

National Pride: Wales in Television and Cinema



Lecture Overview

Part 1: Cinema in pre-WWII

- Early Cinema in Wales
- Cinema in Interwar and Depression-Era Wales
- Miners' Cinemas
- Criticisms of Cinema
- 'American Wales'

Part 2: Film Analysis

- *How Green Was My Valley*
- *Pride*

Part 3: Television in Post-WWII Wales

- Arrival of Television in Wales
- Critiques of Television
- *Teledu Mammon*
- Campaign for Welsh-Language Channel
- S4C
- Television in Economic Regeneration
- *Hinterland — Y Gwyll*
- Television and Tourism

Wales in TV and Cinema

- What might television and cinema tell us about Welsh history and heritage?

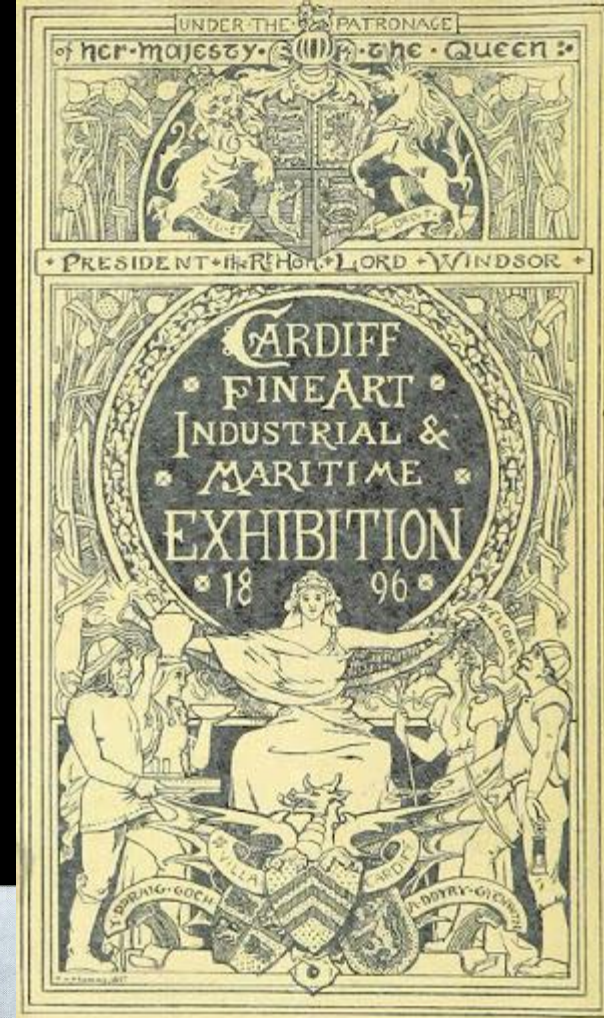
What examples of Welsh television and cinema are you familiar with, and what are some of their distinctive features?

What sorts of narratives, aesthetics and characters are associated with Welsh television and cinema? Are there any 'stereotypes' that stand out?

Part 1: Cinema in Pre-World War Wales

Early Cinema in Wales

- 1895 – *Lumiere Brothers debut in Lyon*
- 1896 – footage of royal visit to Cardiff filmed & shown at Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition
- 1898 - William Haggart (1851—1925) films of Rhyl; British Biograph Company film of Conway
- 1903 – Haggart makes innovative narrative film *Desperate Poaching Affray*
- 1907 – Charles Urban Company, [North Wales, England: The Land of Castles and Waterfalls](#)

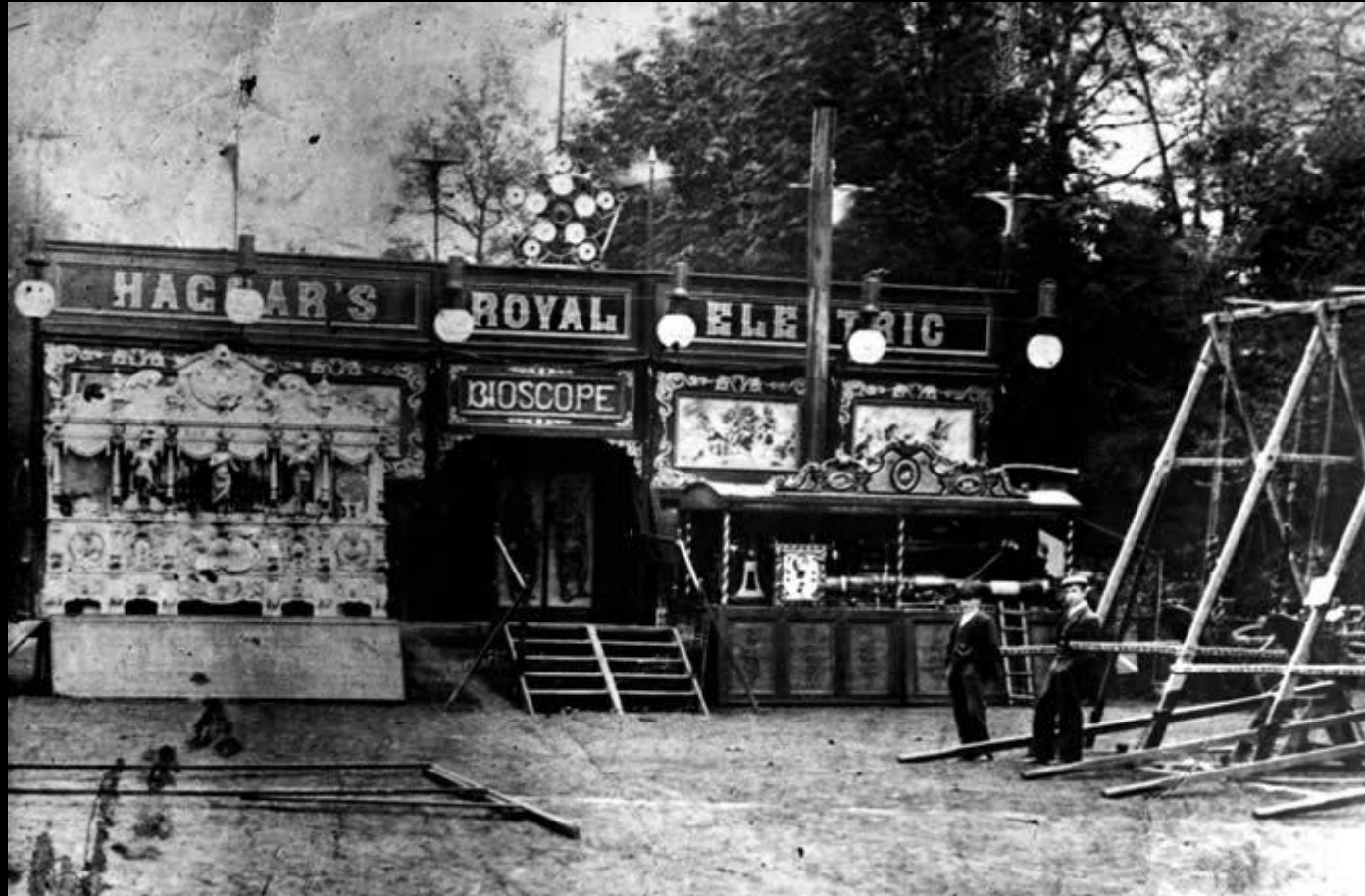


Conway Castle (1898)

Desperate Poaching Affray (1903)

Haggar's Travelling Bioscope

Haggar's Cinema, Pembroke



Cinema in Interwar Wales

- Cinema-going expanded massively in the interwar period – becoming one of the most popular pastimes in South Wales. What might have been the attracting of watching films and going to the cinema during this era? What types of social and cultural functions might the cinema have served?
- Cinema audiences increased in the 1930s despite a long period of economic depression. Why might this have been so? What was the appeal of the cinema?

Cinema in Depression-Era Wales

At nights there are the pictures, and the long queues outside the 'picture house' probably account for more of the 'pocket money' of the unemployed than do the public house, although the 'Clubs' are said to do good business all day long. In a drab and empty existence the 'pictures' provide some colour and excitement.¹⁵

'Thank God for the pictures', is what I have hundreds of times heard from the lips of the people, particularly the women, of this region during the lean and shadowy years of the past decade ... 'If I don't get a few penn'orth o' pictures a couple o' times a week it's off my head I'd go.'²⁶

- Hilda Jennings (top) and Jack Jones (bottom) on cinema-going in Wales, cited by Stephen Ridgwell, "South Wales and the Cinema in the 1930s,' *Welsh History Review = Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 17:4 (1995), pp. 593, 595.

Cinema in Depression-Era Wales

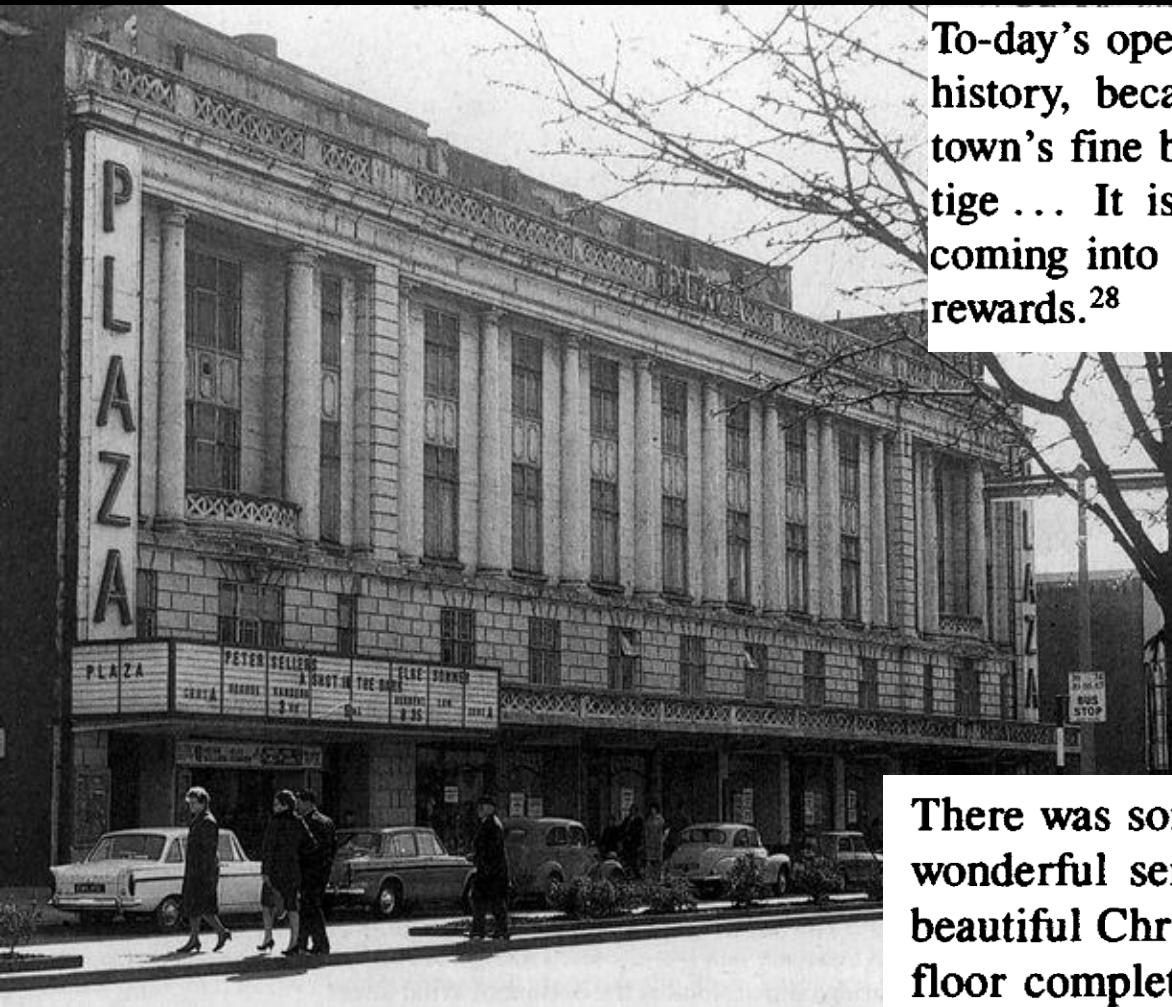
Archie Lush, in his study of *The Young Adult in South Wales*, discovered that unemployment in young males was more likely to produce boredom, 'a continuous sense of boredom'.¹¹ It was obviously important that such an insidiously undermining process should be counteracted and here the cinema proved to be a key institution: Lush records how

frequent visits, as long as finances allow, are customary ... 22 per cent of the sample were in the habit of visiting a cinema at least twice a week ... It gives young men opportunities for a form of a substitute vicarious self-expression.¹²

Similarly, Gwynne Meara, in her 1936 study of juveniles in south Wales, found that:

Of all the attractions outside the home, the cinema is pre-eminent. Most boys and girls go to the cinema at least once a week; many go twice ... The cinema forms a very real background to their lives ... it is a habit which introduces some amount of gaiety and welcome change into lives which would otherwise be very drab and empty.¹³

Cinema in Depression-Era Wales



To-day's opening of the new Plaza cinema is an event of importance in the town's history, because it signifies the inauguration of a most striking addition to the town's fine buildings, and therefore an enhancement of its attractiveness and prestige ... It is a handsome and improving addition to the newer Swansea that is coming into being ... a bold speculation that all can only hope will meet with its rewards.²⁸

– On Plaza Cinema, Swansea *South Wales Post*, February 1936 and letter to author cited by Ridgwell, 'South Wales and the Cinema in the 1930s,' p. 596.

There was something special about the Plaza ... nothing had been spared. It had a wonderful sense of spaciousness, the decor was so pleasing, and there was that beautiful Christie organ with its illuminated console which would rise up out of the floor complete with the organist in tails, who would provide 15 minutes of sheer entertainment.²⁹

Miners' Cinemas



Miners' Welfare Hall, Resolven



Miners' Institute, Blackwood

Miners' Cinemas and Spanish Civil War



Welsh Volunteers of
the XV International
Brigade b, 1938



Criticisms of Miners' Cinemas

From time to time, criticism has been forthcoming of the manner in which Miners' Welfare Halls have been utilised after their erection at considerable cost ... At their origin these public centres were exclusively used for the purpose of miners' meetings, and recreational pursuits of different kinds.⁸¹

It is regrettable that the Miners' Welfare Centres in various localities are reported to be not fulfilling in all cases the purpose contemplated at the time of erection ... the fortunes of the centres have been mixed, but devotion to cinema purposes exclusively, or mainly, was never their purpose.⁸³

- *South Wales Evening Post*, December 1937 cited by Ridgwell, 'South Wales and the Cinema in the 1930s,' p. 596.

American Cinema in Wales

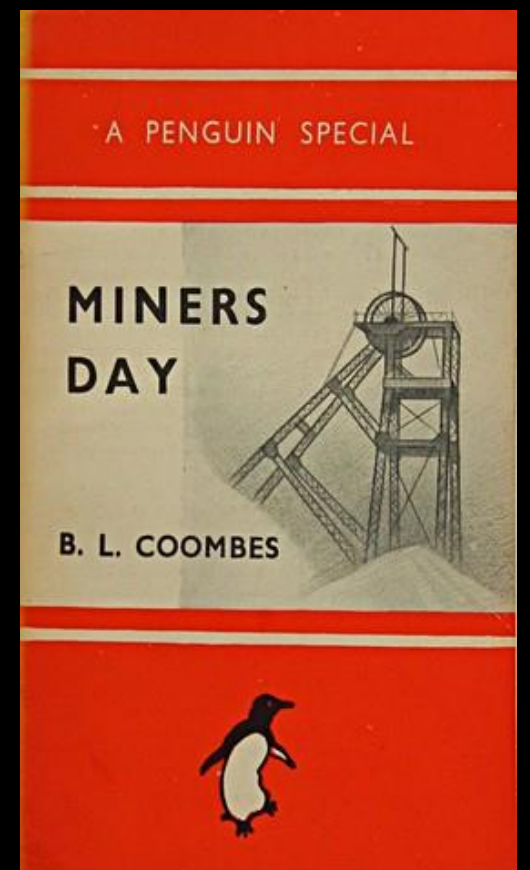
TABLE 2 Genre preferences at the Cwmllynfell Miners' Welfare Hall cinema, 1937–1939, divided by country of origin (first features only)

Genre	American	British	Total
Drama	22	7	29
Comedy	14	6	20
Musical	4	8	12
History	8	3	11
Adventure	6	3	9
Romance	3	3	6
Total	57	30	87

Robert James, 'A Very Profitable Enterprise': South Wales Miners' Institute Cinemas in the 1930s,' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 27:1 (2007): 27-61.

Criticisms of Miners' Cinemas

Bert Coombes, *Miners' Day* (1945)
cited by Ridgwell, 'South Wales and
the Cinema in the 1930s,' p. 610



the regular nightly film shows have driven all other interests away. Unless you want to see a picture it is better to keep away after early evening, for you will get neither room nor peace. I do not believe it was the ideal to compete with other cinemas when the Welfare Halls were built ... What the Halls were for was to supply a permanent place where other types of culture should be nurtured.⁹¹

Criticisms of Miners' Cinemas

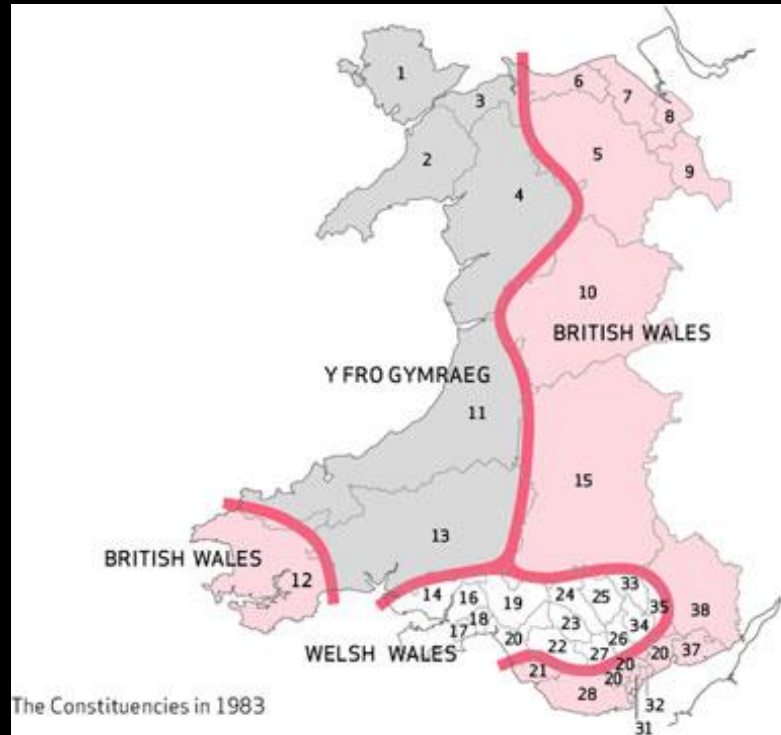
Bert Coombes, very much the archetypal self-improver, who chose to leave the 'pub and the pictures to others', preferring instead the pleasures of 'Saturday Night Theatre' and a good book, and who once saved all winter so that he might be able to attend the National Eisteddfod, was similarly disconcerted by what he saw as the increasing tendency in south Wales of allowing native 'speech and culture to be conquered'.⁹² Reporting on the way in which 'Americanisms have come to Rhondda in the wake of the film and the delightful local accent is broken up by such words and phrases as "Attaboy!" "Oh Yeah!" and "Sez You!"', H. W. J. Edwards was likewise to see little of virtue, and much of harm, in the cinema.⁹³ As might be expected, the chapels were extremely vocal in their opinions on the dangers of the cinema; one cinema-goer of the time recalled how 'we were constantly admonished, particularly from the pulpit, of the evil of the cinemas from a moral point of view, and the perils that cinema-going posed for the future of our language and culture'. Indeed, it was

‘American Wales’

There is not one Wales; there are three Wales. There is Welsh Wales; there is industrial, or as I sometimes think of it American Wales; and there is upper-class or English Wales. These three represent different traditions. They are moving in different directions, and if they all survive, they are not likely to re-unite.

- Alfred E. Zimmern, *My Impressions of Wales* (London: Mills and Boon, 1921).

'Three Waleses'



1 Ynys Mon
2 Caernarfon
3 Conway
4 Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
5 Clwyd South-West
6 Clwyd North-West
7 Delyn
8 Alyn and Deeside
9 Wrexham
10 Montgomery
11 Ceredigion and Pembroke North
12 Pembroke
13 Carmarthen

14 Llanelli
15 Brecon and Radnor
16 Gower
17 Swansea West
18 Swansea East
19 Neath
20 Aberavon
21 Bridgend
22 Ogmore
23 Rhondda
24 Cynon Valley
25 Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
26 Caerphilly

27 Pontypridd
28 Vale of Glamorgan
29 Cardiff West
30 Cardiff North
31 Cardiff Central
32 Cardiff South and Penarth
33 Blaenau Gwent
34 Islwyn
35 Torfaen
36 Newport West
37 Newport East
38 Monmouth

Daniel Balsom
'The Three
Wales Model, in
*The National
Question Again:
Welsh Political
Identity in the
1980s* ed. by
John Osmond
(Llandysul:
Gomer Press,
1985), 1–17.

The Welsh-speaking, Welsh identifying group is perhaps most distinctive and largely centred upon the north and west of Wales. This area is designated **y Fro Gymraeg** [the Welsh language area]. **The Welsh-identifying, non-Welsh-speaking group is most prevalent in the traditional south Wales area and labelled Welsh Wales.** The *British identifying non-Welsh speaking group dominates the remainder of Wales, described therefore as British Wales.*

Critiques of Cinema

**From Merthyr to Dowlais the tramway climbs,
A slug's slime-trail over the slag heaps.
What's nowadays a desert of cinemas,
Rain over disused tips, this once was Wales.⁷⁹**

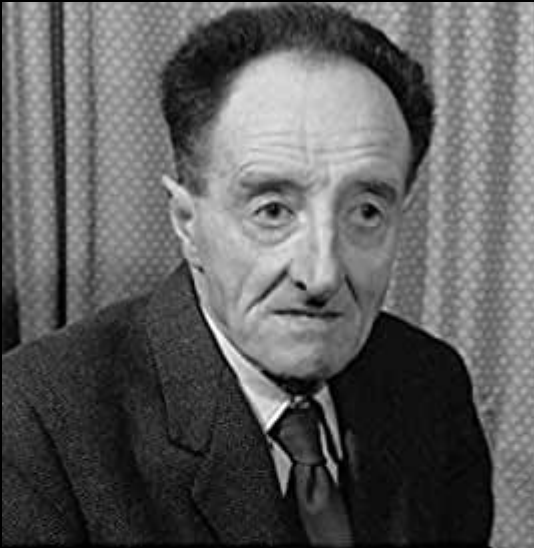
The tramway climbs from Merthyr to Dowlais,
Slime of a snail on a heap of slag;
Here once was Wales, and now
Derelict cinemas and rain on the barren tips

Different
translations
of Saunders
Lewis, *Y
Dilyw 1939*
(translated
as 'The
Deluge
1939'),
originally
published in
1942

Saunders Lewis (1893–1985)

Welsh nationalist poet and playwright

Founder member of Plaid Cymru; chair 1926—1939; imprisoned 1936 for starting fire at RAF Penyberth



Darlith Radio 1962
Saunders Lewis:
“Tynged yr Iaith”

Saunders Lewis' 1962

*Radio Lecture:
“Fate of the Language”*

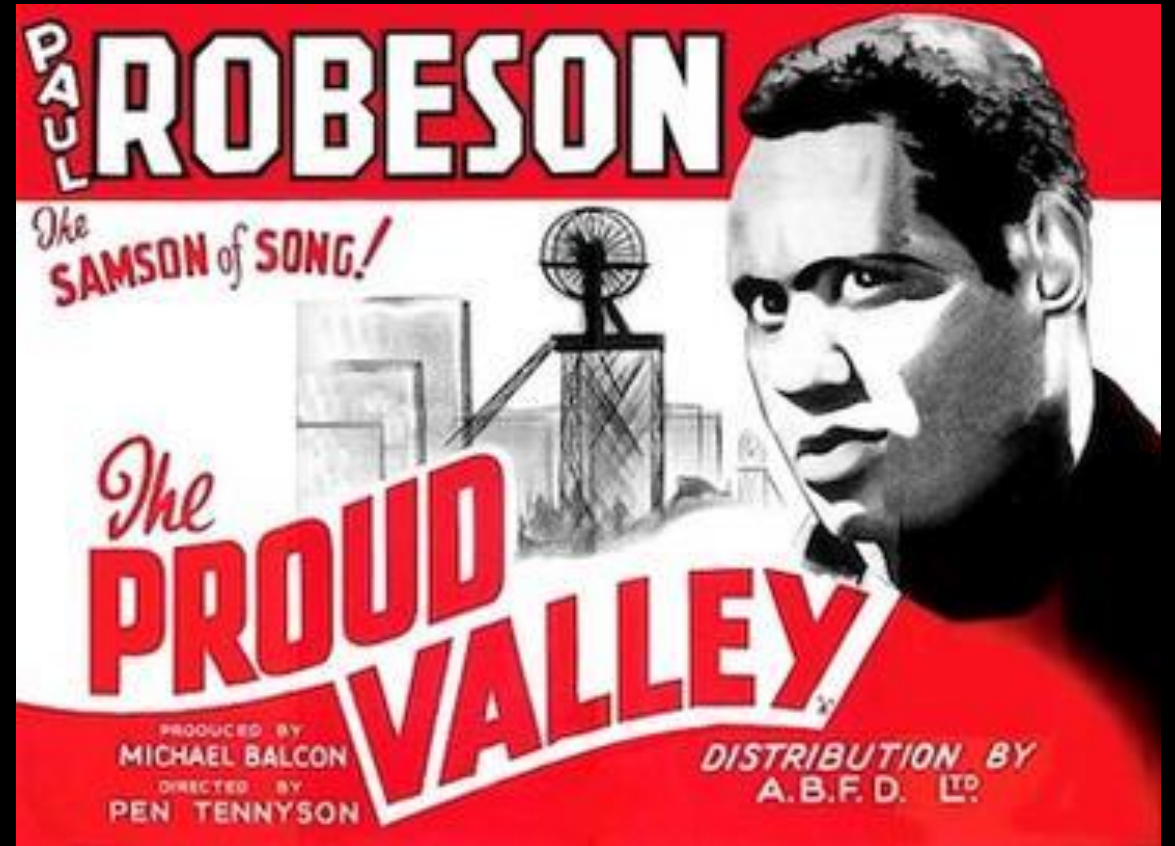


Watch *Writing On The Line*
(1992) documentary by Gwyn
A Williams on Saunders Lewis
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qayhc9KugOY>

Hollywood Comes to Wales



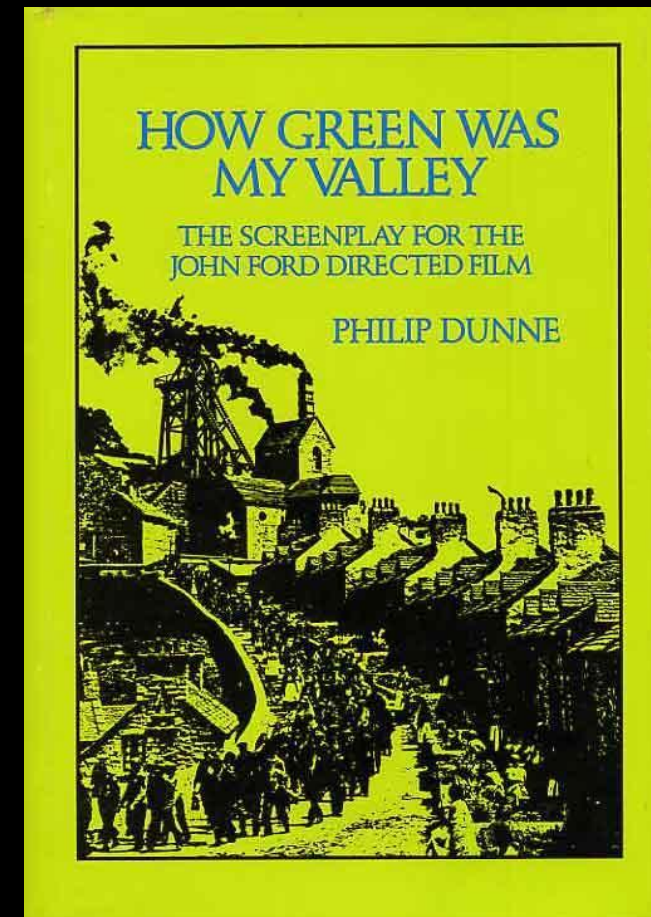
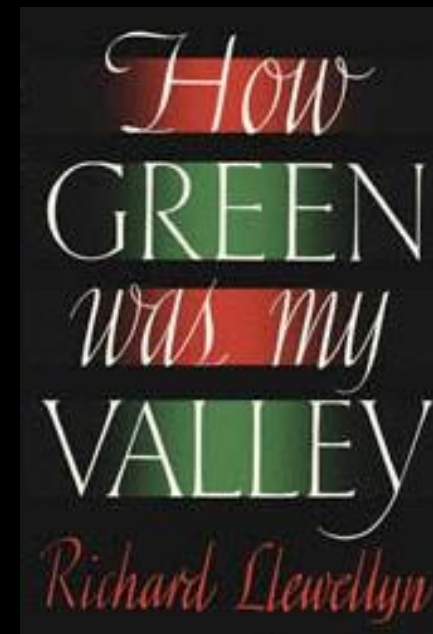
1938



1940

Part 2: Film Analysis

How Green Was My Valley (novel 1939, film 1941)



How Green Was My Valley (1941)

- What did you make of the film?
- What 'image' of Wales does the film convey?
- What social and political themes and ideas does the film engage with?
- What other films might it be compared to?
- How do you interpret the film's opening (and ending)?

How Green Was My Valley (1941)

At the beginning of *How Green Was My Valley*, the montage establishes both the past tense of the title and the vague time 'before all this' that the flashback-framed narrative is set in, suggesting a frightening present. In these opening shots (which are also the film's final images) industry is central to the film's oppositional thematic structure and, as in *Metropolis* (1927), it is presented as a demonic and all-consuming force that leaves only zombies in its wake. Thus the streets are empty except for wistful old ladies and broken child labourers who pass by, heads down. The wind whips up a dust cloud and above it all the pyramid of the slag heap bears down upon the village. A line of men bent double feed this hungry beast by depositing more and more debris. We can see their silhouettes standing out against the grey sky, as they march antlike up and down its slopes.

- Daryl Perrins, 'Arcadia in Absentia: Cinema, the Great Depression and the Problem of Industrial Wales,' in *Regional Aesthetics: Mapping UK Media Cultures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015): 35—54, ppp. 40—41

How Green Was My Valley (1941)

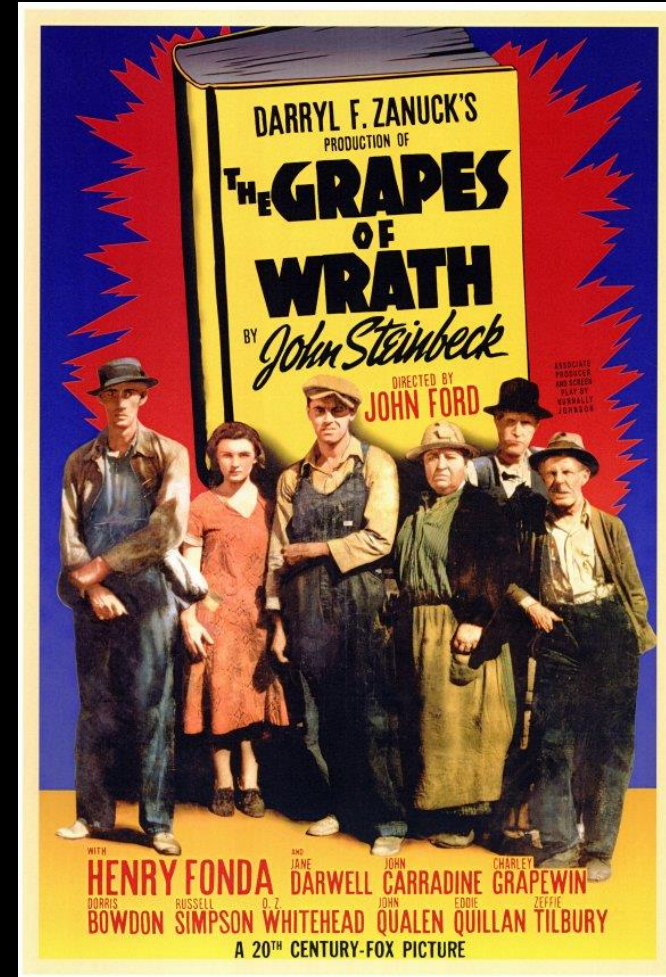


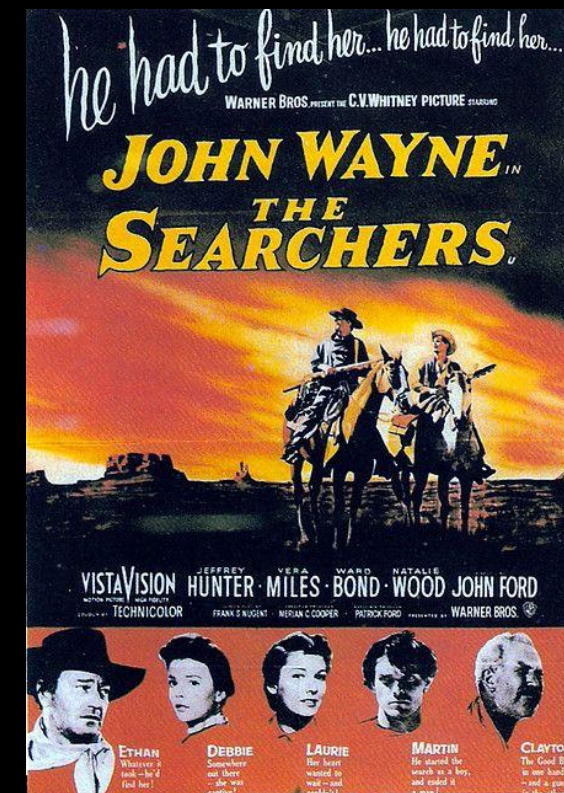
How Green Was My Valley (1941)

“How Green was My Valley ... and ... The Grapes of Wrath ... proved that films of social realism could do well at the box-office and bring in new kinds of audiences.

“[set in] a mythical Shangri-La [which] ensured the exclusion of even the limited labour content that there had been in the original novel ... so this story of Welsh coal-miners became just a hymn of faith in the American family.”

- Peter Stead, *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 95—96





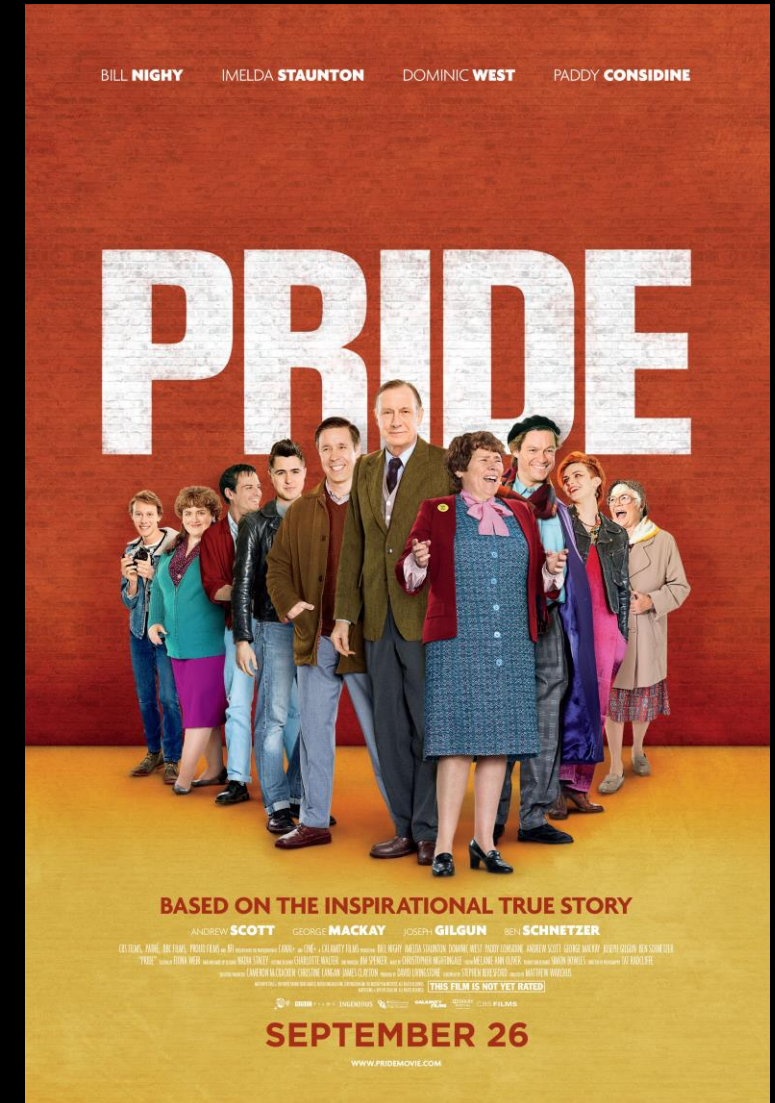


“Ford added his own touches derived from his own family memories and from Irish tradition, observing: ‘The Welsh are just another lot of micks and biddies, only Protestant.’”

- Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 217.

Pride (2014)

- How does *Pride* compare and contrast with *How Green was My Valley*?
- What did you make of *Pride*?
- What 'image' of Wales does *Pride* convey?
- What other films might it be compared to?
- What do you make of the film's representation of gender?



Pride (2014)



'The Welsh Mam'

Welsh women are culturally invisible. Wales, land of my fathers, is the land of coalminers, rugby players and male voice choirs. Welsh cultural identity is based almost entirely on the existence of these three male groups. Not only are these groups exclusively male but they are *mass* groups. Think of Wales and you think of Welshmen in *large numbers*: at the rugby match, in the mines and in the concert hall. Besides their corporate ranks, the tiny, usually solitary figure of the Welsh woman in national costume pales further into insignificance. She was only a bit of trimming on the male image of Wales anyway. Not only is the dominant image of Wales male and mass, it is also macho. Coalminers and rugby players evoke visions of strong male bodies caked with grime and of rippling muscles glistening with sweat: this hard image is brought into somewhat softer focus around the edges by the sweet harmony of tenor, bass and baritone voices. The picture of Welshness is complete. The amazing point about this picture, is that it is constructed on an extremely narrow base. It has been constructed with reference to only one sex, to only one class and to only one sector of the Welsh economic base; the industrial sector.¹⁷



Deidre Beddoe, 'Images of Welsh Women,' in *Wales: The Imagined Nation*, ed. by Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986): 225-238.

Part 3: Television in Post-World War Two Wales



Arrival of Television in Wales

“.... With the opening of the new Wenvoe transmitter in the Vale of Glamorgan in August 1952, the people of south Wales learned that they were expected to share their mast with north and east Devonians, and the West Country was only marginally less dismayed than Wales at this dent to regional self-esteem. The first Welsh language programme, in March 1953, was a portrait of the famous quarryman turned autodidact and bibliophile, Bob Owen of Croesor. It excited many complaints from the English viewers who had to watch it as well, despite it being only twenty minutes long and in a slot normally filled by the test card. ‘I hope the English will cry with pain,’ wrote the *Western Mail*’s broadcasting correspondent. ‘The louder they cry, the sooner Wales will have its own television service.’”

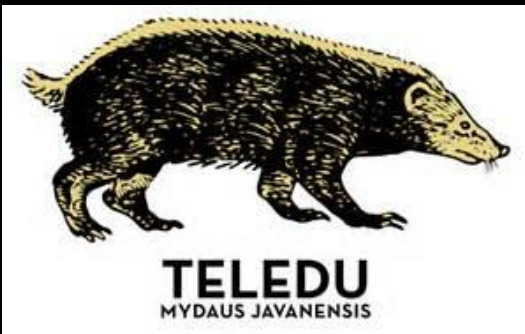
- Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV* (London: Profile, 2013), p. 70.



Arrival of Television in Wales

“.... Another urgent patriotic requirement was to find a settled Welsh word for television, *Radiolygiad* (radio eye), *Radlunio* (radio pictures), and *telefisiwm* all being used without enthusiasm. A competition was launched and in May 1953 the chief judge T.H. Parry-Williams, professor of Welsh at Aberystwyth, announced the winner, *Teledu* – even though, as someone pointed out, this was also the name of the Malayan stink badger.’

- Moran, *Armchair Nation*, p. 70.



Arrival of Commercial Television in Wales

“The BBC’s monopoly on television broadcasting was broken when Independent Television broadcast for the first time in September 1955, to the London area initially. The network of programme contractors grew with the result that ITV came to Wales for the first time in January 1958. The company awarded the licence to broadcast was Television Wales and the West (TWW), a station which covered both south Wales and the west of England from the St Hilary transmitter in Glamorganshire. Television viewers in north Wales were catered for by Granada, the Manchester-based company whose transmitter at Winter Hill reached as far as parts of Anglesey. There was no ITV television service available to the population in west and mid Wales.”

- Jamie Medhurst, ‘Wales Television—Mammon's Television’? ITV in Wales in the 1960s,’ *Media History*, 10:2 (2004): 119—131, p. 121

Critiques of Television: *Teledu Mammon* (1962)

The fact that there are a good number of Welsh people who have invested in this company will not impress the advertisers. They have only one measure—the size of the audience. This is the foundation of their ungodly profits over the last few years.

... A cultural medium as important as television should not be at the mercy of the soap powder manufacturers and nylon stocking sellers. This should not be the case even if their greed for profits is tempered by warm-hearted Welshmen directors.

- *Teledu Mammon* pamphlet cited in Medhurst, 'ITV in Wales in the 1960s,' p. 127

Critiques of Television: DH Culpitt, 'Yr Oes Olau Hon' ('This Enlightened Age'), *Blodau'r Ffair* (1961)

Mae ffyrch y diawl i'w gweld yn awr

Ar gornel simnai'r Hendre Fawr;

I fangre dethol geiriau da

Daeth roc an' ro^l a'r tsha, tsha, tsha

...

Daeth 'Take your Pick' a 'Treble
Chance'

I dy cymydog gwr y Mans...

A siarad geir am Peri Como

'Mhlith hysbysiadau 'Teid' ac 'Omo';

I'r aelwyd gynt lle bu y ga^n

Daeth dyfeisiadau uffern da^n,

Ac ym mythynnod Cymru Wen

Mae'r diawl unllygad heddiw'n ben.

Daeth barn ar fyd! Gyfeillion, dowch

I'r encilfeydd! O bobol, ffowch! [38]

Critiques of Television: DH Culpitt, 'Yr Oes Olau Hon' ('This Enlightened Age'), *Blodau'r Ffair* (1961)

The Devil's forks can now be seen

On the corner of the chimneys of
Hendre Fawr;

To the place of good words

Came rock 'n' roll and cha cha cha...

Take Your Pick and Treble Chance

Came to the home of the neighbour
of the manse...

And we hear talk of Peri Como

Amongst adverts for Tide and Omo

To the hearth where once the song
reigned

The devices of hell now reign,

And in the cottages of Wales

The one-eyed devil is now in place.

Judgement day is here! Friends come

To the retreats! O people flee!,

Campaign for Welsh-Language Channel

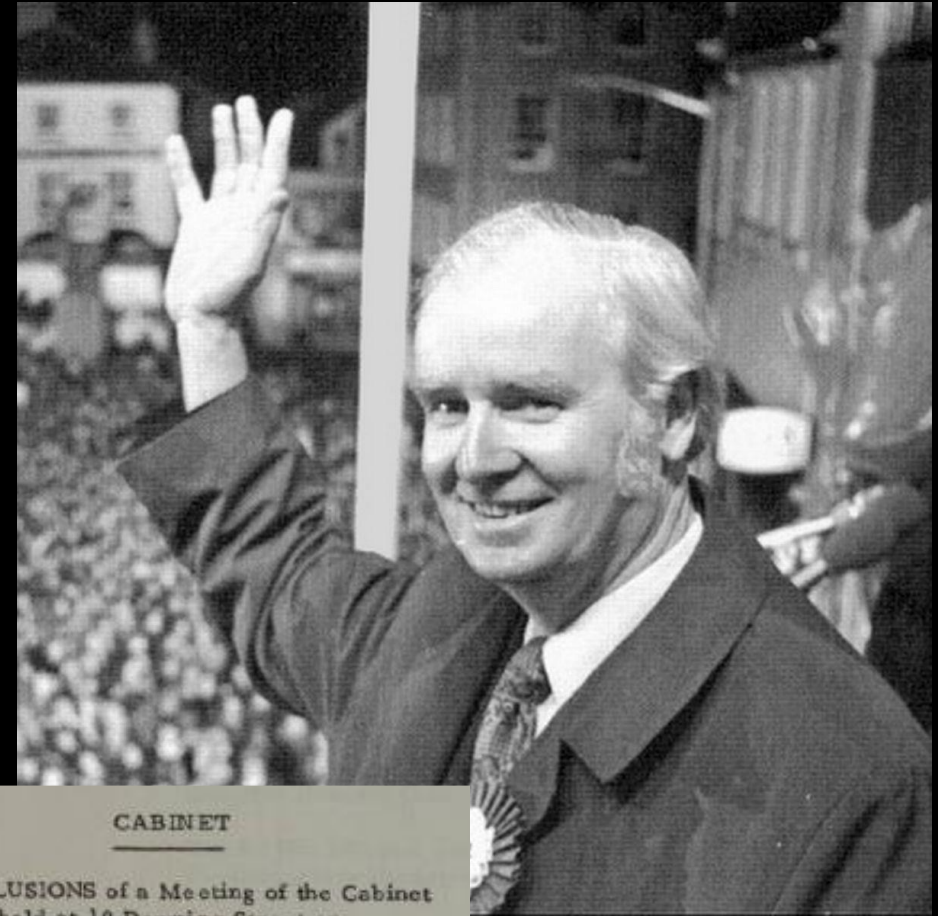
The campaign for a Welsh language television channel, spear-headed by the small but vocal Welsh Language Society, was also reaching a climax. At the national *Eisteddfodau*, speakers often pointed out television's baleful influence in not only presenting an almost unbroken diet of English but also in cutting down the amount of talking, which could have been in Welsh. Welsh language protestors, many of them students or lecturers at Welsh universities, began climbing up television transmitters and trying to disrupt programmes. At 9.05 p.m. on 4 March 1977, protestors invaded the buildings at the Winter Hill transmitter on the West Pennine Moors and managed briefly to switch off the ITV series *Raffles* across the Granada region. 'I tried to explain that radio and TV signals are no respecters of geographical or political boundaries,' wrote the duty officer, 'and I tried to point out to them that inhabitants of N. Wales did not have to tune their sets to the Granada channel if they did not wish to receive it. But all this fell on deaf ears.'

- Moran, *Armchair Nation*, p. 221.

Campaign for Welsh-Language Channel

Gwynfor Evans MP (1912–2005) – threatened hunger strike in 1980 to force Conservatives to fulfil election pledge to est. Welsh-language channel

THE HOME SECRETARY said that, with the agreement of the Secretary of State for Wales, he had announced on 17 September that the Government would withdraw its plans to share Welsh language programmes between two television channels. Instead the programmes would, for an experimental period of three years, be broadcast on one channel, as had been proposed in the Party Manifesto. He still thought that the previous plans were preferable but he had agreed to change them in response to representations, put to him by Lord Cledwyn and others, of the views of informed and responsible opinion in Wales. The change would have the advantages of avoiding a likely defeat in the House of Lords during the Committee Stage of the Broadcasting Bill and of persuading Mr Gwynfor Evans, the leader of Plaid Cymru, to withdraw his threat to fast to death.



CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on
THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 1980
at 10.30 am

Campaign for Welsh-Language Channel

Advocates of a separate Welsh channel professed concern for the non-Welsh-speaking majority who had to put up with Welsh programmes like the BBC's Carmarthenshire-set soap opera, *Pobol y Cwm*. This had long been a complaint of Wales's non-Welsh speaking majority. In 1964, more than 5,000 viewers in Aberystwyth signed a petition protesting about the launch of a new BBC television service for Wales, fearing they might lose their favourite programmes, like *Z Cars* and *Steptoe and Son*, for Welsh language ones. According to a Radnorshire parish council in a 1973 submission to the Committee on Broadcasting Coverage, these Welsh programmes made most Welshmen 'aliens at their own firesides'. Wales had become 'a television electrician's paradise', with non-Welsh speakers paying to have their aerials retuned and turned towards English transmitters.

- Moran, *Armchair Nation*, p. 221.

Campaign for Welsh-Language Channel

The writer Gwyn Thomas ... dismissed Welsh as 'elitist gobbledygook'. Even some Welsh language loyalists did not want a separate channel. Jac L. Williams, Professor of Education at Aberystwyth, wrote many letters to newspapers from 1973 until his death in 1977, arguing that it would exile Welsh speakers to a broadcasting ghetto on an obscure wavelength. By the end of the 1970s, a 'Ban Welsh Telly' group had acquired 30,000 members in monoglot Avon and Somerset. The movement was strongest in Weston-super-Mare, where 'Ban Welsh Telly' stickers adorned the rear window of every other car. Even today, the town's residents attribute antipathy to the Welsh to the days when they had to watch Welsh-language television. When, in September 1978, HTV, the Welsh ITV station, dubbed the western film *Shane* into Welsh, the 'Ban Welsh Telly' group complained to the newly formed Commission for Racial Equality. Both Welsh and non-Welsh speakers seemed equally disapproving of Wyoming cowboys conversing in Cymraeg, and it was sufficiently imprinted in the nation's memory that, twenty-three years later, the MP for Ceridigion, Simon Thomas, told parliament: 'That experiment has gone down in Welsh history and will never be tried again.'

- Moran, *Armchair Nation*, p. 221.

Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C) – first broadcast 1982

WALES4CYMRU



Television and Economic Regeneration

Roath Lock, Cardiff Bay – opened 2012

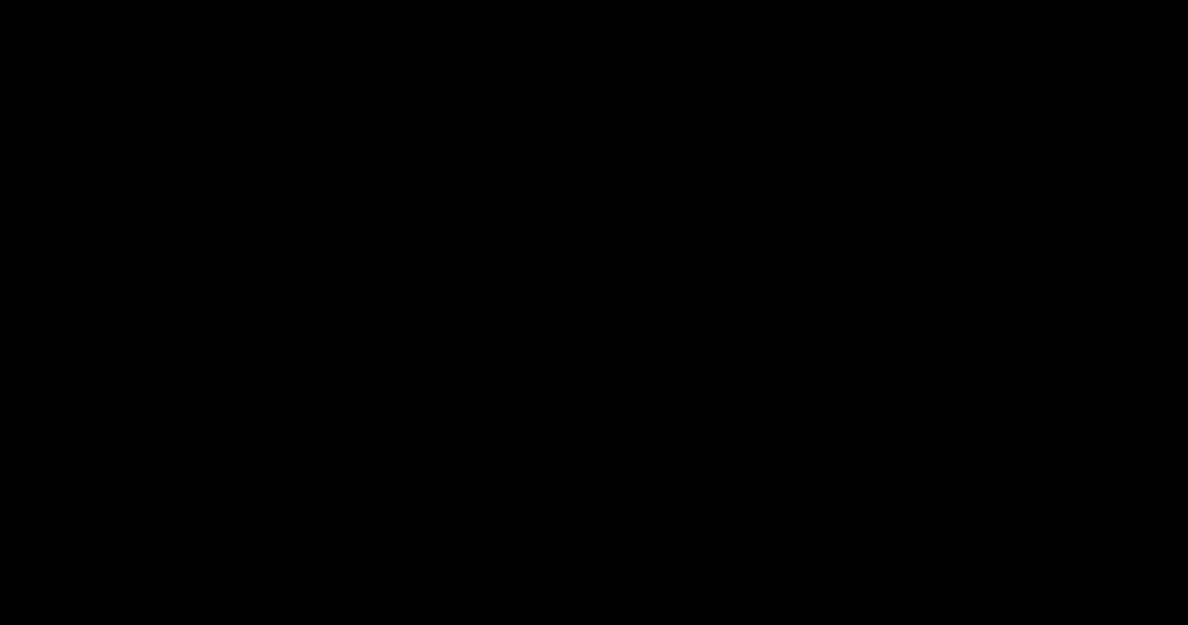


Hinterland — *Y Gwyll* (2013—2016)

- What might this series tell us about contemporary Wales?
- How does the series make use of Welsh history and heritage?
- How does the series make use of West Wales locations and the landscape?







Hinterland — Y Gwyll

- Background image in many scenes

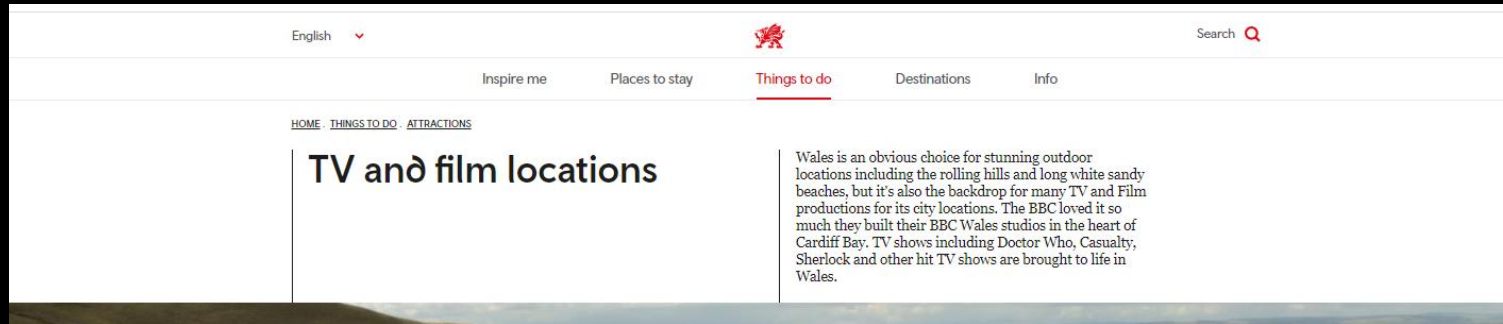


Sydney Curnow Vosper,
Salem (1908)

Hinterland — Y Gwyll

- How might the following versions of the series have ‘played’ to different audiences:
 - Welsh language on S4C
 - English language (with some subtitled sections in Welsh) on BBC4
 - English language on Netflix
 - German-language (*Inspector Mathias – Mord in Wales*) dubbed on ARD?

Television and Tourism



TOURIST TRAP



Television and Tourism

