

Multi-Award-winning comedy, *Gavin & Stacey* (2007) bridged a significant gap between English and Welsh cultures through taking stereotyping of these nations and their peoples to the extreme. Despite this over-exaggerated focus on these cultures and possibly regardless of your own background, the program still enables you to feel an affinity with its characters whilst at the same time keeping them realistic enough to still be relatable. *How Green Was My Valley?* (1941) on the other hand, despite being set in South Wales sets the audiences mindset as a depiction of the whole of Wales in general and as a more isolated structure. Few English or even the world as a whole are aware of the rivalry between North and South Wales that still exists today. (Although I suspect that rivalry today is based more on a 'pet hate' basis and is brought about through something that has been passed on from generation to generation for many, many years.)

These two programs are probably not the best examples to take for this exercise as a comparison as both come from very different times with very different attitudes around daily living. With *How Green Was My Valley?* we see a time where family, work and religion were the staples of day-to-day living with a certain sternness keeping everything and everyone inline on a rather narrow track. These were commonly brought about mainly by the father figure, but also the mother figure as well (in this instance through the characters of Gwilym Morgan (Donald Crisp) and Beth Morgan (Sara Allgood). In *Gavin & Stacey*, we still see the importance of family bonds and nurturing but on a much more relaxed, contemporary level. We have Michael Shipman (Larry Lamb), the easy-going, down-to-earth father figure who, for the comedy aspect of the program, is the 'straight guy' with the common sense and

words of wisdom – Just like Gwilym Morgan. And we have Pam Shipman (Alison Steadman) as the nurturing mother, often seen preparing or eating meals with/for her family (and everyone else) – Beth Morgan’s counterpart. Beth and Pam both had comedic lines for their respective programs, although due to *Gavin & Stacey* being a comedy, Pam had many more along with comedic traits centred on that of an Essex girl and the exaggerated tropes that go with that stereotype. And then we have the nurturing symbolism of showing everyone being frequently fed continues with that of Gwen West (Melanie Walters) constantly making omelettes. Even Uncle Bryn West (Rob Brydon) continues the solid, fatherly figure despite the characters’ tendency to look somewhat dim-witted at times. He’s the energy and positivity that binds.

More similarities in these programs appear in the form of the love interests in that the relationships in both initially began as distance-relationships. In *Gavin & Stacey* we have the distance defined by the Welsh/English border and in *How Green Was My Valley?* we have the relationship between Ivor Morgan (Patrick Knowles) And Bronwen (Anna Lee) separated by ‘The Valleys’. The details of any such struggles of distance are omitted with just a mention in the narration about Bronwen coming from the next valley over. Although such a short distance probably wasn’t such a problem in that period of time they nonetheless didn’t have the communication and even travel options that we have available today. So, maybe the difficulties we see in long distance relationships today are actually more on a par in one respect or another to how difficult, and even frustrating, it may have been in the past and the only thing that has changed is the technology. The distance problem is a main plot point in *Gavin & Stacey* where we see numerous trips between Barry Island and Essex involving cars, coaches and trains (and even a lorry if you’re Ness (Ruth Jones)).

Although, towards the end of the series the characters seem to have become accustomed to this and is something they have come to accept with the only remaining concern be that of [travel] time.

Leading on from relationships we come to sexual relations. In the times when *How Green Was My Valley?* released any reference to sex was frowned upon, albeit tongue-in-cheek, and certainly was a no-no for film censors. Nevertheless, the film, and with reference of the Welsh, did make one or two subtle indications that such a matter was quite normal and even back then, the Welsh were quite open-minded about it – quietly. But the bar has been raised in modern times and as with many things about *Gavin & Stacey*, this subject was taken to extremes with such examples as the first time Smithy (James Corden) met Ness and the experience he had with a toilet brush and the time when Ness didn't get up to anything 'adventurous' through sleeping with Smithy again because she didn't have her 'tools' or 'box of tricks' with her. Most notably of all even the sweet, old lady figure of Doris (Margaret John) shows the open-mindedness towards sex by the Welsh with lines like, "A kiss, a cuddle, a cheeky finger. Just don't go selling him the whole farm."

Personally, I've found *How Green Was My Valley?* very difficult to write about because as classic a film as it is with an enjoyable and entertaining story, there is a lot of depth missing to it and you have to think really hard and assume a lot from the things that were or were not said, which in itself is difficult to doing while watching the film. On the other hand, *Gavin & Stacey* shoves everything in your face. You don't really need any time to think, most, if not all the information is there – And more. A lot of this comes about through the way so much is exaggerated; the jokes,

the comedy, the stereotypes. Fair-dos, *Gavin & Stacey* does have a lot more play time which allows for deeper developments of the story(ies) and characters, but after you've watched either, when you go away and those stories linger in your mind, it's still *Gavin & Stacey* that you come away with feeling more filled. In comparison, *How Green Was My Valley?* feels two dimensional as opposed to *Gavin & Stacey*'s three. This may be because *How Green Was My Valley?* is focused on representing Welsh people and culture only, to the world as a whole while *Gavin & Stacey* gives examples which enables you to compare the cultures and the things they are opposed to. Not only is the series a homage to both English and Welsh cultures and peoples' by levelling the playing field of both which forms a harmonious balance, but the series also alleviates some of the misconceptions one country may have about the other. It also educates us about the others' culture in such an entertaining manner that it possibly also dissolves some of the (minor?) race issues that may exist between the two. It isn't possible to say the same of *How Green Was My Valley?* in any shape or form due to the film being an isolated representation of just one country.

Although it is possible to say *How Green Was My Valley?* was a credible representation of the Welsh people and their culture to the mindset and attitudes of the viewers at the time the film was made it is no longer as credible some eighty years on. Those mindsets and attitudes have changed significantly during those eighty years. People seem more open-minded and aware that over-emphasis of any given aspect in a film is a stereotype and most likely very unrealistic. In the case of *How Green Was My Valley?* that over-emphasis is inevitable due to the fact that the director (John Ford) had never been to Wales and even the writer (Richard

Llewellyn) had only spent a few weekends in his childhood there. Because of that lack of experience by both parties, their knowledge of Welsh culture was minimal. This meant the film's story needed to be padded out with the little they did know, i.e. Welsh choruses, hills and valleys, mining towns, all the characters having traditionally Welsh names, which are all common stereotypes of the Welsh. With these things in mind I consider how much a director may play on people's gullibility for the sake of making what appears to be a good film and with a good story but brings in a fat paycheque. On the surface, *Gavin & Stacey* seems to be made with a lot more love and passion, (how could John Ford love a country he's never been to?) In the DVD extras of *Gavin & Stacey* we see the bond between the writers, James (Cordon) and Ruth (Jones) themselves. It seems only natural that if they wished to work on a project together they'd naturally be pulled towards writing such a series as they did. The series utilises the experiences of someone born in Wales and someone born in England making the program much more credible and relatable and (hopefully) people are aware enough these days to see beyond the exaggerated stereotyping but still learn something from those stereotypes that gives insight.

(1,520 words)

References:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0908454/awards>

https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/view_episode_scripts.php?tv-show=gavin-and-stacey&episode=s01e01

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Green_Was_My_Valley

<http://www.bookrags.com/questions/english-and-literature/who-is-merddyn-gruffydd-from-how-green-was-my-valley-and-what-is-their-importance-how-green-was-my-valley-english-andamp-literature-merddyn-gruffydd--how-green-was-my-valley--130669#gsc.tab=0>