention to the subjects identity and link to the culture of the welsh mining community during a time of depression. My own thesis of the painting is that it is 'a subdued and sorrowful painting'.

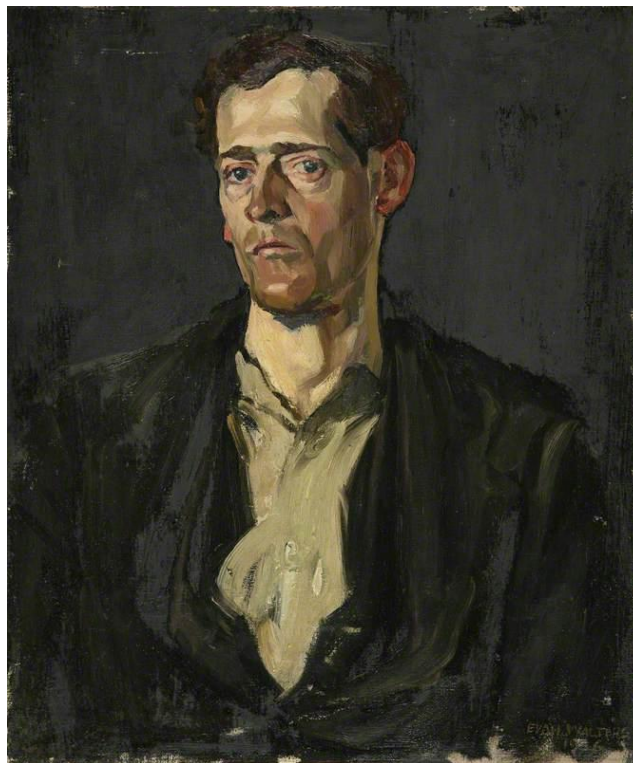


Image 1: The Welsh collier

When looking at this painting I ask myself what is the artist trying to say? In this case I believe the artist is trying to show how the 1926 general strike during the depression affected the mining community of wales. The strike lasted nine days, but some of the colliers remained out of work for months afterwards. At

the time this would have caused a lot of worry to the colliers as they were earning no wages.

The painting is of a solitary real life person. Will Hopkin was a good friend and distant relative of the artist. It was painted at the time of the depression when Will would have been one of the colliers on strike. I think that the artist is using Will to show this message to the viewers. We know that the the artist is welsh and his works are created about wales, so this would suggest that the collier who is his relative is also welsh. I feel that the artist is successful in using the detail in the colliers face to tell the story, it is almost etched upon his face. Barry states:

The central point of commentary and interpretation might be the moralist argument that true value lies in the 'lived life' of the unique individual, and that it is disastrous for the artist to fail to recognise a necessary subservience of art to a communal reality.

(Barry, 1995, p.32)

I feel that this statement relates to the miner as being the point of interest and with the interpretation that the artist is arguing that the miners were important people and unique individuals within the community, and that they are as important as anyone else.

The artist has used a contrast of colours to create a darkness to the painting, mainly blacks and whites, which were probably mixed together to create the greyness in the painting. The value is shown in the contrast that has been used between the lightest tone of white and the darkest tone of black, with the different shades of grey in between. I feel that this technique has worked well and has helped the artist to portray the feeling of sadness and sorrow that the collier would have been feeling at the time of the sitting.

The artist has deliberately drawn the viewer's eye to the collier's face which appears to be the centre point of the painting. The flesh colour has been blended from possibly primary colours of red, blue, yellow and white, the artist has successfully achieved a slightly unhealthy look, by cleverly blending these colours together. This has successfully made me the viewer think that the collier was not a very healthy man.

His jacket is dark, almost black, his shirt looks untidy and is not fully buttoned up which gives me the impression that the artist is trying to send out the message that the miner is stressed or worried about something. I feel that this is the case, as when people are stressed they automatically undo their top button to create a feeling that they are able to breathe more easily or take in more air. I think that this is a clue from the artist to make sure that the viewer's identify this look with one of great sadness and worry.

The painting is set against a dark background which I feel successfully gives the sense that the collier was feeling sad and down at the time. The painting was created during a very dark time for the welsh colliers, I believe that the artist has done a good job of getting this message across to viewers with his use of dark and depressing colours which he has carefully blended in to create that feeling of sadness, empathy and worry.

The body language shows that the collier is almost uptight or tense, his eyes are painted in a way that they look at you and follow you wherever you stand. I feel that the artist has purposely and successfully done this to show that the collier is feeling hopeless and that he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders.



Image 2: Evan Walters and the miners

(Image 2) shows a close up of the miners face, which I feel is etched with sadness, he looks subdued as if he is deep in thought maybe reflecting on the situation he is in, he looks a little worried as if something is troubling him. I believe that the artist has successfully been able to give this impression by the use of darker lines over the face, specifically under the eyes achieving a

shadowed and aged look. The use of the white colour on the face gives a sense of light reflecting and emphasises the look of worry. The careful use of colouring and shaping of the face by the artist has given the impression to the viewer that the collier is not very healthy, the shadowing giving an almost drawn in look and the edges of the mouth are pointing down to create a sullen look. The overall details have made me feel that the artist has successfully achieved the ability to make the viewer believe that the collier is troubled and sad. Williams states that "every portrait I have painted has been a considerable strain, but I believe some of my best work has been of the many interesting faces I have painted." (Williams, 1996, p9). The collier in this case is the interesting face.

The colours used suggest that the artist used a limited range on his palette. There are no strong or striking shades to draw your eye into the painting, just dull, dark shades carefully blended which to me give the sense of depression and sorrow that the artist has successfully portrayed. "The arts, high and low, can express and develop our understanding of who we are and what matters to us" (Gault, 2007, p6). The art in this case relates to the collier, and helps me to understand that he is important and that his livelihood matters to him.

My opinion is that the painting could have been improved to a more narrative form by displaying the miner in a smaller context and adding a small child with its mother into the shadows of the background, in a much smaller scale to give the impression that they are almost faded and only just visible to the eye. This would have been more narrative in the sense that it would develop the feelings that the collier was having by not bringing a wage home to provide for his family.

I believe the Artist has created a painting which has successfully expressed the feelings of sadness, worry and depression that the collier is going through. This I feel has been achieved through careful use of dark colour contrasts, and in the way that the artist has used his brushes and oil paints to create distinguished features, this has left me the viewer feeling subdued and sorrowful at the collier's plight.



Image 3: The Gathering

(Image three) The gathering (Farmers on Glyder fach) was painted in 1982, by Sir Kyffin Williams who was also an oil on canvas artist. The painting measures 122cm x 183cm and can be found on view at the national library of Wales in Aberystwyth. I believe that the artist's main thesis is to portray a feeling of pride and emotion towards his homeland and local people. I think that the key ideas are similar to those of Evan Walters in the painting 'The collier' but in this case Kyffin is drawing attention to his love of Wales, its landscapes, cultures and identity. My own thesis is that I find the painting 'Intriguing and moving'.

Kyffin was born on the 9th may 1918 in Llangefni, Wales. He was known mostly for his landscape paintings of the surrounding welsh countryside, its villages, local livestock and sheepdogs.

What is the artist trying to say in the painting? I believe that the artist is trying to show the viewer how he has managed to capture and paint the surrounding land of his beloved Wales, and just some of the local people he has met throughout his life. I feel that he is drawing attention to the welsh tradition during that time, where local farmers and their sheepdogs would head off into the hills and mountains to gather their sheep. By doing this the artist has been able to successfully link the painting with his welsh heritage, identity and cultures. I feel that he has been able to show a perfect example of one of his main aims in life which was to record the land and people from his childhood. I

feel that the artist was able to achieve this by accompanying the farmers while they went to the mountains and simply painting what he had actually seen. Berger describes images as:

When we 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it. If we 'saw' the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history. When we are prevented from seeing it, we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us. Who benefits from this deprivation? In the end, the art of the past is being mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of ruling classes, and such a justification can no longer make sense in modern terms. And so inevitably, it mystifies. (Berger et al, 1972, P.11)

This I feel can be linked to the artist situating himself within the landscape by accompanying the farmers. If he didn't go and see it for himself then he would have been deprived of the welsh tradition and history which is part of his roots. If he had not experienced it for himself then it would have been a mystery to him. This also links in with the artist's thesis of pride and emotion towards his homeland, as he sees himself in the landscape and a part of it.

The artist has created the painting by using his unique technique of applying very thick layers of oil paints onto his canvas with his palette knife, which he then used to shape his painting. He has purposefully used outlines to make the subjects appear to stand out from the background, it looks like he has added slight contrast around the edges to give the same effect. The use of dark tones and tonal contrast has been used to make the painting appear interesting. The application of the layers of paint, together with the clever use of the palette knife have created a highly textured look, which almost has a roughness to it. This gives me the impression that the artist was feeling a sense of expression such as pride and emotion when painting the piece, which again can be successfully linked to the pride that he feels about his homeland and people. This unique style has left me feeling like I am also a part of what is taking place in the painting.

The artist has painted the farmers and their sheepdogs in a way that has shown their body language with their arms and legs angled. This has successfully given me the feeling that they are moving and not standing still.

The artist has used a limited palette, mainly grey, black and white with some careful blending to make the painting look like it has an edge of darkness and gloom to it. I feel that the clever use of these colours have made the painting feel cold but somewhat intriguing. The value is shown in the contrast that has been used between the dark colours and that of the the bright white of the snow. It appears that the artist has used a heavy hand which I feel has successfully given a good textural quality to the painting. I feel that the careful use of the colours and blending of the thick paint with the palette knife has made the artist successful in showing the viewers that the painting is almost alive and that the subjects are moving over the rocks.

Kyffin was a known expressionist artist. Expressionist art is emotional and I believe that the artist created this piece in a way that it was a kind of escapism. Kyffin suffered with epilepsy and depression, and I feel that this painting was a way of momentarily escaping his depression and the loneliness he would have been feeling. I believe that the artist was able to lose himself in his work and somehow become one with the landscape.

Given the importance of the arts to our self-understanding and to our emotional life, it is hardly surprising that the ethical import of art should have been of recurrent and deep concern to our culture.
(Gault, 2007, P6)

The importance here refers to the artist and his love of his homeland, cultures and local people and how he loves to paint them. It also refers to his emotional life which is recurrent of epilepsy, depression and loneliness. The morals are imported into his heart when painting his beloved Wales, landscapes and people, giving him a sense of escapism when he loses himself into the vast landscapes and culture.

I feel that the artist has been successful in portraying his thesis and key ideas into the painting. The strokes that he has created with his palette knife, the unique technique that he has applied and the choice of colours have beautifully captured the feelings of pride and emotion that he was probably experiencing at the time of painting. I feel that the artist used the dark colours to draw attention to the whiteness of the snow on the ground, so that we the viewers could get a better picture of how the farmers went out into the mountains in

all types of weather to do their work and gather their sheep. This I feel perfectly showed their dedication to their culture and identity.

I believe that the artist was also successful in portraying my thesis of the painting, as he has made the painting interesting in so many ways, which has left me quite fascinated by the history behind it. It has brought out strong feelings in me of sadness and almost a sympathy towards the farmers that they were going out into the mountains on cold, wintry nights to find their sheep.

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