John Ormond and the BBC Wales Film Unit: Poetry, documentary, nation.

Smith, Kieron

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Kieron Smith

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Thesis Summary

This thesis is a detailed examination of the films of Swansea-born poet and BBC Wales documentary filmmaker John Ormond. It examines the uses of the documentary form within the context of a broadcasting institution that many have argued has been one of the central agents in the political and cultural development of this small nation.

Given that the thesis is concerned with the work a decidedly creative figure, it seeks throughout to keep in focus Ormond's unique contribution to the documentary form. It begins with an interpretation of Ormond's broad cultural and philosophical framework as embodied in his poetry, and from here goes on to explore the ways in which this thinking impacted upon his approach to film as a medium and, particularly, the documentary as a cultural form. It positions Ormond's approach to documentary within the tradition of the Griersonian 'British Documentary Movement', in particular its post-war manifestations on British television as pioneered by producers such as Denis Mitchell, Norman Swallow and Philip Donnellan. Indeed, the thesis is, in part, an attempt to align Ormond's work with these better-known figures in British television history.

The major aim of the thesis, however, is to explore the uses of this peculiarly civic cultural form within a minority national broadcasting context. To this end, it utilizes Jurgen Habermas's notion of the 'public sphere' as a lens through which to examine the ways in which Ormond's wide-ranging oeuvre interacted with and impacted upon a Welsh public sphere at a time of unprecedented political, economic, social, and cultural change. It distinguishes three broad areas of thematic concern – "culture", "historiography" and the "ethnographic" - and examines the ways in which Ormond's films reflect and contribute to a wide and shifting range of national discourses in this pivotal era in the history of Wales.

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes, giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Introduction

John Ormond Thomas was born in the village of Dunvant, near Swansea, on 3 April 1923. He was the son of Elsie Thomas and her husband Arthur, the village cobbler. Arthur ran his business from the family home on Bridge Terrace, Dunvant, a house that is situated barely a hundred yards from the local (Welsh Congregationalist) chapel, Ebenezer. The Thomases – like most other families in Wales at that time - were drawn strongly into its orbit, but the young Ormond Thomas did not remain grounded in Dunvant for long. His education drew him ever further from that tightknit community and ever closer to modern, secular, anglicised Swansea - firstly at Dunvant elementary school over on the opposite side of the railway line that splits the village in two, later at Swansea grammar school, a few miles down the road on Mount Pleasant Hill, and later still at the University College that overlooks the expansive Swansea bay. From that beach it is possible, on a clear day, to trace for miles the coast that curves around and on to Cardiff and beyond. It was at university that Thomas, studying for a degree in English and Philosophy, developed a new, secular philosophical sensibility alongside a firm ambition to become a poet. Deeply moved by the work of, in particular, Dylan Thomas and Wilfred Owen, he began writing and publishing poems, firstly in the University College magazine, *Dawn*, later in Keidrych Rhys's *Wales* and, in 1943, an anthology shared with two other young poets, *Indications*.[1] These early poems were, as M. Wynn Thomas notes, frequently 'sub-Thomasian' in style;[2] but while Vernon Watkins was probably right to advise young John that he 'ought not to publish any further collection until [he] was thirty',[3] this early verse offers, appropriately, at least some indication of the creative ambition that was to drive his life's work.

Perhaps intending to follow in the footsteps of Dylan Thomas, upon leaving university Ormond Thomas pursued a career as a newspaper reporter. His writing talents soon found him success; he moved to London to take a job at the *Brentwood Gazette* and was almost immediately afterwards invited by Tom Hopkinson to join the staff at the photojournalist magazine *Picture Post*. He stayed at that prestigious national

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[1] John Bayliss, James Kirkup and John Ormond, *Indications* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943).
[2] M. Wynn Thomas, 'Ormond, John (1923–1990)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61282> (accessed 8 March 2014), no page number.
[3] John Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Meic Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1973), p. 160.

magazine for three years, travelling the length and breadth of the country seeking out articles on a range of issues in post-war Britain. His time in London had been fruitful in a social capacity, too - beery jaunts in Soho saw him acquire a new constellation of creative acquaintances such as John Minton, George Barker, Cecil Day-Lewis and, of course, Dylan Thomas. But it was as a reporter at *Picture Post* that he took his first steps on the path he would pursue for the rest of his professional life. There he learned to match writing with images, to 'think like a camera',[4] skills that would prove indispensable when, back in Wales in the mid-1950s, after a few years at Swansea's *South Wales Evening Post*, he would take up the role of 'Television News Assistant' ('not a Television News Assistant but the one and only one'[5]) at the fledgling Welsh 'National Region' of the BBC. His successes there convinced his superiors that he was the right person to take on the considerable task of setting up Wales's new BBC 'Film Unit' in 1957. He remained Head of that unit, working alongside other brilliant producers and staff, until his retirement in the early 1980s.

Here, at what was to become the 'BBC Wales Film Unit', Ormond (who had by now adopted his middle name as his surname owing to the overabundance of Thomases at the BBC in Wales at that time) was no mere reporter, but a documentary filmmaker, a role that carried with it an entirely different set of freedoms and responsibilities, along with a certain, and not inconsiderable, professional cachet. Ormond was, of course, well equipped for such a role, and over the decades that followed he honed a distinctive style of 'personal documentary'[6] that blended his keen journalistic eye with his individual poetic sensibilities. He produced films on an impressive range of topics, specialising in Welsh history, culture, and society. Moreover, despite his professional success, he refused to give up on the poetic ambitions of his youth; indeed it was in large part the creative labour of "prestige" documentary filmmaking that inspired him to return to poetry in earnest in the mid-1960s. This was in any case a culturally fertile time in Wales, and the friendships he struck up with some of Wales's best creative minds of this era – Alun Richards, Ron Berry, Meic Stephens, John Tripp, among many others – fed into his creativity in verse and on screen in fascinating ways. Having thus built confidence in his poetry with the support of such friends in the 1960s, in 1969 he

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[4] M. Wynn Thomas, *John Ormond* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), p. 15.

[5] John Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision: The People and Politics of Television* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 1.

[6] The phrase is BBC producer Norman Swallow's. See his book *Factual Television* (London: Focal Press, 1966). I will return to it in Chapter Two.

published his first solo collection, *Requiem and Celebration*, and in 1973 his second, *Definition of a Waterfall*.

Whatever the success of these works in Wales and beyond (*Definition of a Waterfall* had been published by Oxford University Press), Ormond found it difficult to balance his poetic endeavours with the demanding professional life, and though his output on screen was nothing short of prolific, his work on the page in these years was slim. This seems to have been the source of considerable regret later in life. He once mused that 'if I'd spent even a tenth of the time and imaginative effort in trying to write a poem as I put into making a film – directing it, writing it, arranging it, supervising the cutting to a twenty-fifth second of it – then I'd probably have more poems.'[7] It was no doubt partly this sense of artistic frustration in Wales that led him to take such pleasure basking in the light of his beloved Tuscany in the years of his retirement from the BBC. Indeed, it was here, in the region of Arezzo, home to so many esteemed Italian artists over the centuries, that he had visited with the film unit in 1963 to produce *From a Town in Tuscany*, and where, he later liked to recall, he had been inspired to return to poetry after so many years. Here in the small Tuscan town of Cortona, a place where, for him, 'long-felt ideas and long-heard music seem [...] to cohere',[8] he settled into the existence of the "poet" he had always longed to be. He explained this himself when, in a letter from the region to *Poetry Wales*, he recalled a significant conversation with an Italian couple with whom he had become acquainted:

> Last year, the courtesies exchanged, the usual enquiries about our families and respective healths done, the old couple's curiosity could be hidden no longer. What did I do, they wanted to know. [...] Now, I said something I am normally reluctant to say at home, and this is the essence of my being here and my joy in it: "Sono poeta," I said [...]: "I am a poet".

Having clearly found a long-sought-for sense of spiritual and creative ease here, he came to view Cortona as his 'second home',[9] and indeed wrote several poems in honour of it. Sadly, however, he had in an earlier visit to the region contracted Lyme disease and, long undiagnosed, it was this disease that weakened his constitution in later years. He passed away at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, on 4 May 1990. He had

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[7] John Ormond, quoted in Richard Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', *New Welsh Review*, 2:1 (1989), 42.

[8] John Ormond, 'From a Town in Tuscany', *Poetry Wales*, 24:1 (1988), 22.

[9] Cynthia Thomas, 'A Town with a Difference', *Poetry Wales*, 24:1 (1998), 24.

published some hundred poems and produced over forty films in his illustrious – and uniquely dualistic - creative career.

<div align="center">*</div>

I wanted to offer a brief biographical sketch of John Ormond here in the opening pages of this thesis. But I should stress at this point that the chapters that follow do not attempt to offer a biographical interpretation of the life and work of this key figure in the cultural history of twentieth-century Wales. This is not to say that such a study would not be worthwhile. There is certainly scope for that kind of examination of a body of often quite personal poems and films that cross-pollinate and frequently display a quite clear and identifiable set of personal characteristics. In fact this was achieved in large part and with consummate skill by M. Wynn Thomas in his Writers of Wales Series volume, *John Ormond* (1997). That book is a crucial study of this sorely underappreciated creative artist, and has been the cornerstone for this thesis. But what I hope to achieve here is something quite different.

I want to argue that the documentary films produced by John Ormond at the BBC Wales Film Unit from the late 1950s to the 1980s constitute a fascinating contribution to – and embodiment of – what has been called the 'communicative dimension' of the public sphere in those decades.[10] Television documentaries are, after all, peculiarly *public* texts. They are public in the sense that they perform a "public service"; documentaries do not pivot on the central conceit of fiction or poetry - they do not insist on the suspension of disbelief - but rather set out explicitly to address, to 'inform, educate and entertain' - and thereby construct - a television viewership, a public. It is for this reason that theorist of television John Corner, in his book about the civic function of television, *Television Form and Public Address* (1995), states that 'documentarism [is] one of [television's] defining modes'.[11] Moreover, documentaries are "public" too in another, related, sense. In this explicit act of informing the public, documentaries implicitly enter into a dialogue with a presumed social reality. That is, in finding things to "inform" the public about, they perform what Brian Winston calls an act of 'claiming the real',[12] of drawing from and recirculating the social discourses and

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[10] David Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley, 'The Communicative Dimension of Civil Society: Media and the Public Sphere', in Graham Day, David Dunkerley and Andrew Thompson, eds., *Civil Society in Wales: Policy, Politics and People* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 17.

[11] John Corner, *Television Form and Public Address* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 77.

[12] Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 [1995]).

discursive formations that constitute public life. This being the case, and given, moreover, that these documentaries were produced at a film unit that possessed a specific mandate to broadcast programmes on issues of Welsh national concern to Welsh national audiences, this thesis will emphasise the important national dimension that I feel dominates these texts. Indeed, one of the central aims of this thesis is to examine Ormond's film oeuvre as a case study of the ways in which the documentary functions within a national broadcasting context. This national dimension, as I note in Chapter Three, is not an issue that has been widely examined in the study of documentary form.

Of course, the task of examining the role of "national" broadcasting of any kind is complicated somewhat in a nation that has for much of its history – and certainly in the era in which Ormond was active – existed as a "stateless" or, perhaps more accurately, "sub-state" nation. The enduring implications of such circumstances have been examined extensively elsewhere, one useful recent example being David M. Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley's collaborative book *The Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation* (2005). There the authors adopt an approach, now common in media studies, that distinguishes three main facets of media production - "contexts of production", "texts", and "consumption" – and conduct their analyses along these lines.[13] In the context of Welsh broadcasting, then, this involves a consideration of a range of issues, from the difficulties of writing public policy and establishing workable media institutions ('contexts of production') in a nation that has, for much of its history, lacked the political frameworks through which to do so, to the ideological struggles inherent in the creative act of making representations ("texts") that cater for and help foster an imagined national community under such conditions ("consumption"). Of course, as this formulation implies, the three are by no means easily trifurcated, and I outline my own interpretation of and approach to some of these issues in Chapter Three. For now it suffices to say that in my analysis of these (as I argue) predominantly *national* film texts, I have at all times borne in mind the "sub-national" status of the Welsh society with which they engage. I interpret these films as key communicative contributions to the development of what was, from the early 1960s onwards, an increasingly politicized nation. And, as I will show, the dualistic and often contradictory circumstances of Wales's stateless status, aligned with its developing political identity

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[13] David M. Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley, *The Media in Wales: Voices of a Small Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 17.

in these years, exerted considerable pressure upon the kinds of representations it was possible for these – it should be remembered, *British* Broadcasting Corporation – films to produce.

On the subject of this tripartite approach to media analysis, I should also make clear at this point that this thesis is not a study of audience consumption or reception. This was, unfortunately, a necessary methodological decision given the fact that there is next to no qualitative or quantitative data available to conduct in-depth analyses of audience consumption in Wales in the era in which these films were produced.[14] This is, then, a thesis heavily weighted toward the analysis of the films themselves, specifically the ways in which these were, in Stuart Hall's terms, not "decoded" by audiences but "encoded" within a specific set of material and ideological circumstances.[15] I do not feel that this is a significant limitation. Indeed, returning to the sense in which these documentary films attempt to 'claim the real' – or perhaps claim a *Welsh* real – in a rapidly changing and developing small nation, I feel that these films constitute an illuminating, and previously untapped, seam of material for the cultural historian. If, as Hall suggests, television programmes, in their process of "encoding" a coherent set of social meanings, 'draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, "definitions of the situation" from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part',[16] then they surely constitute a significant barometer of the dominant ideological and discursive shifts and tensions that accompany social change and development. Thus, in order to chart some of these, I have split the close analysis of Ormond's films into three main categories, broadly: culture, history, and ethnicity. I will elaborate on these shortly.

I am conscious of the risk of reducing these sophisticated and carefully considered films to a collection of bland civic-historical documents. Ormond, whatever the institutional and ideological demands made upon him, was a brilliant filmmaker

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[14] There are available at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham a few Audience Research Reports relating to the films produced in the earliest days of television in Wales; that is, before the inauguration of 'BBC Wales' proper and a bandwidth dedicated to Wales after 1964. Unfortunately, virtually all of the internal documentation relating to BBC Wales after 1964 has been lost or destroyed. The materials that are available relating to post-1964 BBC Wales consist of memoranda sent between Cardiff and the BBC Head Office in London.

[15] Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 128-138.

[16] Ibid, p. 129.

who was granted considerable creative freedom in his work. This was particularly the case in the 1960s, when directors across the BBC's "regional" film units were deemed to be artists in their own right, and were in fact encouraged, as BBC producer at that time Norman Swallow noted, to create 'individual work[s]' that expressed the producer's 'own attitude not only to the programme's immediate subject-matter but to the whole world in which he lives.' Swallow goes on: 'it is in programmes of this sort that factual television has come closest to making works of art.'[17] With this in mind, though without seeking to indulge in a simplistically "auteurist" interpretation of them, I have tried to keep in focus in my analyses the undoubtedly "personal" and, in Ormond's case, "ekphrastic" nature of many of these films. What I have attempted to demonstrate throughout is the ways in which Ormond's vision – inflected, as all artistic perspectives are, by a complex range of social and cultural assumptions – frequently has a direct bearing upon the kind of meanings these films set out to air to audiences. In an effort to do this I have, accordingly, structured the thesis in two parts.

Part One consists of Chapters One and Two. Here I outline in some detail Ormond's own personal philosophical and creative vision, and the ways in which this impacted upon his work. Chapter One examines his intellectual trajectory out of working-class, nonconformist Dunvant, into a secular, specifically post-nonconformist Swansea. There, as a student at the University College, under the guidance of the Wittgensteinian philosopher Rush Rhees, Ormond developed a profound (and, arguably, profoundly modernist) sense of doubt about the spiritual certainties that had guided his youth. I argue, alongside other critics such as M. Wynn Thomas and Tony Brown, that this manifests itself in his poetry and some of his other writing as an acute anxiety about the nature and notion of an absolute truth beyond the confines of human language. However, with particular focus on his "ekphrastic" poems, I suggest that this was not invariably a source of despair. Rather, in poems that are imbued with a deep reverence for the skilled craftsmanship he believed to be crucial to all great art, Ormond channelled this anxiety into an alternative epistemology, one centred upon the redemptive qualities of art itself. His ekphrastic poems seek to immerse themselves in the epistemological worlds of their artist-subjects in order to demonstrate to the reader the multiplicity of perspectives available to humanity. I interpret this creative strategy in terms of the oxymoronic phrase Ormond sometimes used to describe his process of

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[17] Norman Swallow, *Factual Television* (London: Focal Press, 1966), p. 176.

building, from fragments of observation, an artistic totality: the 'organic mosaic'. I argue that this idea was central to his creative work in both verse and on film.

Pursuing this line of enquiry, Chapter Two shifts the focus onto Ormond's creative approach to documentary filmmaking. There I examine the ways in which Ormond's notion of the 'organic mosaic' carried over into his conception of film as a creative medium, and further the sense in which this was, in fact, a philosophy that was extremely well suited to the demands of the post-war documentary film at the BBC. Indeed documentary as a film form had, since its earliest conception under thinkers like John Grierson, carried within it a creative duality, one that emphasised the poetic possibilities of film montage along with – and as a core principle of – the impulse of public information. I argue that this made Ormond, who had at *Picture Post* learned the skills of a journalistic form of 'vertical montage' – of matching words with images – a candidate ideally suited to the demands of the form as it emerged on television. With this in mind, I attempt a primarily formalist analysis of the films that I feel best demonstrates the range of possibilities inherent in a film form that operates on a spectrum that spans the "poetic" and the "expositional".

Chapter Three constitutes the first chapter of Section Two. Here the analytical emphasis of the thesis shifts from the predominantly personal to the contextual, a shift that I argue is entirely necessary in a study of a body of films that, while in one sense certainly the product of an individual creative director, were nevertheless firmly embedded within a set of historical-institutional conditions. To assist this change of perspective, I employ media theorist Peter Dahlgren's notion of the 'televisual prism',[18] a useful figuration, I feel, of the tripartite model that Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley adopt in their volume *The Media in Wales*. This chapter establishes the context for the chapters that follow by examining in detail the sociocultural and industrial conditions that shaped production at the BBC Wales Film Unit. This involves a discussion of the nature and importance of the mass media within a minority, "sub-state" national context, and an examination of the ways in which the struggle for BBC broadcasting in Wales played out over the course of the twentieth century. I suggest that this struggle was played out symbiotically with – that is, as both a contribution to and a product of – the development of a national public sphere in Wales, particularly in the decades following the end of the Second World War. I then go on to examine the documentary

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[18] Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 25.

as an exceptionally pertinent form when utilized within the mass media in such a context. I also note the respective emphases of the final three chapters of Part Two, which split Ormond's films into what I interpret as three dominant themes: culture, history, and ethnicity. I argue that these themes are not arbitrary but three key facets of the national public sphere.

Chapter Four thus alters the analytical emphasis once more and begins in earnest the analysis of the "textual" or "representational" facet of Ormond's film oeuvre. I begin this with an examination of Ormond's treatment of Welsh culture on screen. Given Ormond's own status as an Anglophone Welsh poet in this era, and indeed given - as outlined in Chapters One and Two - the ekphrastic, intertextual nature of much of his creative work, this necessarily entails an interpretation of Ormond's own idiosyncratic approach to these films about fellow artists. However, as these films are inescapably institutional texts, I do not pursue this interpretive approach throughout. Rather, I place Ormond's approach to culture against the backdrop of a dominating British cultural policy, specifically its manifestations in publically funded broadcasting in the post-war period, and from here attempt to assess the ways in which Ormond's own ekphrastic approach to filmmaking was part of an attempt to mediate or, in Welsh art critic Peter Lord's terms, "activate"[19] Welsh culture within competing British and Welsh discursive contexts. This brings into view not only the struggles inherent in Wales's status as a minority nation existing under the umbrella of an overarching British nation state, but also the struggles internal to Wales, specifically the differing strategies of cultural "activation" that marked Welsh cultural thought in the 1960s and 1970s. To this end, I split Ormond's cultural documentaries into two categories: visual art and poetry. These two traditions developed along somewhat different lines in these years, though, as I suggest, there is, nevertheless, a good degree of equivalence in the ways in which they were activated at BBC Wales.

Chapter Five charts Ormond's contribution to history programming on Welsh television. These documentaries were produced at a formative time in the history of Welsh historiography, and in this chapter I examine the ways in which such programming contributed to the important process of bringing these developments into the Welsh public sphere. The activation and recirculation of historical narratives is, of course, a necessary function of any society, but is, as I emphasise, particularly important

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[19] Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), p. 7.

in the context of a minority nation seeking to assert its own sense of itself. As Welsh cultural historian Bella Dicks has written, '[h]istory [...] is a central arena within which claims about the meaning of "Welshness" can be publicly aired, debated and contested'.[20] BBC Wales was thus a crucial way of "airing" Welsh history, and, as I show, the documentary film was (and is) an important vehicle for doing so. However - and as Dicks here implies - the development of Welsh historiography in these years was dependent not only upon the establishment of the means of recirculating an accepted set of historical narratives, but also on actually constructing those narratives, in some cases for the first time, and frequently on contested ground. Ormond's history documentaries thus provide interesting evidence of the ways in which broadcasting in Wales has been required to negotiate a deep and often irreconcilable ideological divide. Of course, this divide has in Wales often taken place along linguistic lines, and indeed it is in this chapter that linguistic difference comes to the surface in interpretations of Welsh history.

Finally, Chapter Six centres on the representation of ethnicity on Welsh television, specifically on Ormond's films as examples of the ways in which Welsh television interacts with "other" ethnicities within and outside the borders of Wales. Ormond's films were produced in line with broader trends in humanist journalism and mainstream broadcasting in the post-war years, trends that saw increasingly wider portions of society represented in the media and that were themselves the product of developments in an increasingly egalitarian British society. But I suggest that, in the context of Welsh broadcasting, these developments opened up a space within which Ormond was able to produce films that, while often quite questionably relativizing and even excluding ethnic minorities from participation in civic Wales, nevertheless constituted an interesting additional means of defining the borders of a Welsh public sphere.

This is, then, not a biographical study of Ormond's films. Nor is it a neatly chronological one. Given the thematic approach I have adopted in this thesis, each chapter contains films from across the decades in which Ormond was working. I have, however, adopted a chronological structure in the respective chapters; this has allowed me to explore the complex ways in which these films' thematic categories connect with different Welsh discursive formations while at the same time keeping a historical

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[20] Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 79.

perspective in view. There is no attempt made in what follows to identify some essential Welsh documentary aesthetic; rather, I feel that this thesis is best understood as an effort to map out an important and unchartered piece of territory in Wales's cultural-historical landscape. As television programmes with mass audiences, these films constituted a key contribution to the communicative life of Wales during a pivotal era in Welsh history, and I have emphasised this aspect of their existence throughout. But equally important is the fact that they also belong to the lengthy, though undoubtedly patchy, tradition of film in Wales.

Welsh film and TV producer Wil Aaron noted in an essay published in the late 1970s that, owing to a variety of (mostly economical) constraints, it was television that virtually singlehandedly carried the flame of Welsh film in the decades after the 1950s. It was television that screened some of the best work in the medium and that fostered some of the most accomplished directors in Wales at that time. Ormond was, I want to argue here, undoubtedly one of these, but others, such as his colleagues at the BBC Wales Film Unit, Selwyn Roderick, Gethyn Stoodley Thomas, Nan Davies and Derrick Trimby to name a few, as well as those working for independent television – Jack Howells, Terry de Lacey and Aled Vaughan, for example – also deserve further attention. Aaron goes on to suggest that the dominance of television in that era was both a boon and a bane to younger filmmakers seeking to enter the industry in the late 1970s. 'Whichever way we turn' said Aaron, 'television has usually been there before us, explored all the avenues, sign-posted the cul-de-sacs and floodlit the main roads.'[21] Happily, filmmaking in Wales has marked out new territory in the decades since Aaron wrote that piece. But the fact remains that in leaving those decades behind, the lights on those older roads are dimming, the maps fading. At the risk of belabouring the metaphor, I view this thesis as part of the effort to relight those lamps, to re-trace those maps. I do so with the conviction that these areas of exploration in Welsh television filmmaking constituted key contours on the complex intellectual, ideological and cultural landscape of Wales in this era. These films should thus be viewed not only as products of a single creative mind, nor as manifestations of an institutional agenda, but

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[21] Wil Aaron, 'Film', in Meic Stephens, ed., *The Arts in Wales 1950-75* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1979), p. 302.

in a broader sense as part of what Raymond Williams described as the 'distinguishing shapes' which 'give us our senses of our lives'.[22]

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[22] Raymond Williams, 'Introduction', in Meic Stephens, ed., *The Arts in Wales 1950-75* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1979, pp. 1-4.

Chapter One: Ormond, the 'Organic Mosaic', and Welsh Poetry in English

Serving as epigraph to John Ormond's *Selected Poems* (1987) is a short poem titled 'The Gift'. These are its opening and closing lines:

> From where, from whom? Why ask, in torment
> All life long when, while we live, we live in it?
> [...]
> Enough that it was given, green, as of right, when,
> Equally possible, nothing might ever have been.[1]

This poem, which so coolly shrugs off its own existential questionings, seems to me an odd choice as an epigraph to the selected poems of a poet for whom, as one critic has it, 'doubt is paramount'.[2] Evidently Ormond, by this time in his mid-sixties, was trying to demonstrate that he had softened somewhat, that the questions that had once bothered him now held less sway over his consciousness, that he was now able, for instance, while on one of his many sojourns in Italy later in life, to see in a cluster of Tuscan cypresses not 'the black flames of their [untelling] silence',[3] but their 'green[ness]', their mere existence.[4] Yet, as even a cursory reading of his poetry reveals, this apparent ease of mind was hard-won. Most critics of Ormond's poetry rightly identify the almost incorrigible strain of uncertainty that fuelled much of his creativity. For Tony Brown, 'Ormond's poetry is born of his dissatisfaction';[5] for Randal Jenkins, questions '[press] forever on John Ormond's mind; the yearning, the doubt and bewilderment can never be allayed'.[6] I would agree with these, and argue that this attractive little poem, despite its claim of existential acceptance, barely scratches the surface of an artist whose very conception of creativity, of culture, and of himself, was so persistently 'torment[ed]/ All life long' by doubt.

This tendency toward philosophical questioning, which impacted so profoundly upon Ormond's work as a poet and filmmaker, had disparate yet identifiable origins. As

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[1] John Ormond, 'The Gift', *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 13.
[2] Richard Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', in *New Welsh Review*, 2:1 (1989), 45.
[3] Ormond, 'Tuscan Cypresses', *Selected Poems*, p. 133.
[4] I will return later to the significance of Ormond's use of the colour "green".
[5] Tony Brown, 'At the Utmost Edge: The Poetry of John Ormond', *Poetry Wales*, 27:3 (1990), 36.
[6] Randal Jenkins, 'The Poetry of John Ormond', *Poetry Wales*, 8:1 (1972), 27.

I noted in my introduction, John Ormond was born in the small village of Dunvant, a few miles north-west of Swansea, in 1923. This is a village on the outermost western edge of the sprawling south Wales coalfield, and, as a result, is a place where, a few feet beneath land that for centuries served as 'good grazing fields',[7] 'a vein of coal/ Can [...] be seen when graves are open'.[8] Indeed, soon after it was decided that the railway line built to transport coal from the mines of west Wales down to the port at Swansea would exploit the narrow valley that gives Dunvant its name (Dyfnant, 'deep brook' or 'deep stream' in uncorrupted Welsh) as its thoroughfare through Gower,[9] the few rural inhabitants of this small village began to hear not only the clatter of passing trains but the chipping of pickaxes at the open cast mines that rapidly sprouted along the trainline. By the time Ormond was born, most of these inhabitants, and many more from the surrounding areas (though significantly, not his own father), were employed in these mines, if not here then in the brickworks and foundries that jostled for space near the new railway station. Yet, despite the burst of industrial activity that rapidly churned up its lowland rural landscape, Dunvant for many years remained, according to one historian of the community, even during its 'industrial heyday', a peculiarly isolated place with a 'rural outlook'.[10] This was due to its location not only on the westernmost edge of the coalfield but also on the easternmost edge of the traditionally - and still predominantly - pastoral Gower peninsula. In the years in which Ormond was growing up, then, before the town of Swansea sucked this small community entirely into its suburban orbit, Dunvant was a relatively sheltered place. The young Ormond was raised a Christian, and regularly attended the village's small Welsh-speaking chapel, Ebenezer, Capel yr Annibynwyr (Welsh Congragationalists). He enjoyed the insulated comfort and familiarity of close-knit village life and the chapel that was its cultural fulcrum.

Yet Dunvant, despite its relative isolation, could not, like many such places in the south Wales of the first half of the twentieth century, remain insulated from the convulsions of modern life for long. Modernity in all its manifestations was on its way and was effecting a fundamental shift in the conception and direction of Welsh life. This was characterised not only by the general shift towards a linguistically and culturally

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[7] John Ormond, 'Where Home Was', in *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 42.
[8] Ormond, 'My Dusty Kinsfolk', in *Selected Poems*, p. 41.
[9] The Llanelly Railway and Dock Company built a line from Pontardulais to Swansea in the early 1860s. In 1867 it became a passenger line that later linked up with the Central Wales Line to Shrewsbury. See Gareth Evans, *Dunvant: Portrait of a Community* (Stafford: Stowefields Publications, 1992), p.12.
[10] Evans, *Dunvant: Portrait of a Community*, p. 10.

anglicised majority, but also by the change in *religious* ideology that was closely tied up with it. Indeed, as M. Wynn Thomas has demonstrated in his major study of this topic, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit* (2010), these convulsions were closely related parts of the same broad ideological movement. This was 'a change of language not only from Welsh to English but also from a religious discourse to a 'modern' discourse of an altogether different kind'.[11] Thomas's linguistic trope here is pertinent, for Ormond too has written of the faith that provided meaning in his early life in similarly discursive terms as a 'narrow, *literal*'[12] world-view (my emphasis). Indeed, Ormond again wrote in similar terms when recalling an important encounter at, appropriately enough, the local chapel, with his fellow Dunvant-born artist, and later, friend, Ceri Richards.[13] Richards had returned to visit his family one summer weekend and turned up at Ebenezer for the Sunday morning service. The young Ormond was suitably impressed by the artist's presence; as he later remembered, Richards on that day represented for him something enormously significant yet, at that time, inexpressible: 'the feeling [was] there but not the vocabulary to express it'.[14] Thus Ormond, born on the brink of a modern, secular cultural society, on that day caught a glimpse of, in Thomas's terms, that 'rich lexicon of experience excluded from Nonconformist discourse.'[15] Ceri Richards seems to have in some way represented this new discourse, this new way of seeing.[16] Over the coming years the young Ormond accumulated interests across the arts. He made regular bus journeys to the "Tiv", the local cinema in nearby Gowerton.[17] While at Swansea Grammar School, he would at lunchtimes hurry down to the Glynn Vivian art gallery,

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[11] M. Wynn Thomas, *In The Shadow of the Pulpit: Literature and Nonconformist Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 118. As Gwyn A. Williams notes, Nonconformity was fast to take hold in Wales. Between 1811 somewhere between fifteen and twenty per cent of its population belonged to one of its denominations; by 1851 the figure was around eighty per cent. See G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales?:A History of the Welsh* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 158. And as south Wales developed industrially, Nonconformity followed: 'Nonconformity [became] part of the very weave of industrial society, its lifestyle cut from exactly the same cloth'. Thomas, *In The Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 38.

[12] John Ormond, 'Ceri Richards: Root and Branch', *Planet*, 10 (1972), 6.

[13] Richards, born in 1903, was himself a slightly earlier product of this general cultural shift in Wales.

[14] Ibid, p. 22.

[15] Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 143.

[16] As Ormond recalls of Richards's appearance, 'His hair was not cut in the short-back-and-sides manner of all the other men in the polished pews that day, but left perhaps an inch longer. Instead of dark serge he wore a tweed sports-jacket and grey flannel trousers.' (John Ormond, 'There you are, he's an artist', in *Ceri Richards: An Exhibition to Inaugurate the Ceri Richards Gallery* (Swansea: University College of Swansea, 1984), p. 22.) No doubt Richards's appearance must have seemed the height of rebelliousness in 1930s Dunvant.

[17] John Ormond, 'Picturegoers', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales on the Wireless* (Llandysul, Gomer, 1988), p. 59.

and later at University College would sneak off from lectures to take drawing lessons at Swansea School of Art, brushing up against the short-lived but vibrant Swansea arts scene that, led by William Grant Murray, produced Alfred Janes, Evan Walters, Archie Griffiths and others. A decisive moment came in 1941; in one evening he read two poems from a Penguin poetry anthology he had found in the window of Morgan and Higgs bookshop in blitzed Swansea: Wilfred Owen's 'Exposure' and Dylan Thomas's 'The Force that through the Green Fuse'.[18] 'Life was never to be the same again',[19] he said later. These expanding interests in the arts augmented his imaginative vocabulary in ways that, inevitably, began to challenge the "narrow" discourse of his faith.

But it was not until studying towards a degree in English and Philosophy at the University College of Swansea that his beliefs were challenged in a way that, I believe, fuelled his creative endeavours throughout the years that followed in London and, later, Cardiff, up to the end of his life. Indeed it was at University in Swansea that he became acquainted with the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein through Rush Rhees, the formidable lecturer and arch-Wittgensteinian philosopher. The challenging new ways of thinking that Rhees encouraged forced Ormond to question his every assumption:

> [at university] my distrust of the easy – even moderately easy answer to any question grew sharper [...] as I caught something of Rhees's approach to ideas and the world. [...] Was there any final truth?[20]

Rhees's answer to this question was, of course, a resounding "no". In line with the ground-breaking philosophy of his mentor Ludwig Wittengenstein, Rhees offered Ormond a radically new way of comprehending – or, perhaps more precisely, *not* comprehending – the world around him. Indeed, in an inversion of the process through which Ormond expected to be able to enrich his world after his departure from Nonconformity – that of creating, to repeat M. Wynn Thomas's useful phrase, 'a new

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[18] Ormond's early poetry bears strongly the mark of the 'Dylan Thomas effect' that James A. Davies speaks of in his essay "In a different place,/ changed': Dannie Abse, Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot and Wales', in Alyce von Rothkirch and Daniel Williams, eds., *Beyond the Difference: Welsh Literature in Comparative Contexts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 225. 'Poem in Feburary' (first published in *Indications*, a shared poetry collection alongside John Bayliss and James Kirkup for the Grey Walls Press in 1943), for instance, brims with grandiloquent Dylan-esque phrasings and a concern with the cosmic forces of life.

[19] Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1972), p. 157.

[20] Ibid, p. 160.

discourse that [would] name his world into different [...] existence'[21] – Ormond was introduced, in fact, to the *boundaries* of human comprehension.

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Ormond and the 'Organic Mosaic'

This new philosophy was based on Wittgenstein's assumption that there are, in fact, no fundamental truths, that there is no true 'reality'. For Wittgenstein, such ideas are illusory, a mere function of language, which tricks us into believing it is capable of somehow containing reality by accommodating within it 'grammatical fictions.'[22] These imply that fundamental truth-seeking questions – such as 'what is reality?' or 'what is time?' - can be answered. Wittgenstein asserts that they cannot:

> We never arrive at fundamental propositions in the course of our investigation; we get to the boundary of language which stops us from asking further questions. We don't get to the bottom of things, but reach a point where we can go no further, where we cannot ask further questions.[23]

The influence of this basic yet deeply disruptive philosophical proposition is, I want to argue, discernible throughout Ormond's work in both poetry and film. But it is perhaps most plainly manifested in a poem such as 'Saying'. Here, the sense of imprisonment implied in Wittgenstein's statement above is matched by a metaphor that figures language as a jail in which 'we lie/ Prisoners',[24] in which anything but frustrated communication is ultimately futile:

> We tap on the jail's
> Waterpipes, signal through stone
> And wait for the vague answer.[25]

The thorough despondency of such a poem is perhaps to be expected from what could quite easily be viewed as a philosophical dead-end; from this position, the quest for absolute truth is destined to be a fruitless one. This is due not only to the epistemological walls that language builds around us, but also to the fact that beyond these walls there is no comprehensible reality, no absolute truth. We can only know

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[21] Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 235.
[22] Ray Monk, *How to Read Wittgenstein* (London: Granta, 2005), p. 106.
[23] Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 301.
[24] John Ormond, 'Saying', *Selected Poems*, p. 38.
[25] Ibid, p. 38.

what the human imagination is capable of knowing, and that is, at the very most, its own boundaries. Artists that follow Wittgenstein's line of thought will, then, have to be content with the partial truth that *full* truth is finally unknowable.

This is not to say that Wittgenstein's work is dominated by a sense of despondency, and neither is Ormond's. For, while the human imagination is destined to be forever thwarted in its quest for absolute truth, it is not denied the ability to conjure a liberating multiplicity of creative responses and interpretations in the process. While language has its limits, there are always multiple creative means of seeing the world to explore *within* language. Wittgenstein has famously explained this with his figure of a building: 'I am not interested in constructing a building' he says, 'so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings.'[26] He thus speaks dismissively of the process of perpetually reformulating and refining an ever more complex single structure of understanding – such as philosophical discourse itself - seeing this as an inherently limited activity. Rather, Wittgenstein looks optimistically to the imaginative possibilities of finding and using multiple discourses, multiple forms and structures of comprehension, in order, at least, to find solace in the realm of the imagination. Again, it is possible to discern a correlative perspective in Ormond's poetry. His ironically-titled 'Definition of a Waterfall' for instance, is a gushing, triumphant testament to the imaginative possibilities engendered by the mind's attempt to grasp a multiplicity of *definitions* of an unknowable phenomenon:

> Not stitched to air or water but to both
> A veil hangs broken in concealing truth
>
> And flies in vague exactitude, a dove
> Born diving between rivers out of love[27]

The poem continues in this way, gathering pace and accumulating metaphors in its affirmation of the imagination, and this in spite of the poet discovering the games language plays, its 'grammatical fictions' ('vague exactitude') and its perpetual semantic flux (does the veil 'conceal' truth or is its truth a 'concealing' one?). Finally, performing a climactic release from the pounding iambic rhythm of the preceding

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[26] Wittgenstein, quoted in Monk, *How to Read Wittgenstein*, p. 95.
[27] Ormond, 'Definition of a Waterfall, *Selected Poems*, p. 15. This poem has what could be viewed as its filmic accompaniment in a lingering shot of a waterfall that ends episode three of the second series of *The Land Remembers* (1974).

couplets, 'Definition of a Waterfall' breaks off with an affirmation unhindered by

finalising punctuation:

> So that this bridegroom and his bride in white
> Parting together headlong reunite
>
> Among her trailing braids. The inconstancy
> Is reconciled to fall, falls and falls free[28]

Indeed the poem's acceptance and affirmation of "inconstancy" seems ultimately to

constitute a somewhat paradoxical act of faith in the unknowable. It revels in the

possibilities of an active imagination, an act that critic Tony Brown sheds light on when

he notes that Ormond's poetry is so often 'poised on the border of what can be defined

in words'.[29] This poem is certainly "poised": it finds sublime confidence in the face of

what can never be known in the multiplicity of the imagination. And this is an important

point. Wittgenstein's ideas, and the new, anti-transcendent epistemology they offered,

seem paradoxically to have constituted a *compensatory* philosophy for post-

Nonconformist Ormond, who himself lamented that he had 'lost the reassurances of a

formal faith'.[30] Terry Eagleton has written suggestively of this hidden strand in

Wittgenstein's thought:

> Posed at the extreme edge as it is, it threatens [...] to leave everything exactly as it
> was. To affirm that because of the nature of [language] no analysis can be
> exhaustible, no interpretation ultimately grounded, valuably demystifies the
> metaphysical but is [...] quite compatible with talk of 'truth', 'certainty',
> 'determinacy' and so on.[31]

To be sure, this loss of the possibility of final truth is actually replaced in Wittgenstein's

thought by a new affirmation of the realm of the imagination, leading Eagleton to the

conclusion that Wittgenstein's thought, in this sense, constitutes 'a negative

metaphysic';[32] a new certainty in uncertainty, so to speak.[33]

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[28] Ibid, p. 15.

[29] Tony Brown, 'At the Utmost Edge: The Poetry of John Ormond', *Poetry Wales*, 27:3 (1990), 32.

[30] John Ormond, quoted in M. Wynn Thomas, *John Ormond* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 74.

[31] Terry Eagleton, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', *New Left Review*, I:135 (1982), p. 74.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Robert Minhinnick offers a similar interpretation of Ormond's philosophy when he suggests that his was an 'absence of faith which in itself becomes a kind of belief.' Robert Minhinnick, "The Echo of Once Being Here': A Reflection on the Imagery of John Ormond', *Poetry Wales*, 27:3 (1990), 52.

It is important to remember, however, that although Ormond's outlook was undoubtedly informed by these new strains of philosophical thought, we should not treat him as a philosopher. This is a trap that Frank Kermode has argued many critics of the eternally ruminative poet Wallace Stevens fall into; that is, 'treating him as a philosopher who expresses his thought in such a way that commentators' duty is to extract it as best they can from the verse in which he chose to write it.'[34] While Ormond, as a poet, could also be intensely ruminative, his aims were quite separate to those of the philosopher; his real preoccupation was with the artefact, the finished art-object, not with philosophical conclusions alone. I will explain shortly why this is an important distinction to make, but for now it is necessary to ignore Frank Kermode's advice and "extract" some more of Ormond's philosophical foundations in order to pursue my broader argument. To do this, it is in fact useful to draw some parallels between Ormond and Wallace Stevens himself. Stevens was similarly engaged in a post-Christian humanism; one that was, alongside Wittgenstein and other post-Romantic thinkers, obsessed with the epistemological possibilities of a human imagination that is simultaneously sceptical and optimistic. Stevens was, of course, prolific, yet at the same time, as Helen Vendler notes, 'notoriously "narrow" in subject'.[35] Thus the underlying assumption that generated decades of his creative work can, allowing for a degree of reductionism, be summed up fairly succinctly. I believe Albert Gelpi's summary of Stevens's outlook is useful:

> For [Stevens], the poet is not the individual locus of vision, the inspired medium who sees into the life of things and tries to find adequate language for his mystical experience, as the Romantics had maintained. The poet is instead an individual through whose personality the "constructive faculty" of the imagination strives to compose the fragments of impression and response into an autotelic art-object.[36]

The parallels with Ormond, and, indeed, with Wittgenstein, seem to me manifest. Stevens postulates an imagination that, far from penetrating into the absolute truth of reality, is rather itself the source of its own reality. He understands transcendence to be pure illusion; indeed, as Vendler confirms, Stevens is in many of his poems 'engaged in

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[34] Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens*, 2nd edn. (London: Faber, 1989), p. xv.

[35] Helen Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1969), p. 14.

[36] Albert Gelpi, 'Stevens and Williams: The Epistemology of Modernism', in Albert Gelpi, ed., *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 8.

rejecting the search for an absolute truth'[37] (my emphasis). Yet at the same time, Stevens understands the need for belief, the need of the young woman of his 'Sunday Morning', who, 'in contentment [...] still feel[s]/ The need of some imperishable bliss.'[38] Thus he argues for the search for a more tangible, malleable and humanly possible truth, one that is an immediately achievable product of the mind's labour, and can provide solace in, as Stevens himself put it, 'an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent'.[39] This is, of course, the truth of *art* in all its manifestations, of Stevens's 'supreme fiction'. As Stevens wrote in his fascinating book *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*, 'poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost.'[40] His poetry thus self-consciously dramatized the mind's new relationship with reality, and demonstrated to the reader the ways in which the imagination *is* the very reality it supposedly 'comprehends'. As his well-known 'Description Without Place' asserts with characteristically elegant – and yet at the same time deceptive - simplicity: 'The sun is an example. What it seems/ It is and in such seeming all things are.'[41] Such poetry, then, offered humanity a new epistemology appropriate to the truthless world in which it now found itself. Indeed, this theme is nowhere better developed than in two of Stevens's lengthy major poems. 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction', for instance, declares across three movements what art, the 'supreme fiction', *must* do: 'It Must Be Abstract'; 'It Must Change'; 'It Must Give Pleasure'. And this imperative tone is dominant again in an earlier poem, the seminal 'The Man with the Blue Guitar': 'Poetry// Exceeding music must take the place/ Of empty heaven and its hymns.'[42]

The comparison with Stevens is useful not only due to his poetry's evident thematic and philosophical parallels with Ormond's own, but further because Ormond, in 1982, delivered a fascinating lecture on Stevens that, in fact, reveals as much about his own philosophical perspective as about that of his subject.[43] Reading 'In Place of

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[37] Vendler, *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems*, p. 16.
[38] Wallace Stevens, 'Sunday Morning', *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 68.
[39] Wallace Stevens, 'The Relations Between Poetry and Painting,' in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 171.
[40] Ibid, p. 171.
[41] Stevens, 'Description Without Place', *Collected Poems*, p. 339.
[42] Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', *Collected Poems*, p. 167.
[43] Richard Poole has written on some of the shared thematic and symbolic similarities between Ormond and Stevens in an essay in the special memorial issue of *Poetry Wales* in the year of Ormond's death. ('John Ormond and Wallace Stevens: Six Variations on a Double Theme', *Poetry Wales*, 27: 3 (1990), 16-

Empty Heaven', it becomes clear that Ormond was particularly interested in Stevens'
epistemological pronouncements. He reads lengthy passages of many of Stevens' major
poems, as well as three poems in their entirety -'Thirteen Ways of Looking at A
Blackbird', 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' and 'The Idea of Order at Key West' – in an
effort to drive Stevens' ideas home. But, in accord with Kermode's insistence that
readers reach beyond mere philosophical interpretation towards a grasp of Stevens'
concern with, in Gelpi's terms, the finality of the 'autotelic art-object', it becomes clear
that Ormond too was acutely aware that this was an epistemology that was predicated
on, and could only be perceived through, the crafted artefact. This goes some way to
explaining why Ormond felt the need to quote Stevens' poems in their entirety.
Introducing 'The Idea of Order at Key West', for example, the enthusiasm Ormond
displays in setting for his listeners the visual and intellectual scene to enable them to
understand the implications of this way of seeing via the experience of listening is
palpable:

> The place is Key West in Florida. It is beginning to be evening and soon it will be
> dusk. A woman is singing as she walks along the sea-shore. Remember, the world
> is as we imagine it to be. It does not exist without us. (I think of Tzang Tzu, the
> early Chinese philosopher who declared, "I dreamed I was a butterfly and woke to
> find myself a man. Now I wonder. Am I perhaps a butterfly which dreams it is a
> man?")[44]

'The Idea of Order at Key West' is of course a brilliant epistemological treatise that
provides an answer to its speaker's quasi-religious '[b]lessed rage for order'. It
provides, as with so many of Stevens's poems, an explanatory narrative, an analogy that
enables its readers to comprehend this new, compensatory way of seeing, and
simultaneously transmutes this into beautifully resonant verse:

> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker.[45]

26.) Poole makes some valuable observations on this score, but here I want to focus primarily on the
philosophical similarities between the two, and the impact of this on Ormond's wider conception of the
role of culture.
[44] Ibid, p. 20.
[45] Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *Collected Poems*, p. 129.

It is thus easy to see Ormond's attraction to it; the poem extols not only the power of the imagination to 'make' the world, but also the power of the *product* of that imagination – here the woman's 'song', elsewhere the 'supreme fiction' – to give solid meaning to it, to provide a faithless humanity with an order and a substance through which to understand the world where otherwise there would be none. Indeed this act of 'making' objects *for* humanity is a major facet of Ormond's conception of art.

There is little doubt Stevens's philosophy resembles that of Wittgenstein in its rejection of the transcendent and its exaltation of the imagination's role in producing its own reality. But Ormond's interest in Stevens arose principally from the importance that poet placed upon being more than a philosopher; upon being, rather, someone who could create from the stuff of the imagination 'autotelic art-object[s]' to offer humanity. This meant carrying through the implications of Wittgenstein's pronouncement that philosophy should identify the 'foundations of possible buildings'; under Stevens's conception, artists should become the builders of these objects, these new structures of understanding.[46] But, as the following passage illustrates, Ormond's interpretation of this strand of Stevens's outlook contains a significant proviso:

> Stevens is nearer the spiritual role he assigned to the poet [...] when he is working towards his "supreme fiction" which will be the thing made; the fictor, the modeller as artist justifying man's belief in himself not only as the inventor and destroyer of gods but, in a finally unaccountable universe, the arbiter of what is. And the tool for all this is the imagination. The imagination makes the truth.[47]

I have already suggested the major factor that contributed to Ormond's interest in artists aspiring to a 'spiritual role'; he spoke on many occasions of his own loss of faith, and while he was well aware of living in a world that was too complex for faith - or, as he pithily puts it, in which 'there was plenty to be agnostic about'[48] - he held a lifelong conviction that he and others like him 'still need[ed] mysteries if not rituals'.[49] But it is

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[46] Indeed, Wittgenstein wrote much in praise of art, music and literature as forms of understanding superior to what he saw as the inherently limited discourses of the sciences. As Ray Monk, Wittgenstein's biographer, writes, 'One of the most important differences between the method of science and the non-theoretical understanding that is exemplified in music, art, philosophy and ordinary life, is that science aims at a level of generality that necessarily eludes these other forms of understanding.' Monk, *How to Read Wittgenstein*, p. 101.

[47] John Ormond, 'In Place of Empty Heaven: The Poetry of Wallace Stevens', *W.D. Thomas Memorial Lecture* (Swansea: University College of Swansea, 1983), pp. 18-19.

[48] Ibid, p. 16.

[49] Ibid.

crucial here to underline the distinctly egalitarian character of this conviction. Note the terms upon which Ormond feels artists should provide this new epistemology for humanity: it is not the artist prophesying a way of seeing, but the artist 'justifying man's belief in himself'. In other words, the artist furnishes humanity with the objects through with which it is able to see for itself.[50] And this is in contradistinction to Stevens's somewhat elitist view, which postulated artists in the 'age of disbelief' to be almost prophetic 'figures of importance'.[51] Indeed, Ormond's suggestion that this elitism is merely the 'high-minded wind of a braggadocio'[52] is telling. It indicates that while Ormond was fascinated by the liberating epistemological potential of Stevens's ideas, his egalitarianism compelled him to translate them into a more down-to-earth language. Hence the emergence of a discourse of workmanship, of craftsmanship: 'The *tool* for all this is the imagination' (my emphasis); elsewhere: 'poetry has a job on; and we must see what equipment Wallace Stevens has to accomplish the task.'[53]

This discursive thread is discernible in all of Ormond's work. Often it manifested itself in his impulse to look not only to the higher human and quasi-spiritual purposes of art and creativity, but also at the level of human skill and physical craft that necessarily went into even the loftiest of creations. The best known example of this is, rightly, Ormond's superbly bathetic 'Cathedral Builders', a poem which – as its title indicates – concerns itself with the invariably forgotten lives of those who labour day-in-day-out to build those structures deemed to be the work of God. Ormond describes the quaintly shambolic lives of men who 'climbed on sketchy ladders'; '[i]nhabited sky with hammers'; 'lay with their smelly wives' before getting rheumatism and '[deciding] it was time to give it up'. Yet despite their comic appearance, these men serve an important purpose which Ormond skilfully emphasises: only they are able to stand aside on the day of consecration, '[cock] up a squint eye' and have the final word: "I bloody

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[50] An interesting line of correspondence can be drawn from here back to Ormond's upbringing in Dunvant, particularly his family's attendance at the local Welsh Congregationalist chapel, Ebenezer. As M. Wynn Thomas writes of the Congregationalists' 'independent [...] model of Church organisation':' [i]t's members gathered together by a common impulse of faith, worshipping without benefit of priest, image or ritual, prayerfully concentrating on the reading and interpretation of Scripture, held their 'congregation' to be an 'independent', self-sufficient unit. They would owe no authority to any larger, centralised structure or body'. (Thomas, In the *Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 24.) Resonances of this self-sufficient, anti-hierarchical approach to spirituality seem to me to ring clear in Ormond's conception of the role of art.
[51] Wallace Stevens, quoted in Ormond, 'In Place of Empty Heaven', p. 18.
[52] Ormond, 'In Place of Empty Heaven', p. 18.
[53] Ibid, p. 4.

did that!'".[54] We can, further, see this impulse at work even in some of Ormond's earliest professional work as a journalist for *Picture Post*. In a feature published in May 1947, 'A Bronze for the Academy', Ormond examines the process of transforming a clay sculpture into bronze for the Royal Academy, London. The article is not, as we might expect, a celebration of the cultural significance of the Royal Academy, or, indeed, of the exalted art of sculpture, but rather one of the painstaking labour of the bronze casters that goes on unheeded beneath the gallery floor. Large photographs of the casters at work dominate the page, along with a detailed step-by-step description of their process. Credit is given where due: the process is one 'which calls for skill and craftsmanship only acquired by years of experience in an art foundry';[55] moreover, 'the sculptor [...] is at the mercies of the metal-caster to complete his work.'[56] The carefully planted implication of the article is, of course, a comment on the skewed values of a society that offers little or no recognition of this kind of craftsmanship, particularly in the context of a financially-driven art market: '[a]fter exhibition in London, 'The Lady of Peace' will go to a private garden in Kent, where she will sit in all weathers looking at her child with the same intransient smile, outcome of a skill and a tradition which time has left untouched.'[57] The purpose of the article thus seems to be to reconnect the processes of craftsmanship with the final art-object.[58]

This outlook is perhaps unsurprising when we consider Ormond's upbringing as the son of the village cobbler. As M. Wynn Thomas has noted, the village of Dunvant, lying on the outskirts of the south Wales coalfield, was 'less proletarianized than, say, the townships of Rhondda', a result of which was that '[t]he older concept of the artisan still had validity in a community that retained aspects of rural society, and which readily respected the skills involved in the industrial process.'[59] There is little doubt that Ormond absorbed these values and greatly admired the artisanship of his father's trade. Take the poet's elegy for his father, 'At his Father's Grave', in which his father's skill is

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[54] Ormond, 'Cathedral Builders', *Selected Poems*, p. 28.

[55] John Ormond, 'A Bronze for the Academy', *Picture Post*, 3 May 1947, p. 24.

[56] Ibid, p. 24.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ormond later went on to produce a documentary on the history of *Picture Post* magazine, *The Life and Death of Picture Post* (1977). Ormond's acquaintance with key figures at the magazine, including editors Tom Hopkinson and Stefan Lorant, as well as its proprietor Sir Edward Hulton, enabled him to glean fascinating interviews that paint a nuanced portrait of its rise and fall. This was one of those rare films produced at BBC Wales specifically for the BBC Network, but as it does not deal specifically with matters of Welsh public concern, I do not examine it at length in this thesis.

[59] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 5.

revered in such terms: [r]emember his two hands, his laugh,/ His craftsmanship. They

are his epitaph'. These terse lines are the apt finale of a poem of few words; here his

father's skill carries such value and significance it is able to stand in – as, we can

imagine, it would have in life – for unnecessary verbosity. Indeed, several critics have

identified this concern in Ormond's poetry. Michael Collins, for instance, has argued

that the poet's 'concern with craftsmanship' resulted in verse that championed material

reality over the metaphysical: as Collins writes, 'we can, as [Ormond] suggests, [...] find

meaning for our lives even as we live without metaphysical knowledge.'[60] Tony Brown

finds a similar link, seeing the poet's existential interest in 'the resilience which causes

individuals [...] to continue to attempt song, to create fragments of structure and order'

to be 'an aspect of the value which Ormond consistently places on human creativity and

craftsmanship'.[61] Both these perspectives seem in one sense to confirm the argument I

have been building towards; namely, that there is a discernible relationship between

Ormond's vision of a world without essential, fathomable meaning, and the manner in

which he perceived art-objects – whether made of words, paint, music or any other

medium – as *crafted* artefacts with which humanity could discover some semblance of

meaning and order in that world. This argument stands up when we further consider 'At

his Father's Grave': here it is the memory of Ormond senior's craft that serves as

compensation for death, not any appeal to the spiritual or transcendent. As the no-

nonsense materialism of the penultimate couplet confirms: 'He was no preacher but his

working text/ Was *See all dry this winter and the next*' (emphasis in original). Yet the

relationship between these two facets of Ormond's outlook is not as seamless as this

argument seems to suggest. M. Wynn Thomas has pointed to what he sees as a tension

between Ormond's egalitarianism - his belief in 'a democratic art that was the finest

expression of collective social life'[62] - and an unwavering perfectionism that concerned

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[60] Michael Collins, 'Craftsmanship as Meaning: The Poetry of John Ormond', *Poetry Wales*, 16: 2 (1980), 33.

[61] Tony Brown, 'At the Utmost Edge', 34.

[62] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 5. Here Thomas alludes to a tradition of socialist cultural thinking that leads back in particular to the work of William Morris, himself a hand-craftsman, who viewed well-crafted art as the best index of an ethical, equal society. Morris felt that such art, crafted from the best kind of harmonious society, could equip a grimy utilitarian capitalism with the values necessary for its ethical health: 'It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life'. William Morris, quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993 [1958]), p. 150. Morris was particularly influential amongst 'ethical socialists' such as Robert Blatchford and Keir Hardie, who went on to shape the early Independent Labour Party (see Anthony Wright, *Socialisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 11. Yet while these thinkers were concerned primarily with the social and political efficacy of culture (hence the formation of institutions such as Ruskin College and the Workers'

itself with 'sternly upholding the highest artistic standards'.[63] Indeed Thomas sees this
duality in Ormond's outlook as one that 'powered much of his art.'[64] This proves to be a
perceptive observation if we reconsider a poem such as 'Cathedral Builders'. While part
of this poem's power lies in its deflationary impulse, its ability to prick the pomp of the
cathedral's grandiosity with a single exclamation, the poem nevertheless serves to
reinforce this grandiosity; the very humour of the final exclamation is predicated on the
gulf between the builder's perspective and the exalted magnificence of the cathedral
itself. Moreover, we should not forget that this is, after all, a poem. This is a medium
that carried for Ormond, as with all other arts, considerable significance that greatly
outweighed the emphasis he placed upon craftsmanship alone. As I have shown, art, for
Ormond, in a post-religious world, was the new religion, the new means through which
humanity could navigate the uncertainty of existence. It was, after all, an artist that
Ormond chose to be, not a cobbler, a builder, or even an architect, as he held hopes for
at one time. [65] Some of the tensions that arose from this blending of discourses come to
the surface in a statement Ormond made on his process of writing poetry:

> [I]t starts in a sensual delight in building, out of words, shapes to be spoken.
> There was a time when I found the manipulation of words and cadences to be an
> almost completely intoxicating activity. Now the music – by which I mean the
> sound and rhythm – and the meaning must satisfy me as being, as far as I am able
> to make them so, one thing. [...] [W]hen a poem of mine lacks a sensual texture,
> especially a sense of the tactile, it is far less likely to succeed.[66]

While there is here the presence of this egalitarian discourse of craftsmanship, of
"building", "mak[ing]" and "manipulation", that undoubtedly underpins Ormond's
conception of the "tactile" art-object, the real emphasis is on the harmonious
arrangement of form and meaning that must take place within the finished product. In
line with Wallace Stevens, there is certainly an element of the imperative here: 'the

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Educational Association), Ormond is perhaps better viewed, as I will go on to suggest, as closer to
thinkers such as Matthew Arnold insofar as his priorities lay in a belief in an exalted art that could
provide the best culture for *humanity* (though of course this, too, as I will explore in a later chapter,
carried with it strong political implications).

[63] Ibid, pp. 5-6.

[64] Ibid, p. 5.

[65] Ormond, in a biographical essay, states that 'at seventeen-and-a-half I badly wanted to try to be an
architect'. Yet it was less than a year later that he would stumble across Dylan Thomas and Wilfred
Owen, and 'life would never be the same again.' ('John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2*, pp.
156-157.

[66] Ibid, p. 163.

music [...] and the meaning *must* satisfy me as being [...] one thing' in order 'to succeed'. And this is precisely where a tension, or even a kind of paradox, arises. Indeed, for Ormond, the 'success' or failure of a poem rests upon the question of whether it enables humanity to grasp reality or leaves it to languish in the maelstrom of uncertainty. Yet, at the same time, this humanitarian vision affords artistic "craftsmanship" an axiological significance that far outweighs that of the skilled labourer; one would find it difficult to apply such a criterion of "success" to the work of Ormond's father, whose own craft was judged by how well a shoe fitted. Ormond's appreciation of the value of homely "craft" thus differed significantly from that of, for example, Iorwerth Peate, the Welsh nationalist museum curator and scholar who, as Peter Lord notes, 'saw himself as a man whose roots had been severed by university education, and who experienced a deep sense of regret and loss as a consequence.'[67] Peate, in an effort to counteract this loss, dedicated his life to preserving and memorializing the Welsh artisanal and folk tradition at the National Museum of Wales and, later, at the Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans. Ormond, on the other hand, found a way to combine his artisanal heritage with the exalted appreciation of high culture he had acquired during his own root-severing university education. The result was a degree of duality between his reverence of egalitarian "craft" and the higher human purposes of artistic practice.

This duality would, for reasons I will go on to explain in the following chapter, make him an ideal candidate as a documentary producer. But it also manifested itself in an important thematic strain in his work as a poet. Indeed, this is signalled in the passage above; while this reveals something of a tension between Ormond's egalitarian conception of 'craftsmanship' and the higher epistemological service he felt art could offer humanity, it also signals a further aspect of the *ways* in which he felt art could offer this service. As his deployment of the language of music and the visual arts here implies – "music", "rhythm", "shape", "texture" - Ormond's deep concern with the epistemological possibilities of art gave rise to an in interest in what critic Wendy Steiner has termed "interart", or, in other words, the relationships between various artistic media – in the ancient world referred to as "ekphrasis". This is an important topic to address. Ormond was, we should remember, an artist working in more than one medium, and the themes and formal strategies he adopted in both poetry and film

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[67] Peter Lord, *The Meaning of Pictures: Images of Personal, Social and Political Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 95-6.

frequently overlapped. Ekphrasis was thus an issue at the heart of much of his work as an artist. Wendy Steiner's book *The Colors of Rhetoric* (1982) is useful here. Steiner's book provides a comprehensive survey of "interartistic" correspondences in Western art. Steiner argues that 'the interartistic comparison inevitably reveals the aesthetic norms of the period during which the question is asked. To answer the question is to define or at least describe one's contemporary aesthetics'.[68] The converse of this statement is, therefore, that an era's aesthetics – which as a matter of course depend upon that era's understanding of the relationship between reality and the mind - necessarily underpins its understanding of "interartistic" comparisons. Steiner demonstrates this by looking back to the classical thinkers whose ideas have formed the basis of Western aesthetics. Aristotle, for instance, held a fairly straightforward conception of art's relationship to reality: art merely mirrors what is objectively there in reality. Correspondingly, his conception of the relationship between the arts was relatively simple; poetry, painting and theatre famously "mimic" this knowable reality. This 'reality claim'[69] can further be seen in what Steiner deems the 'second locus classicus of the painting-poetry correspondence, Horace's phrase, *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry)'.[70] As she goes on to explain: 'The gist of Horace's comparison of painting and literature [...] is as follows: poetry is like painting because both have as their subjects existent reality and both are limited in their mimetic adequacy to that reality'.[71] Thus, any conception of "interart" can be seen to be finally dependent upon the question of epistemology.

Indeed, Steiner's thesis proves useful when we consider the somewhat more complex epistemological problems postulated by modernist thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Stevens. For these, as we have seen, the absence of a fully knowable reality resulted in a belief in the imagination and its products as the only possible points of mediation between the self and the unknowable. Thus, as critic Bonnie Costello has noted, while Wallace Stevens was necessarily interested in artistic endeavours other than his own in his search for a 'supreme fiction', he sought in his poems about paintings not to 'visualise [his] subjects, making the reader a beholder of an imagined

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[68] Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 18.
[69] Ibid, p. 7.
[70] Ibid, p. 7.
[71] Ibid, p. 8.

pictorial space'. [72] Neither did Stevens, in his interartistic poems, '[strive] for an equivalency of effect in words'; [73]'The Man with the Blue Guitar', for instance, does not attempt to imitate the effects of music. Rather, believing that there was finally no true reality to 'mimic' or fully 'represent', Stevens instead emphasised the arts' special relationship with the unknowable, and its uses in creating an 'idea of order'. As Costello states:

> Although Stevens's poems abound in references to particular artists and their works, it is finally the idea or ideal of painting, its struggle to define an imaginative space with a presence to rival natural experience, that attracts him, and in the transfer to his own verbal medium the idea of painting becomes a poetic one, "not to be realised" but always imagined. [74]

While Costello is speaking here of Stevens's relationship with painting, her argument can undoubtedly be applied to his conception of the other arts. Stevens's interest is frequently in art's ability to *mediate* the unknowable rather than to *represent* it, and to 'define an imaginative space with a presence to rival natural experience'; indeed, for Stevens, 'natural experience' is a fallacy, thus his emphasis is on the epistemological possibilities of other art forms rather than the perceived efficacy of their method of representation. Moreover Ormond, sharing Stevens's conception of reality, also shares this emphasis. But as Ormond's outlook had been initially problematised by the ideas of Wittegenstein and Rush Rhees, it is useful to read his own relationship to the arts in Wittgensteinian terms. Thus, returning to our earlier discussion of Ormond's awareness of the limits of language, of reaching, as Wittgenstein puts it, 'a point where we can go no further, where we cannot ask further questions', Ormond was also aware that there is nothing to stop artists wielding the epistemological potential of all other media – be these visual, musical, linguistic, or, as we shall see in the following chapter, filmic. While none of these are ever able to access an essential "reality" – as Rush Rhees explains, '[a] work of art shows me itself. [...] [I]t does not show me something which might be shown in another way' [75] – they are able serve the indispensable function of constituting the multiplicity of 'possible buildings', of possible structures of understanding. In Costello's terms, these buildings make up the 'imaginative space' that

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[72] Bonnie Costello, 'Effects of an Analogy: Wallace Stevens and Painting', in Albert Gelpi, ed., *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 65.
[73] Ibid, p. 66.
[74] Ibid, p. 67.
[75] Rush Rhees, *Without Answers* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 145.

has 'a presence to rival natural experience'. Ormond had his own way of figuring this notion of an ungraspable world mediated and made sense of by the plethora of possible imaginative responses to it. This was his characteristically oxymoronic notion of the 'organic mosaic'.[76] I believe this phrase is key to understanding Ormond's overarching conception of culture. In a conversation with the critic Richard Poole, Ormond claimed that 'from acute observation of particularities, you build up a kind of organic mosaic – if you can mix two such conceptions'.[77] Though the phrase may appear oxymoronic, taking into account Ormond's post-Nonconformist desire for a conciliatory epistemology - a 'negative metaphysic' - it seems to contain a kind of inverted logic. Indeed, though Ormond uses it here in relation to the construction of a single piece of art (he elsewhere, as I will discuss in a later chapter, referred to filmmaking as 'making [his] mosaic') - of building towards a unified structure from particularities (the discourse of craftsmanship is not accidental) - I believe the phrase can be applied on a wider level to Ormond's conception of the ways in which the particularities of individual artworks and artistic visions can be conceived as parts of a wider conceptual matrix or patchwork – each of which corresponds and contributes to a unifying epistemology.

However, a comparison needs to be made here between Ormond's work and that of Wallace Stevens. Stevens' comparable philosophical concerns generated much of his own poetry, and I believe this notion also lies beneath much of Ormond's creative work in poetry and on film. In contrast to Stevens, however, whose own "egotistical" vision, to borrow Keats's terminology, led him to subsume the epistemological concerns of the other arts into his own unique poetic style, and to refuse to mimic the representational strategies of other arts or 'strive for an equivalency of effect in words', Ormond, wishing, in a more functional – perhaps didactic, journalistic – sense, to demonstrate what the culture could provide for humanity, instead frequently took on the role of the "chameleon" in his poems and films – that is, the role of finding the creative means of incorporating unique, discrete views of other artists into a wider vision. One way to view this is to categorise Stevens's preoccupation as, in Steiner's terms, "interartistic", and Ormond's as "ekphrastic". If Stevens's "interart" concerns itself with the epistemological possibilities of artistic representation, "ekphrasis" does also, but goes further and attempts, in critic Laura M. Sager Eidt's terms, the 'verbalization, quotation,

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[76] John Ormond, quoted in Richard Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', 41.
[77] Ibid.

or dramatization of real or fictitious texts composed in another sign system'.[78] Indeed,
various commentators seem to have registered this tendency. Dannie Abse, for instance,
has argued for Ormond the poet to be understood as a 'portraitist'.[79] M. Wynn Thomas
has stated that Ormond the filmmaker 'unfailingly places himself at the service of each
artist's vision'.[80] Moreover, in a similar but more critical vein, film historian David
Berry has accused him of being occasionally 'too deferential'.[81]. All of these remarks
are perceptive, each recognising something of the ekphrastic nature of Ormond's work
in poetry and on film.[82] But, as I will presently show, the impulse behind all these
"deferential" works of "portraiture" is not to evoke a hallowed, ideal realm of art, or
indeed, a strictly unified philosophy, but invariably to demonstrate, in a functional way,
a modernist epistemology suited to an ungraspable world – the 'organic mosaic'.

A significant number of Ormond's poems and films share these ekphrastic
concerns with other artists and art forms. Indeed much of Ormond's work for BBC
Wales took on a task of national-cultural dissemination, documenting the work of
Welsh artists on screen for the enrichment of a national audience. As I will explain in
more detail in a later chapter, implicit in Ormond's approach to this project was an

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[78] Laura M. Sager Eidt, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 19.

[79] Dannie Abse, 'John Ormond as Portraitist', *Poetry Wales*, 26:2 (1990), 5-7.

[80] Thomas, John Ormond, p. 40.

[81] David Berry, *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. 297.

[82] In recent years "ekphrasis" has been identified as a rich seam in Welsh culture. A 1999 touring exhibition, META (curated by Christine Kinsey), for instance, showcased the collaborative work of a variety of Welsh writers and artists, and later resulted in the 2005 anthology of essays, edited by Christine Kinsey and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, *Imaging the Imagination* (Llandysul: Gomer, 2005), which explored the lengthy traditions of collaborative work between writers and artists in Wales. As M. Wynn Thomas noted in his foreword to that book, 'the complex interaction between image and word [...] [has been] reproduced across languages, across decades, across genres and right across Wales.' (*Imaging the Imagination*, p. 9) Indeed Thomas includes Ormond in a long list of Welsh writers in both languages whose work concerns itself with the visual arts: from Glyn Jones and Emyr Humphreys in English to Euros Bowen, Alan Llwyd and R. Gerallt Jones in Welsh. Moreover, Thomas's recent book on R.S. Thomas, *Serial Obsessive* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), contains two fascinating essays on that poet's often-overlooked ekphrastic poetry. Additionally, in an essay in *Imaging the Imagination*, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan suggests that the prominence of such ekphrastic work in Welsh culture can in part be attributed to the disproportionate strength of the culture of literacy in Nonconformist Wales: 'The extraordinary status accorded to word-based works, whether written, recited or sung, may help to account for the very close relationship which developed between the two modes of expression within Wales, for even those whose primary career was in visual art could not escape being steeped in the literary culture from childhood onwards.' Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'A Dual Tradition', in Kinsey and Lloyd-Morgan, eds.,*Imaging the Imagination*, pp. 19-36. Such a suggestion perhaps also conversely explains the preoccupation of many Welsh writers with the visual arts, particularly in post-Nonconformist Wales. Ormond, as I have already discussed, can certainly be understood as confirming this; starved of the visual arts in the visually austere Nonconformist culture in which he was brought up, Ormond relished the opportunity to absorb the fruits of European art.

ekphrastic endeavour – an effort to employ the poetic possibilities of film to inhabit the discursive worlds of fellow artists and writers in an effort not only to mediate their work for wider audiences but also creatively to augment those works as part of his wider artistic vision. Moreover, a sizable number of Ormond's poems share this concern. This was an area of poetic interest to which Ormond returned throughout his life, from the early poems 'Collier',[83] 'Elegy for Alun Lewis'[84] and 'Homage to a Folk Singer',[85] to the later work published after he returned to poetry in earnest in the 1960s, 'Certain Questions for Monsieur Renoir' (a brilliant exploration of Renoir's famous *La Parisienne* that was later included in Joan and Dannie Abse's *Voices in the Gallery* (1986),[86] a collection of poems in response to paintings), 'Michelangelo to Himself, 1550', 'Memorandum to the Dissector [Ron] Berry', to name only a few obvious examples. Indeed, M. Wynn Thomas states that for a time, consistent with his preoccupation with the twin themes of 'requiem and celebration', Ormond had considered the idea of working on a series of 'Letters to the Dead',[87] whose recipients would have been artists such as Louis MacNeice, Vernon Watkins, Dylan Thomas, Gwyn Thomas, B.S. Johnson, among others. All of these films and poems can be considered as in some sense "intertextual" works, but there are specific ways in which many of these, too, can be deemed in a slightly different sense "ekphrastic" in the ways I have outlined above. It is these that provide us with useful insights into Ormond's assumptions about the uses of culture, and further about the politics of such assumptions. I will go on in a later chapter to explore in detail the implications of the ways in which Ormond adopted this strategy in the context of national broadcasting. But firstly, it is necessary to focus on the quite different cultural act of writing ekphrastic poetry.

M. Wynn Thomas has recognised two of the important poems that pay 'homage [...] by way of sensitive stylistic imitation'[88] to two painters, 'Salmon' - 'first for, and now in memory of Ceri Richards'[89] – and 'Landscape in Dyfed', written for Graham

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[83] This was inspired by Swansea painter Evan Walters' striking portrait of an anonymous coalminer, 'The Welsh Collier', and published in the Swansea University College literary magazine, *Dawn*, in 1942, while Ormond was still a student.

[84] Sections of this were first published in Keidrych Rhys's magazine *Wales* in 1944.

[85] This was written alongside Ormond's *Picture Post* piece on the Gower folk singer Phil Tanner in 1949. I will return to this in the following chapter.

[86] Joan and Dannie Abse, eds., *Voices in the Gallery* (London: Tate, 1986).

[87] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 57.

[88] Ibid, p. 86.

[89] Ormond, *Selected Poems*, p. 92.

Sutherland. However, I feel it is important to distinguish my interpretation of these poems from Thomas's. Indeed, where Thomas understands each of these poems to '[isolate] a key component of Ormond's imaginative make-up',[90] I would reiterate my conviction that these are poems that rather serve to demonstrate two alternative – and, in fact, not necessarily compatible - ways of seeing. Indeed, I would argue that Ormond's purpose is to evoke for the reader these different viewpoints in order to reveal the multiplicity of 'tiles', so to speak, available to the 'organic mosaic'. 'Landscape in Dyfed' is a key example. A description of the poem Ormond gave at Sutherland's memorial service at the National Museum of Wales in 1981 is revealing: '[The poem] sprang from a view of the work he had given to Wales; it is an account of *his* Pembrokeshire, some of *his* metaphors for reality'[91] (my emphasis). Such a statement seems to indicate that Ormond was not attempting to absorb Sutherland's way of seeing into his own, but rather attempting, as he says, to offer an "account" of it. The poem itself confirms this. While initially mimicking Sutherland's vision, translating his visual effects into poetry, the poem immediately shifts focus and acknowledges the painter in the second person, that is, as exterior to the voice of the poem. This is its first stanza:

> Because the sea grasped cleanly here, and there
> Coaxed too unsurely until clenched strata
> Resisted, an indecision of lanes resolves
> This land into gestures of beckoning
> Towards what is here and beyond, and both at hand.[92]

These lines find a linguistic homology for Sutherland's characteristically elaborate visual patterns; it consists of a single, complexly interlocking sentence that draws on the lexicon of geology, and its occlusive consonantal emphases insist on phonetic dissonance that seems to mimic the harsh visual geometries of rock formations: 'there/ Coaxed too unsurely until clenched strata/ Resisted'. It certainly shares Sutherland's concern with the hidden significance of geological phenomena, or, as art critic Peter Lord has put it, 'the primitive forces which [Sutherland] came to perceive beneath all

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[90] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 86.

[91] John Ormond, *Graham Sutherland, O.M.: A Memorial Address* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1980), p. 5.

[92] John Ormond, 'Landscape in Dyfed', *Selected Poems*, p. 99.

landscape'.[93] Here the natural world takes on a meaning and a life of its own: the sea

'grasp[s]', the land 'beckon[s]'; aeons are revealed within a single image. It is,

moreover, close to Dylan Thomas in its philosophical self-assurance: despite its

syntactic complexity, the stanza is essentially a self-contained declarative statement; it

gives no doubt as to its philosophical integrity, much like 'The force that through the

green fuse drives the flower/ Drives my green age'. However the second stanza appears

to move outside this frame of reference to provide an exterior view, a shot, almost, that

examines Sutherland as a camera might. Though Ormond denied ever seeing poems in a

'cinematic way',[94] this poem seems to me to go on to perform an explanatory

documentary function that is comparable with that of his films. It addresses Sutherland

in the second person, following his movements across the landscape. But poetry, of

course, is able to capture a different reality from that of the camera:

> Walk where you will, below is an estuary.
> In advance to a fleeting brightness you traverse
> So many shoals of the dead who have drowned
> In stone, so many hibernations
> Of souls, you could be in phantom country.[95]

Indeed, where Ormond's documentary film *Sutherland in Wales* (1977) follows the

artist on one of his daily hikes, here his poem tracks one of Sutherland's *metaphysical*

rambles across the countryside, seeing what the artist sees beneath the landscape's

mysterious majesty. Yet while the poem indulges in Sutherland's way of seeing, it does

not finally endorse it as a unique vision. The grandeur of natural form is seen up against

Sutherland himself, not the "self" of the poem: 'here are rock cathedrals which can be/

As small as *your* span'[96] (my emphasis). Thus, where M. Wynn Thomas argues that, in

the poem, 'Ormond imagines *himself* (like Sutherland) X-raying trees to their

mysterious temporal core'[97] (my emphasis), I would contest that Ormond in fact

provides an account of *Sutherland* doing just that: 'If you could cut/ Right to the heart

and uncouple the innermost rings/ [...] you would see the structure of air'.[98] This "you"

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[93] Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Imaging the Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 376.

[94] Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', 42.

[95] Ormond, 'Landscape in Dyfed', *Selected Poems*, p. 99.

[96] Ibid, p. 99.

[97] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 86.

[98] Ormond, Landscape in Dyfed, *Selected Poems*, p. 99.

is not the vernacular form of the impersonal third person singular 'one', but as it stands:
literally the personal second person singular 'you'. 'Landscape in Dyfed', then, offers
the truth of one artist's perspective, but does not assume that truth to be final. It is a
poem about a way of seeing, but performs the correlative function of being a poem
about the validity of *all* ways or any way of seeing. It demonstrates the idea that each
perspective that contributes to the 'organic mosaic' has its own integrity, but never
finally accesses 'true reality'.

Ormond's startling poem 'Salmon' works in a similar way.[99] This is another poem
that finds a poetic correlative for a painter's vision, this time that of Ceri Richards, of
whom Ormond was, as we know, a lifelong admirer, and who was himself an ekphrastic
artist who absorbed the energies and techniques of other arts, particularly the poetry of
his fellow-Swansea artists Vernon Watkins and Dylan Thomas, and, later, the work of
the French "Impressionist" composer Claude Debussy. At first glance 'Salmon' is a
poem that buys entirely into the vision of its ur-artist, finding in the migration of salmon
a potent metaphor for the dynamism of life's natural forces. Its short, vigorous lines
pulsate irrepressibly down the page, and it consistently finds a language to match the
dynamic proto-sexual energy of Richards's visual work on the same theme: 'his held,
squanderous peak/ Shudders his final hunger/ On her milk; seed laid on seed/ In spunk
of liquid silk.'[100] Significantly, though, this is a theme that Ceri Richards himself
discovered in the work of another artist, namely Dylan Thomas's 'The force that
through the green fuse drives the flower'. As Richards's biographer Mel Gooding has
asserted,

> [t]here is no doubt that when [Richards] turned to 'The force that through the
> green fuse' in 1943 its impact upon him was startling and revelatory. The words
> of the poem unleashed a complex of images, expressive visual metaphors for his
> own vision of the universe of living forms and of the dynamic natural processes
> which generate their distinctive and recurrent configurations.[101]

'Salmon', then, can be understood (perhaps somewhat clumsily) as a poem about a
series of paintings about a poem. (In this sense its very artistic genesis mimics

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[99] Ormond, never the most prolific of poets, allegedly spent four years ruminating on this poem before
deciding on its final form. Rhondda writer Ron Berry helped him with many of the working drafts; that
writer's papers at the Richard Burton Archives at Swansea University contains some interesting letters
between the two on this subject.
[100] Ormond, 'Salmon', Selected Poems, p. 94.
[101] Mel Gooding, Ceri Richards (Moffat: Cameron and Hollis, 2002), pp. 70-72.

something of the generative life energy that provides all these works with their theme.) Yet, as with 'Landscape in Dyfed', I would argue that this poem too is less an attempt to find a poetic language to match the artist's vision, but rather an attempt to mimic its effect in a way that draws attention to its use as one way of seeing among many. Indeed, Richards' paintings on this theme display the same pseudo-prophetic philosophical integrity we have seen in Dylan Thomas's work. Indeed, Thomas's 'The force that though the green fuse', in its declarative confidence, exhibits no hint of existential doubt; its speaker knows fully and precisely their own place within the natural order and, as a consequence, their own fate: 'The hand that whirls the water in the pool/ Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind/ Hauls my shroud sail.'[102] 'Salmon', however, repeatedly betrays the philosophical questioning that drives its imitative effects. The migrating fish are 'Caught in the embrace/ Of nothing that is not now'.[103] Such a phrase, while skilfully conveying the timeless energy of the salmon's migratory instinct, is predicated on the speaker's awareness of another timeframe, of a 'nothing' that is, indeed, a 'something' when set in distinction with an instinctively felt 'now'. Moreover, the fish

> know no question
> But, pressed by their cold blood,
> Glance through the known maze.
> They unravel the thread to source
> To die at their ancestry's
> Last knot, knowing no question.[104]

This reiteration of the salmon's philosophical blitheness seems almost to comment upon the very notion of questionless existence: where Richards and Thomas's works display a bold existential faith in the organic processes of nature, this poem, in its very awareness of the idea of an existence without question, betrays its own exteriority to that existence. Thus, where M. Wynn Thomas argues that the poem is 'offered as vivid naked proof of the sexual dynamic of nature', I would again add the rider that it rather offers this as one *possible* way of seeing. Indeed, its concluding appeal to Gautama Buddha, while revealing an anxious desire for a final truth through which to live, is

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[102] Dylan Thomas, 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower', *Dylan Thomas: Collected Poems 1934-1953*, ed. by Walford Davies and Ralph Maud (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 13.
[103] John Ormond, 'Salmon, *Selected Poems*, p. 92.
[104] Ibid, p. 94.

ultimately left unanswered. It is a poem that is 'haunt[ed]' by a vision of a final belief

that it can never fully endorse:

> Why does this fasting fish
> So haunt me? Gautama, was it this
> You saw from river-bank
> At Uruvela? Was this
>   Your glimpse
>   Of holy law?[105]

'Salmon', then, seems to me to embody the central driving impulse behind Ormond's

conception of art. This was a deep scepticism that required a new 'negative

metaphysics' through which it could imaginatively buffer and contain the terrible

certainty of uncertainty. This 'negative metaphysics' was a compensatory anti-belief, so

to speak; a belief in an imaginative realm manifested in well-crafted artefacts that could

resolve the irresolvable; an 'organic mosaic' that is never transcendent but always

materially and reassuringly present in exalted art; inter-related, inter-textual, inter-

artistic, but never accessing any final truth further than its own multiplicity of visions.

And, as I have been arguing, this was an impulse that itself bore the marks of a

Nonconformist upbringing and was shattered by a shift into post-Nonconformist,

modern Wales, a Wales in which artists no longer believed in the sustaining narratives

of Christianity, and were therefore instead required, as M. Wynn Thomas has remarked

of Dylan Thomas, 'to perform the traditional function of religion, which was to produce

[...] stories for people to live by, stories that linked human beings to the cosmos.'[106]

There was, it is worth adding, perhaps something of a paradox underlying this

philosophy of culture. Ormond, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, was driven to

his poetic philosophy by a partly egalitarian, partly journalistic, and certainly post-

religious set of mentalities. This was a poetic philosophy that displayed a profound

reverence for the myriad variegation of cultural forms and perspectives, and one that

resulted in an approach to poetry - and, as I will go on to discuss in the chapters that

follow, film - that attempted a form of absorption of this variegation into a chameleon

poetry of the 'organic mosaic'. It was post-religious in the sense that, as I have

discussed, culture was deemed a compensatory substitute for a unifying spiritual

epistemology that was, in the modern era, deemed untenable. And it was egalitarian and

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[105] Ibid, pp. 94-95.
[106] Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 234.

journalistic in the sense that it sought to share the profound benefits of culture to wider audiences. Yet this was a multifarious conception of culture that paradoxically hinged on a perception of the discrete *uniqueness* of each artistic perspective. Ormond's organic mosaic can thus be understood as a "dialogic" cultural strategy that, ironically, drew its strength from a "monologic" perception of culture as deriving solely from uniqueness of the romantic artist. This was, I believe, a tension at the heart Ormond's work in both poetry and on film. It was no doubt, a productive one, particularly given his role as a producer of documentary films; a form that, as I will discuss in the following chapter, to be effective, must maintain a careful balance between the informational and the aesthetic.

Ormond and the 'Second Flowering' of Anglophone Welsh Poetry

Ormond was in possession of the kind of modernist, compensatory, radically universalizing artistic philosophy, then, that we might not expect to be able to accommodate, or even be interested in accommodating, a set of specifically "national" political or cultural priorities. Like Wallace Stevens, the poet whom he deeply admired, and with whom he shared many of these philosophical preoccupations, we might expect Ormond to be utterly indifferent to such pedestrian questions of the 'actual world'. Indeed Stevens, as critic Alan Filreis notes, was perennially indifferent, even actively disobedient, to such concerns. He possessed a view towards matters of reality that was famously contained in his poem 'Description Without Place': 'observing is completing and we are content,/ In a world that shrinks to an immediate whole,// That we do not need to understand'.[107] And yet, despite evidently sharing a similar epistemological position, Ormond matured as a creative artist in 1960s Wales at the heart of a maelstrom in Welsh national political and cultural activity. As a poet he re-emerged, after his long hiatus, within the 'Second Flowering' of Welsh poetry in English, a movement that was, at its core, quite explicitly nationalist, and would prove influential in the regeneration of a Welsh cultural nationalism in the decades that followed. As a filmmaker he built a career under the auspices of a rejuvenated and rapidly expanding BBC Wales, which, as

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[107] Stevens, 'Description Without Place', in *Collected Poems*, p. 341. In fact Filreis goes on, somewhat excessively, perhaps, to accuse Stevens of a form of complicity with a neo-colonialist 1950s American foreign policy. Filreis suggests Stevens's was a 'world-absorbing view' that was tantamount to 'rhetorical colonialism'. Alan Filreis, *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 164-178.

I will explore in detail later, was in its own way – in programmes such as Ormond's - making an important contribution to these developments. His, then, was a relationship with Wales that we patently *do* 'need to understand'. The outlines of this relationship can be sketched, in part, with reference to the poetic philosophy I have been exploring in this chapter.

Indeed, the 'Second Flowering' of Anglophone Welsh poetry which provided the breeding ground for Ormond's return to poetry was the product of a socio-cultural moment far removed from that of the pre-Second World War south Wales in which Ormond grew up. The nation as a whole was, despite the steady decline of heavy industry, becoming materially richer with the onset of more light and service-based industries. Westminster was beginning to bring its engagement with Wales into clearer political focus, with the creation in 1964 of the Welsh Office and the Welsh Economic Planning Board, and, soon after, the Welsh Arts Council. This resulted in more employment – particularly white-collar work; as Tony Conran has written of this time, 'no one had to move to London now'.[108] As a result, political nationalism began to make ground, with Plaid Cymru winning its first seat in the Carmarthen by-election of 1966, a development that was no doubt fuelled further by the successes of a Welsh-language movement that had itself recently been turbocharged by Saunders Lewis's 1962 BBC lecture 'Tynged yr Iaith' (Fate of the Language). That this was broadcast on the BBC was of no minor significance. The real advancements that were being made in Welsh broadcasting – embodied by the emergence of BBC Wales proper and, three years later, the opening of Broadcasting House in Llandaf, Cardiff - provided the ground for fresh debates in Wales on the related subjects of culture, nationalism, and the Welsh language.[109] In the sphere of the bourgeois Anglophone Welsh literati, whose ranks had been newly swelled, this was characterised by a need to 'find a range of attitudes and a life style'[110] through which to justify itself; namely, a new national identity. Many found this in the tenets of an organic Welsh-language nationalism. And unlike Keidrych Rhys's almost identical effort in the late 1930s with his successful yet short-lived and sporadic journal *Wales*, this time national feeling was able to take

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[108] Conran, *'Poetry Wales* and the Second Flowering', p. 253.
[109] Saunders Lewis's brief return to the public sphere with his 1962 BBC lecture 'Tynged yr Iaith' ('The fate of the Language') in particular turbo-charged these debates.
[110] Tony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 64.

root.[111] Besides the central fact of an undoubtedly more conducive socio-economic and cultural climate, this was partly due to a conscious alteration of the very conception of national culture within the Anglophone Welsh community. Keidrych Rhys had assumed that the mere existence of such a cultural community, supported by a journal and better artistic networks, was enough to give rise to national consciousness; yet his work was weakened by the dual circumstances of a socio-economic situation in which most Welsh artistic talents were compelled, out of economic necessity or educational need, to move to London (Dylan Thomas, Ceri Richards, Alfred Janes, Daniel Jones, and later Dannie Abse and John Ormond, to name only a few[112]), and by the related fact that many of those same talents were catapulted out of Wales by artistic ambitions that obviated any interest in what they frequently viewed as the cloistered cultural communities in which they had grown up. The proponents of the new 1960s nationalism were thus aware that for a cultural nationalism to take shape in Wales, a fundamental shift had to take place within the value-set of the cultural community. An early editorial from Meic Stephens' important journal, *Poetry Wales* (established in 1965), sums up the new approach:

> [B]efore a poet writing in English can fully justify his position as Anglo-Welsh, he needs either to write about Welsh scenes, Welsh people, the Welsh past, life in contemporary Wales, or his own analyses of all these, or else attempt to demonstrate in his verse those more elusive characteristics of style and feeling which are generally regarded as belonging to Welsh poetry.[113]

Thus, with the creative onus being placed on national identity (or perhaps, depending on your view, weighed down by it), the new cultural policy necessarily became one of 'justify[ing]' the poet's relationship to the nation. For Stephens and others within the movement, this could only be achieved by planting poetry firmly in the Welsh ground, however 'newly disturbed'[114] its soil may have been.[115]

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[111] Rhys had set up the journal as an outlet for Anglophone Welsh culture in defiance of what he perceived as 'the English literary map of log-rolling, cocktail parties, book clubs, knighthoods, O.M.s and superannuated effeminacy in Bloomsbury editorial chairs.' (Keidrych Rhys, 'As you know', *Wales*, I:1 (1937) , 36-37.) Though his particular version of nationalism viewed a Welsh-speaking Wales as the final ideal, and viewed his project of supporting an Anglophone Welsh literary community as a 'stage on the way back to the use of Welsh for literature'. (Keidrych Rhys, 'Editorial', *Wales*, III: 2 (1943), 8.)

[112] Conran notes that there was 'a period of ill-adjusted growth, when a new middle class was in being, students were coming out of university looking for jobs, but Wales was not yet able to absorb them.' See '*Poetry Wales* and the Second Flowering, p. 224.

[113] Meic Stephens, 'The Second Flowering', in *Poetry Wales*, 3: 3 (1967), 3.

[114] Ibid, 6.

[115] Tony Bianchi has perceptively argued that this process of constructing Anglophone Welsh literature as the material 'with which a new cultural intelligentsia' could 'mould itself in Wales' was a result of the

There were, of course, voices within the 'Second Flowering' that did not subscribe to Stephens' somewhat dogmatic approach. Indeed, if, as Tony Conran suggests, it is possible to perceive two differing cultural strategies within this movement - one represented by Stephens, which favoured what Conran calls a form of "protectionism" centred on a utilization of the resources of the newly-founded Welsh Arts Council to construct a 'separatism new-rooted in Cardiff',[116] and another by Bryn Griffiths, who favoured a more open approach that sought to 'give Wales and its Anglophone literature a better place in the sun',[117] then Ormond is best viewed in the latter camp. This was, after all, an artist whose creative momentum had been generated by the convulsive surge out of this 'Nonconformist nation'[118] and into a newly modernist, cosmopolitan orbit. This made re-entry into a nationalist cultural community in Wales challenging, and Ormond demonstrated a fairly persistent ambivalence towards such thinking in much of his writing. A useful indication of this can be found in his introduction to the *Selected Poems* of his friend John Tripp (1989). Tripp, if we take Conran's dichotomy to be true, was firmly of the former camp. Possessing a bleakly lacerating nationalist voice, Tripp, as Ormond notes, consistently 'mourn[ed] a Wales oppressed by a still-continuing English infiltration and domination which have subdued, exploited and eroded the richnesses of Welsh tradition'.[119] Interestingly, Ormond takes the opportunity to note that he himself possessed a 'different view of things'[120] and, though he doesn't make explicit the particularities of this view, the remarks that close his short essay are revealing. Here he states that '[w]ith [Tripp's] death Wales lost a devoted and passionate poet, and poetry itself a singular voice.'[121] This seemingly innocuous remark seems to me to reveal an ambivalence that is central to Ormond's attitude towards the cultural nationalism espoused by his fellow artists in the Anglophone Welsh scene. Closing this short essay on one of the most vociferous proponents of Anglo-Welsh nationalism, Ormond feels it necessary to give the final

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deference the new middle class felt towards an already-established Welsh-speaking intelligentsia that had itself historically possessed a 'literary orientation'. It was thus 'natural that any new intellectual grouping seeking legitimacy should define itself in literary terms.' See Bianchi, 'R.S. Thomas and his Readers', in Tony Curtis, ed., *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 75-80.

[116] Conran, '*Poetry Wales* and the Second Flowering', p. 228.

[117] Ibid, p. 228.

[118] Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit*, p. 15.

[119] John Ormond, 'Introduction', in John Tripp, *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Seren, 1989), p. 9.

[120] For which Ormond fondly recalls the poet decried him a 'twittering optimist'. Ibid, p. 9.

[121] John Ormond, 'Introduction', in John Tripp, *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Seren, 1989), p. 13.

word to what he views as Tripp's *universal* significance: '*poetry itself* [lost] a singular voice'. I believe this to be precisely where Ormond's vision of art becomes troubled by the idea of a rooted nationalism. Though Ormond was no doubt inspired and excited by artistic developments in Wales, it was *poetry itself*, the conception that poetry and culture are not rooted to a singular place, that was, for Ormond, always the overriding principle.

Thus Ormond's poetic philosophy had expanded his epistemological frame of reference to the extent that the question of nationhood became a low priority, and certainly not a defining feature of his world-view. The critic James A. Davies aptly describes this as a form of 'detached attachment.'[122] The decidedly *un*national thematics of his earliest contributions to the explicitly nationalist *Poetry Wales*, for instance ('Cathedral Builders' and 'Design for a Tomb', published, respectively, in the third and fourth issues of that magazine) are a case in point; for the artist who views reality as merely a function of the imagination, and art as the medium through which that reality is mediated, the problems of cultural politics and national difference bear little significance. Indeed Ormond's lack of interest on this score is further suggested in an autobiographical essay he wrote for the Welsh Arts Council publication *Artists in Wales 2* in 1972:

> In what way is my work Welsh at all? [My work as a film-maker has] contributed
> to a broadening of my experience of my country. But when it comes to my poems
> I have to give a different account of myself. What I ask of my poems is that, first
> and foremost, it should be a good poem in the English language, that is to say my
> use of the English language. If there is a further element of Welshness in a poem,
> I know that it will look after itself.[123]

Ormond's idea or ideal of art here seems to override any real concern with national culture. Whereas for nationalist intellectuals such as Stephens and Tripp, Anglophone Welsh writers must 'justify' their use of that language by 'writ[ing] about Welsh scenes, Welsh people, the Welsh past, life in contemporary Wales, or his own analyses of all these', for Ormond the language carries no national-ideological baggage. It is merely a tool to be 'use[d]' (the verb here is significant) to create the artefacts through which a broadly- (and certainly not nationally-) conceived humanity is able to comprehend the final incomprehensibility of the world. Thus, while Ormond did, as an early contributor

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[122] James A. Davies, 'Detached Attachment', *New Welsh Review*, 10: 3 (1997-98), 37-39.
[123] Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales* 2, p. 162.

to *Poetry Wales* and an associate of the 'Second Flowering', write a number of poems that concern themselves with Wales – and in particular with Dunvant – Ormond's tendency to find inspiration for his art in the realm of the imagination as opposed to social reality, and to find justification for it in humanity as opposed to the nation, is discernable in all of these.[124] A case in point is 'My Dusty Kinsfolk', one of Ormond's best-known 'Dunvant poems'. Though on the surface this poem insists it is composed 'in requiem and celebration' of the community in which the speaker was raised – addressing himself in the second person, it 'speak[s] these words to you, my kin/ And friends'[125] - this is a poem that speaks noisily past its imagined interlocutors to its implied reader. The poem is concerned primarily with one of Ormond's favourite themes – the interrelatedness of life and death[126] – and being so, the village serves as little more than a universal signifier for a way of life that has been and gone. The speaker, strolling through the village graveyard, finds little more than a cosy nostalgia in his decidedly former 'fellow villagers' whom, in death, he helped to 'tuck' into 'the best blanket from [their] bed', and the couplet that gives a place to the poem does so in the tones of a gothic nursery rhyme: 'The Dunvant seam spreads fingers in/ The churchyard under Penybryn'. This, then, is not a poem that offers an alternative to a lost community, but rather finds thematic sustenance in its loss. Indeed, productive life is manifested only in the shape of trees that 'Put down their roots to you'. Unlike the 'jamjars' which 'carry flowers' for the dead mentioned earlier in the poem, it is ultimately only these trees - rooted in the natural earth - that will endure. The past lives of these villagers can only 'haunt' as memories, memories which will too be forgotten, as the speaker, checking himself, implies: 'as surely as/ Your breath was not, and was, and was.' Furthermore, a similar triumph of the natural over the historical, the universal over the national, is reiterated in a poem titled (with appropriate ambivalence) 'Where Home Was'. As with 'My Dusty Kinsfolk', 'home' is again here fixed firmly in a past

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[124] The poet's daughter, Rian Evans, has written of this in the introduction to her father's posthumous collection *Cathedral Builders* (1991): 'John was deeply conscious of his roots and proud to celebrate them in his poems, but his perception of the characters and their lives is such that their truth is a universal truth'. Rian Evans, 'Introduction', in John Ormond, *Cathedral Builders and other poems* (Newtown: Gwasg Gregynog, 1991), p. ix.

[125] John Ormond, 'My Dusty Kinsfolk', *Selected Poems*, p. 41.

[126] I do not have the space here to elaborate on this important facet of Ormond's poetry. It suffices to draw on a quotation from Richard Poole's useful article 'Conversations with John Ormond'. There Ormond explains that his reading of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who most notably explored the notion of the essential duality of all phenomena, provided him with a 'resting-place when for many years I'd lost my former religious faith. I found that if you accept the notion of life you have to accept the notion of death.' Ormond, quoted in Poole, 'Conversations', 40.

littered with quaint nostalgia and characterised by a distinct sense of the simple life;

bridges are built by men 'whose blunt/ Belief was that a builder's guess, / If good, was

better than a long/ And bungled calculation';[127] a box marked '*Private*' contains no

titillating curiosities but, rather, 'oily/ Rags, a lantern, an oil-can.' The poem recalls the

speaker's youthful days spent loitering on the local railway line, and while Ormond,

with a skilful transposition of images – a jump-cut, of sorts - that demonstrates the deft

hand with images that proved central to his talent as a filmmaker, the gesture

demonstrates also his unvarying tendency to universalise:

> The trains went by to town.
> We waved our caps to people we'd never
> Know. Now it is always Sunday. Weeds
> Speed down the line. The bridges
> Stand there yet, joists over a green
> Nothing.[128]

Thus, the boys' wave is the gesture of the universal; theirs is not the singularly local or

national experience, but that of humanity waving a valediction to a now lost past.

Moreover, the marvellous images of 'Weeds/ Speed[ing] down the line', and of bridges

over a 'green/ Nothing' finds solace in the cosmic, natural timeframe with which the

poem begins ('the glacier long ago/ Gouged out the valley'). Like the trees of 'My

Dusty Kinsfolk', the simple past of the poem's locality is effaced by a grander sense of

natural inevitability – a sense of existence that one can never fully know.

Perhaps the best symbol and example of this propensity to read history through

the lens of natural inevitablity is found in Ormond's 'Tombstones', another poem to be

found in the "Dunvant" section of his *Selected Poems*. Once again, the natural order –

here symbolised by the encroaching lichen on a tombstone – reduces all life, all history,

to 'ritual statements'. Indeed this natural order effaces any attempt to inscribe memory

in stone: 'Lichens censor all but the primitive/ Incisions of arbitrary dates'. It is thus

futile to record the past; ultimately, on a long enough timescale (note again Ormond's

tendency to concertina time), all history becomes 'primitive'. Here the lichen is 'ochre',

but it is quite possible to see this colour functioning within the same philosophical

palette as Ormond's recurrent use of the colour green. In both 'My Dusty Kinsfolk' and

'Where Home Was', we see this colour on the surface; in the former, in trees which

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[127] John Ormond, 'Where Home Was', *Selected Poems*, p. 42.
[128] Ibid, p. 43.

'[p]ut down their roots', and in the latter, in the weeds' 'green nothing'. Moreover, we should not forget Ormond's use of the colour in the poem of existential acceptance we examined earlier, 'The Gift': 'Enough that it was given, green, as of right, when,/ Equally possible, nothing might ever have been'. M. Wynn Thomas, in his book on Ormond, has rightly identified the prominence of this colour in the poet's oeuvre. There he describes it as

> the colour of the given, unalterable nature of things; it represents the wonderful arbitrariness and arbitrary wonder of existence [...], and admits of no Romantic belief in either immanence or transcendence. And the questions we are warned not to ask about it are not so much questions for which we can find no answers as questions which, in Wittgenstein's terms, make no real sense because they lie beyond the limits that give meaning to language.[129]

This is partly the point I have been aiming at. Ormond's anti-transcendent, modernist vision engendered an epistemology that could account for the bewildering experience of modernity without resorting to assumptions of faith or of an underlying coherence to existence. He found this in a Wittgensteinian pleasure in the imagination's ability to at least grasp what isn't there, and find enjoyment in the imaginative products that arise from this unknowability. But when this way of seeing comes up against the problems of history and of – in the case of the socio-cultural context in which Ormond was operating – the nation, it finds itself without a language with which to address it. Ormond's strategy, when addressing themes of locality and nation in his poetry, was thus to reduce this problem to the realm of natural forces – to resign himself to the fact that these are the inevitable consequence of a natural, "given" order.

Ormond's universalising philosophy thus resulted in a persistent ambivalence in his relationship with his home nation, a nation that was, in its widening cultural and institutional circles at least, becoming increasingly nationalistic in focus. This ambivalence is strongly signalled in his tendency, in his later years, to distance himself from Wales by spending lengthy sojourns abroad in the town of Cortona near Arezzo in Tuscany, Italy. Cortona was a place with which he seems to have felt a deep affinity; it was here that 'something tap[ped] a spring', where '[l]ong-felt ideas and long-heard musics seem [...] to cohere'.[130] Indeed this sense of increasing distance from a "protectionist" Cardiff cultural scene is aptly symbolized by the fact that this remark is

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[129] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 71.
[130] John Ormond, 'Letter from Tuscany', *Poetry Wales*, 24: 1 (1988), 22.

contained in a 'Letter From Tuscany' to *Poetry Wales* magazine in 1988, which was,

moreover, one of his final published pieces of writing. By this time, he notes, Cortona

was 'not the place I visit, but the other place I live.'[131] On one level, this affinity with

the sun-kissed sandstone hill villages of Tuscany was no doubt a product of Ormond's

own peculiar sensibility as a poet and a man. In his obituary for Ormond, Glyn Jones

confesses to having been tempted to 'call John an aesthete', if, that is, 'the designation

had not gathered such extensive overtones suggesting powerfully a languid manner,

scented hair and an orchid'.[132] To be sure, as the following passage from his letter to

Poetry Wales indicates, there was no doubt something of the *bon vivant* in Ormond, of

the man interested in the better things in life (even if this was tempered by the more

grounded, homely sensibility he acquired from his upbringing in working-class

Dunvant):

> I started this early today and the morning has gone fast. I'll have a bite and glass
> later in the public gardens where my mate Erminio and his girl Dorella keep a
> little restaurant. I have a Mozart tape and some Schubert to exchange with him.
> Last year he gave me Paganini's unaccompanied violin pieces. What will it be
> today at a table outside the heavy scent of the linden trees?[133]

But it is clear from this letter, too, that there was a deeper, though related, significance

to his attraction to this place so far removed from south Wales. It was here that he was

able to revel in his lifelong ambition; that of being, simply, a poet - a purity of ambition

that he felt unable to pursue in Wales. 'I said something I am normally reluctant to say

at home', he writes, recalling a conversation with the owner of a local café, 'and this is

the essence of my being here and my joy in it: "Sono poeta", I said. [...] "I am a

poet".'[134] This sentence, written in a letter to the literary magazine at the heart of the

Welsh cultural nationalist project, seems to me to encapsulate the tension that was

central to Ormond's life as an artist in both verse and on film. This was a man

committed to the purity of artistic and imaginative ambition, to the craft of his art, yet

simultaneously drawn to the commitments and obligations of national life. But as I will

go on to discuss in the chapters that follow, this was, for a producer of documentary

films at a national broadcasting institution, a highly productive tension.

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[131] Ibid, p. 22.
[132] Glyn Jones, 'John Ormond 1923-1990', *Poetry Wales*, 26:2 (1990), 3.
[133] Ormond, 'Letter from Tuscany', p. 22.
[134] Ibid, p. 22.

Chapter Two: Ormond and the Poetics of Documentary

Everything contributes or distracts in its degree [...] and everything – pace, setting, rhythm, sounds, as well as words and shifting images – must not only combine in a single statement but be harnessed to powerful and daring ideas informing the programme as a whole if it is to be more than a piece of scissors and paste anthologising or so much talk with 'visual aids' tacked on. Television, a conviction no less strong for eluding us so often in practice, resides in the imagination.[1]

Huw Wheldon, *Monitor: An Anthology*

By personal documentary I mean a programme, usually made on film, which is very much the individual work of its producer and/or director and which, through its imaginative handling of reality, expresses his own attitude not only to the programme's immediate subject-matter but to the whole of the world in which he lives. It is in programmes of this sort that factual television has come closest to making works of art. Indeed there is a very vocal body of opinion which claims that in the work of a small handful of documentary producers television [...] has enjoyed its finest creative moments.[2]

Norman Swallow, *Factual Television*

In an essay published in his recent edited book *New Challenges for Documentary* (2005), John Corner highlights a prevailing tendency amongst his colleagues to overlook the formal and creative aspects of documentary films – those aspects that fall broadly within what he terms the 'category of the aesthetic' - in favour of sociological, political and audience-centred approaches. As he puts it,

[d]etailed attention to the 'art properties' of television has been seen to waste investigative time that might more valuably be spent on questions of institution, practice, thematic content and consumption, on the framing political and cultural economies and processes within which programmes are produced and circulated.[3]

Of course, this tendency can partly be ascribed to the fact that, as Corner concedes, 'a good deal of non-fictional television is not particularly interested in offering itself as an aesthetic experience anyway.'[4] Nevertheless, Corner reminds us that there are plenty of documentary films and television programmes that do take the form of 'overt textual

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[1] Huw Wheldon, ed., *Monitor: An Anthology* (London: Macdonald, 1962), p. 12.
[2] Norman Swallow, *Factual Television* (London: Focal Press, 1966), p. 176.
[3] John Corner, 'Television, Documentary and the Category of the Aesthetic', in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner, eds., *New Challenges for Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 48.
[4] Ibid, p. 49.

display and performance'[5] and that 'reward repeat viewings in a way that finally has little to do with the extractable knowledge they convey.'[6] Indeed, judging by the remarks of the two distinguished BBC television producers that I have used as epigraphs to this chapter, to overlook such aspects would appear to border on the criminal. Here Huw Wheldon and Norman Swallow's emphasis on the exhaustive and exacting attention that many television producers applied to their programmes during the formative 1960s is, if nothing else, an encouragement for media critics and commentators to repay their hard work with equally exhaustive and exacting critical attention to them.

Given that I am dealing with a television producer who considered himself first and foremost a poet, a creative artist, such a focus on the aesthetic qualities of Ormond's films seems appropriate.[7] Indeed, we know that Ormond invested a considerable amount of creative energy in his films for BBC Wales. One strong indication of this is the quite simple fact that he remained in his job as a television producer for so many years. Ormond joined the BBC in 1955, was made head of the new 'Welsh Film Unit' in 1957, and was still working with the BBC in some capacity throughout the 1980s. This was in contrast to the somewhat peripatetic early years of his working life. He had in 1955 resigned from the prestigious *Picture Post* photojournalist magazine on the basis that the job "interfered" with his true calling as a poet. As he wrote in an autobiographical essay in 1973, '[b]efore joining *Picture Post* I had resolved that if my job interfered with my work (that was to say, being a poet), I

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[5] Ibid, p. 51.

[6] Ibid, p. 50.

[7] It is necessary here to say a few words about my use of the term "film". As James Monaco notes in his book *How to Read a Film*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), finding a singular term for the 'art of the moving picture' (the phrase is poet and early film theorist Vachel Lindsay's) is a tricky process. The names that are usually ascribed to it – "movies", "cinema" and "film" – are not distinct; they each possess different connotations, yet are often used interchangeably. Monaco usefully draws out the broad differences between the three: '"movies", like popcorn, are to be consumed; "cinema" [...] is high art, redolent of esthetics; "film" is the most general term we use with the fewest connotations.' Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, p. 252. I have thus chosen to adopt the term "film" here, though I am conscious of the fact that the term is complicated further when used in the context of both documentary and television production. Nevertheless, I find the term "film" more appropriate than "television programme" in the context of Ormond's work; film seems to more aptly signal the range of artistic and cultural discourses outside broadcasting that contributed to the kind of "films" Ormond produced. The term "programme" seems to me to miss some of these important wider connotations. As for the term "documentary" – the broad aim of this chapter is to clarify a working definition of this fraught term for use throughout the thesis.

would leave my job.'[8] Later, the strains of regimented newspaper copywriting proved too trying for a man interested in the finer subtleties of language:

> I went back to Swansea to work as a sub-editor on the evening newspaper there, thinking that a job that occupied me from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. would leave me the evenings free to work in. It did not turn out that way. There came a point when I'd write a line of a poem and automatically start counting the number of letters in the line, as though it were a headline of the kind I'd been writing all day, as though it had to fit across eight or nine columns.[9]

Without even watching the films themselves, then, the very fact of Ormond's decision to stay with BBC Wales for the duration of his career after 1955 seems to be a strong indication that his role as documentary filmmaker there satisfied at least some of his creative inclinations. Moreover, in his later years, even when ostensibly lamenting the fact that his role as a filmmaker (his "job") absorbed so much of his creative energy (his "work" as a poet), it is clear that he nevertheless saw filmmaking as a primarily creative endeavour. 'I know that my work as a film-maker obsessed me,' he confessed in an interview for *New Welsh Review* in 1989, 'and there came a point in my life when I realised that if I'd spent even a tenth of the time and imaginative effort in trying to write a poem as I put into making a film – directing it, writing it, arranging it, supervising the cutting to a twenty-fifth second of it – then I'd probably have more poems.'[10] It is, further, no doubt significant that Ormond was, on more than one occasion, inspired to write poetry by his experiences as a filmmaker. In the same interview with critic Richard Poole, Ormond noted that his poem 'Ancient Monuments' came as a result of scouting a location for a film and coming across a cromlech in a field of barley.[11]

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[8] Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales* 2, p. 161.

[9] Ibid, p. 161. Ormond found a way of passing the time on such monotonous tasks by testing the night-editor's patience. Geraint Talfan Davies recalls Ormond telling him of a time he constructed a three-line headline, 'Swansea Man/ Weds Swansea Woman/ In Swansea.'. Geraint Talfan Davies, *At Arm's Length: Recollections and Reflections on the Arts, Media and a Young Democracy* (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 40.

[10] Ormond, quoted in Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', 42.

[11] The film was *A Bronze Mask* (1969), in memory of Dylan Thomas. The cromlech was used to illustrate a passage from a posthumous collection of the writings of seventeenth-century metaphysical writer Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations* (1908): 'The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown.' Another instance was that in which Ormond famously set down the poem that 'broke the blockage that had kept [him] virtually silent for too many years', 'Cathedral Builders', after seeing a group of workers while on location filming his 1963 *From a Town in Tuscany*. It is debatable on this occasion whether he was inspired by the process of filming or by the culturally resonant Italian region itself; indeed, as I noted in the previous chapter, Tuscany was a region that was to have much significance for him later in life. Either way it seems to me no accident that it was during work as a filmmaker that his muse returned to him.

However, while he admitted that there were 'definitely cases where observation and visual experience, things vividly seen, have started me off on poems', he firmly denied any suggestion that he saw his poems 'in a cinematic way'.[12] Interestingly, 'Ancient Monuments' itself enacts a similar dismissal of any meaningful link between his two trades in its unwillingness to pay explicit reference to his day job: '*Looking for something else*, I came once/ To a cromlech in a field of barley' (emphasis added).[13] This reluctance to acknowledge the unrefined world of television production in his poetry is a significant omission; it seems to me to say something about the perceived axiological clash between the two creative worlds within which Ormond was working. Yet, despite this denial, there are nevertheless many strong and often illuminating correspondences between his poetry and his filmmaking – sometimes thematic, sometimes formal, often philosophical or ideological - and I will be exploring such individual instances in detail throughout the thesis. One of the aims of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss in general terms the ways in which the poetic philosophy I traced in the preceding chapter manifests itself in important ways in Ormond's filmmaking.

It could be argued at this point that such a focus on Ormond's own thinking and practice runs the risk of reducing the study of his wider body of work at BBC Wales to a simple "auteurism", an approach to film – and indeed to all forms of culture – that has, since at least Roland Barthes' seminal essay, 'Death of the Author', been viewed as problematic. The post-structuralist turn that is often marked by the work of Barthes and other French philosophers of the 1960s opened up an enormous range of new readings, interpretations and definitions of art and culture that brought into question the notion of an ideal "Author-God", to borrow Barthes' term, at the centre of creative endeavour. In film and television studies in particular, the limitations of this view can quite easily be demonstrated by the presence of the enormous range of personnel involved in the creation of any single creative "text" - camera operators, editors, sound engineers, set designers, actors and so on - all of whom contribute to the final product in a way that quite clearly renders problematic, if not ridiculous, the idea of a single "author" at the helm of the text. As media critic Jeremy Tunstall notes in his useful book on television production:

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[12] Ormond, quoted in Poole, 'Conversations', 42.
[13] This reluctance to reference the unrefined world of television production in a poem is a significant omission; it seems to me to speak volumes about the conflict between Ormond's two creative idioms.

> If television is an art-form, it is a cumbersome and expensive one. If the producer
> is an auteur or author, he is an author who needs the active involvement of thirty
> or forty other people, expensive equipment, studio space and – not least – a
> network to transmit the end-product.[14]

This fact, along with the prominence of post-structuralist critical ideas, has led to a

dominance within the broad field of media studies of the set of critical approaches to

which Corner refers, namely those that foreground politics, economics, and other wider

institutional forces. The more theoretical versions of these arguments, moreover,

highlight the idea that all creative endeavour inevitably takes place at the nexus of a

range of discourses that belong to no single person or institution. In this sense creative

acts are far more complexly interwoven in the wider socio-cultural realm than any

reading that starts from the notion of a singular "author" can hope to explain. As

Barthes wrote, '[t]he text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres

of culture.'[15] While I am in accord with such interventions in the "author/auteur"

debate, I do believe there are nevertheless merits to an approach that simultaneously

starts with the author, particularly in the context of television production in the era in

which Ormond was most active (the 1960s and early 1970s). Indeed, I want to explore

in this chapter the extent to which it is in fact necessary to combine the two, or at least

to keep both in view.

Film historians Patrick Russell and James Piers-Taylor make a useful point on this

score in their recent important book on post-war British documentary, *Shadows of

Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain* (2010). Indeed they argue that the (in

their words) "commonsensical" auteurist approach has much to offer critics. And while

in the following passage they discuss the realm of commercial, independent

documentary production, their argument certainly pertains also to television production

in the same era:

> The career narratives of those who toiled in post-war documentary make for
> absorbing human stories. They are also revealing micro-studies in how the
> industry at large functioned and changed. Finally, as part of a collaborative
> process, the director undoubtedly did play an important role in mediating the
> sponsor's brief and the viewer's experience.[16]

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[14] Jeremy Tunstall, *Television Producers* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

[15] Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1993 [1977]), p. 146.

[16] Patrick Russell and James Piers-Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain* (London: BFI, 2010), p. 117.

I would, naturally, defend the idea that Ormond's 'career narrative' is worth examining as an 'absorbing human story', and I will go on in the chapters that follow to argue that his body of work as a filmmaker can indeed be viewed as a 'revealing micro-study' of the ways in which BBC Wales functioned as an institution within a broad national context. But it is necessary to modify Russell and Piers-Taylor's final point here to bring it into the context of television production in this era; specifically the fact that the auteur-director of television documentaries at this time played not only an "important" but, further, an absolutely *central* orchestrating role in the production of programmes. Indeed, looking back at, in particular, Swallow's remarks in the epigraph to this chapter, it is clear that documentary filmmakers at the BBC, particularly in the 1960s, were accorded an exceptionally high status. That passage is borrowed from a chapter in Swallow's important 1966 book *Factual Television*, in which he attempts to outline the form of a particular kind of television documentary, something Swallow tellingly terms the 'personal documentary'. The kind of 'personal documentary' that Swallow endorses is 'very much the individual work of its producer', it 'expresses his own attitude'; later in his book Swallow refers to the producers of such programmes as 'essentially artists who use ordinary people as the symbols with which to express their view of life, as the dramatist creates his own characters and as a painter mixes his own paints.'[17] Significantly, Ormond is one of the filmmakers Swallow names in this connection, alongside other influential figures such as Denis Mitchell, Ken Russell and Philip Donnellan, all of whom made names for themselves during the expansion of documentary production at the BBC in the late 1950s and 1960s. It was therefore these kinds of assumptions about the essential creativity of the individual that, alongside the institutional requirements that led to the expansion of documentary production at this time (more on which in the following chapter), awarded such filmmakers the space, time and resources to create their films. As Swallow attests, 'personal documentaries' were 'created to a large extent by one man in isolation, forged and modified minute by minute, depending entirely on his own skill in extracting what is finest and most relevant from the corner of life which he has chosen'.[18] Similarly, Ormond himself recalled being 'blessed by non-interference'[19] during the 1960s.[20]

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[17] Swallow, *Factual Television*, p. 178.
[18] Ibid, p. 190.
[19] John Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 10.

This fact of Ormond's high degree of creative freedom at BBC Wales is important on two scores. Firstly, a closer examination of this fact alone reveals much about the broader values and assumptions that were at that time informing BBC production. In the same way that we can learn much about the values and assumptions of film culture in 1950s France via an understanding of its cultivation of "auteur" film theory - a discursive formation that was in a major sense a reaction to the dominance of a Hollywood film industry predicated on the Fordist principle of mass production that was inimical to the idea and status of "art" in France (and elsewhere) at that time - we can similarly learn much about the institutional context in which Ormond was working as a filmmaker via an examination of those values and assumptions that afforded him the space and resources to produce the kind of films that he did.[21] Secondly, and as a consequence of this, a grasp of these institutional freedoms and, further, the ways in which Ormond exercised those freedoms, can lead us in turn to a better understanding of the 'aesthetic axis' that John Corner rightly argues is crucial to a fuller understanding of the peculiar cultural form we call "documentary". Indeed, while I want in later chapters of this thesis to examine the specific social, civic, and, I want to argue, "national" meanings that Ormond's documentaries seek to present and with which they seek to engage, it is necessary first to isolate the question of the aesthetic form that these films take. This is not only due to the fact that I am dealing with the work of an exceptionally "creative" documentary filmmaker – though this is of course partly the case. It is necessary too for the reason that Corner expands upon in his excellent book on television, *Television Form and Public Address* (1995):

> [A] 'good' documentary must always, by definition, have the primary aim of directing its viewers down its *referential axis* towards 'real world' concerns. Yet [...] there is an *aesthetic axis* too – a documentary 'poetics'. This does not merely comprise a set of presentational skills; it is centrally implicated in the production of the referential [...].[22] (Emphases in original.)

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[20] Though there were considerable developments in the 1970s that restricted many of the freedoms producers like Ormond enjoyed in the 1960s. I will return to this issue in a later chapter.

[21] The "auteur" theory arose among the writings of a set of French "new-wave" filmmakers and theorists such as André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard and in particular Francois Truffaut in their journal *Cahiers du Cinema*. As film critic Pam Cook explains, 'the practice of attributing cultural products to the name of an individual artist ensures that they are marketed in a particular way, as 'art' rather than 'mass production', and consumed by a knowledgeable, niche audience.' Pam Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 3rd edn. (London: BFI, 2007), p. 388.

[22] John Corner, *Television Form and Public Address* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 104.

I will talk at length in the following chapter about the sense in which the television documentary's primarily "referential" – that is, informative, educative and therefore civic - function is necessarily concerned with promoting and perpetuating certain forms of *national* citizenship. But one of the main purposes of this chapter is to set the groundwork for those wider discussions; that is, to discuss the basic ways in which the "aesthetics" of documentary films are 'centrally implicated in the production of the referential'. It will also address the issue of Ormond's unique contribution to this form of filmmaking.

Documentary Poetics

Before I move on to a detailed examination of his own "personal" approach to documentary production, then, it is first necessary to examine the wider set of assumptions about film as a medium, and particularly documentary as a form, which helped furnish Ormond, along with the other 'personal documentary' makers of this era, with the resources - material and imaginative - to produce the creative films they did. Indeed, though the term "documentary" has, given its etymological root, connotations that touch strongly upon notions of truth and fact, the evidentiary and the authentic, the "documentary" as a film form in its earliest manifestation is arguably far better understood if associated with the realms of creativity, innovation and the imagination. Indeed, the experiments with the film camera that took place outside of the burgeoning "feature" film industry in the first few decades of the twentieth century have prompted some critics to adopt the less loaded term "non-fiction film".[23] The work of non-fiction filmmakers in Europe, in particular, was driven by the creative impulses of modernism, and was part of a wider cultural search for new forms and means of artistic expression and understanding. Occasionally the crossovers were quite real; the famous surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), for instance, was a collaboration between Spanish filmmaker Luis Bunuel and the great surrealist painter Salvador Dalí.[24] But in general

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[23] See for instance Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[24] Another notable of the Paris film scene of this era was René Clair, an influential French filmmaker who attempted in these early days to achieve what French contributors to *La Cahiers du Cinema* attempted in the 1950s, that is, to view film as a new, discrete art-form of the calibre of any of the traditional arts. Clair's idea of "pure cinema" was an attempt to move the medium away from its tendency to mimic the traditional narrative and visual arts and to forge a visual vocabulary of its own. See René Clair, *Cinema Yesterday and Today* (New York: Dover, 1972). Significantly, M. Wynn Thomas has noted that Ormond

this was a time of broad intellectual and creative exchange across the arts that resulted in an essentially imaginative approach to "non-fiction" filmmaking, an approach that deliberately complicated – if not totally rejected - the dichotomy of "fiction" and "non-fiction" in its search for new forms of artistic expression. One notable result was the short-lived but influential "city symphony", a genre whose name alone points to this searching interpenetration of artistic ideas and forms. As documentary historian Erik Barnouw notes, the 'city symphony' was a genre that 'represented a crossbreeding of all the arts.'[25] The filmmakers in this tradition used the film medium to paint totalising pictures – or rather write totalising "symphonies" – of major cities. Films such as Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1929) (Amsterdam), Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien Que Les Heures* (*Only the Hours*, 1926) (Paris), and Walter Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1927) transcended the devices and conventions of narrative cinema in their search for more profound means of filmic expression. Some critics further place Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's experimental masterpiece *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), despite its origins in a very different political and cultural climate, under the same banner.[26] But whatever the politics of their realisation, all of these films demonstrate the essentially creative and experimental spirit of "non-fiction" filmmaking in this era of 'documentary before documentary',[27] in Michael Chanan's terms.

It was of course John Grierson who virtually singlehandedly reshaped – or perhaps gave shape to – the nebulous non-fiction film in the late 1920s. A high-minded graduate of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, Grierson had returned to Britain after a period of post-graduate study in the United States armed with a new idea, the "documentary". He had been the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship to study 'aspects of public opinion and social psychology'[28] in the United States. During his time there he had watched the pioneering non-fiction films of Robert Flaherty, Dziga Vertov, and others, and became convinced that with the right resources he could

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was an admirer of Clair, and had scribbled notes from the Frenchman's books into his notebook. See Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 34.

[25] Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 77.

[26] Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: BFI, 2007), p. 24. As Brian Winston notes, Vertov viewed the camera as an instrument of social observation that was, in its observational precision, capable of penetrating the truth of social(ist) existence: "The movie camera', Vertov claimed, 'was invented in order to penetrate more deeply into the visible world' than could the unaided human eye.' Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 [1995]), p. 167.

[27] Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary*, p. 59.

[28] Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

fashion this nascent form into a powerful tool of democratic citizenship. Back in Britain

he set about establishing and promoting the form on a national scale. Securing the initial

financial resources via a job at the Empire Marketing Board, he set about theorizing and

formulating the form and, crucially, *function* that he felt documentary should adopt.

Film was, after all, more visually stimulating than newspaper print, and, if manipulated

in the right way, far more affective than the 'speedy snip-snap'[29] of the newsreel. It is

important to recognise, therefore, that Grierson's vision for the documentary was, from

the beginning, quite distinct from the purely expressionist, experimentalist uses to

which the blank canvas of the non-fiction film had hitherto been put. Grierson had a

firm political view of society, one that had taken shape under the influence of idealist

philosophers at Glasgow University such as F.H Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet and A.D.

Lindsay,[30] and translated into a political philosophy that can be described as, in the

words of documentary historian Jeffrey Richards, "corporatist"; that is, one in which

'individual and social phenomena were perceived as being integrated, at different levels,

within the social totality'.[31] Grierson saw the purpose of documentary as being,

primarily, in the service of this political vision. As he wrote in 1942,

> The documentary idea was not […] a film idea at all, and the film treatment it
> inspired [was] only an incidental aspect of it. The medium happened to be the
> most convenient and most exciting available to us. The idea itself, on the other
> hand, was a new idea for public education: its underlying concept that the world
> was in a phase of drastic change affecting every manner of thought and practice,
> and the public comprehension of the nature of that change vital.[32]

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[29] John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary', in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 145.

[30] Ian Aitken, in his comprehensive study of the formation of Grierson's political philosophy, names these professors as having the major influence on Grierson's thinking while at Glasgow. He does not mention the Welshman Sir Henry Jones, who, at the time Grierson was a student there, held the chair of moral philosophy, and would have no doubt also been an influence. (H.J.W. Hetherington, 'Jones, Sir Henry (1852-1922)', rev. David Boucher, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34229> [Accessed 19 November 2013])

[31] Jeffrey Richards, 'John Grierson and the Lost World of the GPO Film Unit', in Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, eds., *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* (London: BFI, 2011), p. 1. Grierson once said that 'We taken postmen for granted, like the milkmen, the engine driver, the coal miner, the lot of them, […] we take them all for granted, yet we are all dependent on them, just as we are all interdependent one to another. The simple fact is that we are all in each other's debt. This is what we must get over. This is what this documentary is all about.' Quoted in Scott Anthony, 'The GPO Film Unit and "Britishness" in the 1930s', in Anthony and Mansell, eds., *The Projection of Britain*, pp. 13-14.

[32] John Grierson, 'The Documentary Idea: 1942', in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 250.

Grierson should thus be viewed, alongside his outspoken colleague of the early 1930s, Paul Rotha, as one of the figures who cemented the idea of the documentary film as a functional tool of public information.[33] After the closing of the Empire Marketing Board, his work came under the sponsorship of the General Post Office and, after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Ministry of Information. His work (and that of his many colleagues and underlings) at all three state organizations is now broadly termed under the banner of the 'British Documentary Movement'. And while the end of the war saw the movement splinter into a wide variety of commercial film companies and, later, into cinema and television, his core vision provided the template for all work under the banner of "documentary" that has succeeded it.

Yet there was always something ambiguous about Grierson's pithy definition of the documentary: the 'creative treatment of actuality'.[34] Indeed, while the sober tone of many of his pronouncements – the statement above being no exception – has led some historians, in the words of documentary historian Jon Hoare, to 'compartmentalise the so-called 'Griersonian' documentary as a dry informational, didactic form of non-fiction film-making',[35] attempts have also been made to salvage something of the aesthetic legacy of the movement that Grierson led from the end of the 1920s onwards.[36] Recent documentary historians of the British documentary movement, for instance, have sought to highlight the strands of creativity and experimentalism among the films of those working beneath Grierson in the years before and during the Second World War.[37] Yet

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[33] Rotha had worked with Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board, but when Grierson moved on to head the GPO Film Unit in 1933, Rotha was on his way, in historian Richard Barsam's words, toward '[laying] the foundation of the independent movement' of documentary production. Barsam, *Nonfiction Film*, p. 105. Despite the split, Rotha helped Grierson develop the idea of the documentary in the early days of the movement, and was therefore prone to similar pronouncements. As he wrote in his important book, *Documentary Film*, 'Beauty is one of the greatest dangers to documentary. Beauty of individual shots is not only insufficient but frequently harmful to the significant expression of content.' Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber, 1970), p. 153.

[34] Grierson first used the term in 1933. See John Corner, *Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 13.

[35] Hoare, Jon, '"Go the Way the Material Calls You" Basil Wright and *The Song of Ceylon*', in Anthony and Mansell, eds., *The Projection of Britain*, p. 240.

[36] Tyrus Miller is one critic who has examined some of the 'convergences and complementarities' between the related cultural strands of documentary and modernism in Britain in the 1930s. He notes the shared elements of surrealism in works of documentary and modernism: 'insofar as the documentarists insisted on the precise registration of details, especially photographically and cinematographically, they verged over into the emotionally intense, often surreal depiction of the autonomous fragment of reality characteristic of radical naturalism and modernism alike.' Tyrus Miller, 'Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9:2 (2002), 229.

[37] See the BFI website, *Screenonline*, for instance; there Jamie Sexton notes that Grierson was 'extremely interested in modernist art', and further the modernist 'city symphony' films of Ruttman and

there are limitations, too, to isolating the aesthetic features of Grierson's legacy at the expense of his social vision. In fact, Grierson's idealism underpinned a conception of documentary that encompassed both. He was well versed in the writings of idealist philosophers such as Kant and Hegel,[38] and it was these that gave him the intellectual foundations from which to conceive of a cultural form that could utilize both the creative and referential features of the medium of film. Ian Aitken argues that Grierson's conception of "documentary" did not imply a 'subordination of aesthetics to social and political instrumentality.' In fact, says Aitken, 'it implied that aesthetics and social purposiveness should have equal status.'[39] He explains this with reference to Grierson's endorsement of the idealist distinction between 'the real' and 'the phenomenal', in which

> the abstract and general (the real) is of greater significance than the particular and empirical (the phenomenal), but in which the empirical and particular constitute the best means of comprehending the abstract and general. There is, therefore, no logical contradiction – within the frame of reference set by philosophical idealism – between Grierson's advocacy of documentary naturalism and dramatic montage.[40]

From this perspective, the poetic nature of film could function as the crucial revelatory link between pure observation of individual phenomena and a wider, unified understanding of 'the real'.

Interestingly, and of course not coincidentally, one of the early masters of cinema, the Russian director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein, had been refining his enormously influential theory of "montage" around this time in a way that similarly emphasised the higher revelatory potential of a poetically charged use of film. It is a theory of film that helps us to examine in more detail the "poetic" effects that Grierson -

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others. (Jamie Sexton, 'John Grierson' <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/439877/> , accessed 8 April 2013.) A recent book on the topic is Scott Anthony and James G. Marshall's eds., *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* (London: BFI, 2011). These are relatively recent developments. Jeffrey Richards' opening chapter to *The Projection of Britain*, 'John Grierson and the Lost World of the GPO Film Unit' sets the book firmly against the slew of earlier histories of the movement, such Don Macpherson, ed., *Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the Thirties* (London: BFI, 1980) and Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II*), which sought rather to critique (sometimes searingly) its putative radicalism rather than explore its aesthetic legacy.

[38] To be precise, Aitken, from a study of Grierson's early writings, ascribes to him a 'neo-kantianism'. (Aitken, *Film and Reform*, p. 11.)

[39] Ibid, p. 11.

[40] Ibid, p. 12.

and indeed producers like Ormond - achieved using the documentary format.[41] In his important work, *The Film Sense* (1943), Eisenstein sought, like other filmmakers of his era, 'to demonstrate that the art of the sound film is as demanding a medium as its kindred arts of music and plastic media'.[42] To do this, he formulated a theory of "montage", the principle of which being that 'two film pieces of any kind' – that is, sound or image - 'placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition'.[43] It was this crucial element of juxtaposition that Eisenstein felt not only rendered film, in its ability to combine and contain the other arts within it in what he called a 'powerful synthesis',[44] a truly *modern* art, but also elevated it to the status that those other "high" arts already enjoyed: '[a] work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator.'[45] Naturally, there was an art, a craft to dramatic montage that 'passed far beyond the limits of splicing bits of film together'.[46] It is useful to place the technique, as Eisenstein does, in contradistinction to unedited, unrefined documentary footage. Eisenstein calls such a use of film the "affidavit-exposition", which 'conveys bare documentary information, not raised by means of art to a created exciting force and emotional effect'.[47] Indeed, appropriate to my discussion of Ormond – a poet working in film – Eisenstein uses the poetry of Pushkin, Milton and others to understand what he views as the essentially *poetic* manipulation of raw filmed material: where those poets manipulate words, images and ideas, the director manipulates film footage. Even more significantly, Eisenstein argues in his defence of the montage principle that such poets – and, correlatively, film artists – achieve their art through 'the juxtaposition of [...] almost "documentarily" selected representations of [...] incidents.'[48] There is thus for Eisenstein a "validity" in 'choosing a realistic method to produce and achieve an

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[41] Eisenstein was, of course, a Soviet filmmaker of immense fame and respect; he influenced in some way virtually all film producers that followed him, Grierson very much included. Indeed Grierson was a great champion of the Russian; he enthusiastically screened Eisenstein's seminal early work *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) at the London Film Society meeting at which he screened his own first film, *Drifters* (1929). See Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 41.

[42] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. by Jay Leyda (London: Faber, 1943), p. 9.

[43] Ibid, p. 15.

[44] Ibid, p. 9.

[45] Ibid, p. 25.

[46] Ibid, p. 37.

[47] Ibid, p. 36.

[48] Ibid, p. 44.

emotional quality', a method in which 'objectively expressed representations [...] come together in an emotionally expressed unifying image.'[49]

This was, therefore, a conception of the revelatory possibilities of the creative manipulation of actuality material that was closely in accord with Grierson's broader "corporatist" political project. Grierson felt that the key to a better society was a better-informed citizenry, and the means to a better-informed citizenry was finding the most effective possible means of public communication. Grierson found this in the documentary film. Indeed, he in fact made some useful general statements on this score in a short interview that Ormond conducted with him for a BBC Wales series of interviews with artists called *Private View* in 1970.[50] Here Grierson emphasised the centrality of poeticism to the task of public information, remarking that documentaries should 'bring alive what was going on in the world' through poetic revelation: 'you must never forget the poet. You must never forget the poetic processes, because there is no revelation, finally, without a gesture to the poetic nature of revelation.'[51] He named films such as *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936) as the epitome of the form, both of which employed the combined talents of two highly esteemed English artists of the time, composer Benjamin Britten and poet W.H. Auden, to create not a merely informational documents about the services that mining and the General Post Office offer the nation, but visionary, "corporatist", quintessentially Griersonian *documentaries* that, in the related acts of bringing to the screen and projecting to the nation poeticized, revelatory visions of these industries, attempted to construct a society in orderly harmony. Curiously, however, in his interview with Ormond, Grierson doesn't mention perhaps the most representative pioneer of this aesthetic-political impulse, Humphrey Jennings. Himself a surrealist painter and experimental modernist poet, Jennings applied the Eisensteinian principle of montage to the documentary film with remarkable flair.[52] In terms similar to Eisenstein's "powerful synthesis", Jennings

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[49] Ibid, p. 45.

[50] I will discuss this series further in Chapter Four.

[51] John Grierson, quoted *Private View: John Grierson*, dir. by John Ormond (Cardiff: BBC Wales, 1970). It is likely that these were the kinds of things Grierson was saying to students at the Newport Film School around this time. Grierson had been made 'patron and occasional lecturer' at the then recently established (and short-lived) school. See David Berry, *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 300-301.

[52] It is by now something of a cliché to mention it (virtually every essay on Jennings published in the last thirty years begins with the quote), but it is worth noting that revered British filmmaker Lindsay Anderson (more on whom shortly) once famously called Jennings 'the only real poet that the British

viewed film as a 'magnificent system'[53] capable of shoring up the multifarious and frequently bewildering aspects of wartime life, and thereby put it in the service of Grierson's corporatist vision of British society. His wartime Ministry of Information film *Listen to Britain* (1942) is perhaps his supreme application of the montage principle. The film dispenses completely with the detached voiceover narration that was almost a prerequisite of wartime propaganda films of the time, and generates its quiet force through the accumulation and juxtaposition of, in Eisenstein's terms, 'documentarily selected' images and sounds from a whole range of familiar wartime situations. Fighter planes roar above a group of farmworkers; two soldiers stand guard while a military dance goes on in a nearby hall; the sound of a classical concert plays over footage of British factories hard at work. As documentary historian Michael McCluskey notes, cinema, for Jennings, 'should reveal the multiple systems and different layers of meaning operating in society.'[54] Jennings' was a totalising vision, then, one that sought to contain and explain the totality of social reality through documentary film.

In this sense, Jennings's wartime work can be viewed as the best manifestation of the corporatist idealism that underpinned Grierson's formulation of the documentary film. But, as I have been attempting to show, it is important to keep in mind that whatever the experimentalism, whatever the potential for lyrical poeticism latent within it, the documentary films of the British documentary movement and after were the products of material, institutional contexts and, therefore, identifiable ideological agendas. The Griersonian documentary, as I have noted, was for much of its history the product of government sponsorship, and was therefore highly politically motivated. When it was not, particularly in the years after the war, it became a commercial endeavour subject to the demands of corporate or, again, government sponsorship. Furthermore the documentary on television had its own agenda, be this commercial, civic, or both. I will explore the particular ideological implications of the institutional circumstances of British broadcasting in more detail in the following chapter; for now it suffices to view the form as one that sustains within it a constant and complex synthesis

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cinema has yet produced'. Lindsay Anderson, 'Only Connect', in Mary-Lou Jennings, ed., *Humphrey Jennings: Film-maker, Painter, Poet* (London: BFI, 1982), p. 53.

[53] Humphrey Jennings, quoted in David Mellor, 'Sketch for an Historical Portrait of Humphrey Jennings', in Mary-Lou Jennings, ed., *Humphrey Jennings: Film-maker, Painter, Poet* (London: BFI, 1982), p. 67.

[54] Michael McCluskey, 'Humphrey Jennings: The Customs of the Country', in Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, eds., *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* (London: BFI, 2011), p. 63.

of ideological purpose and aestheticism. Jennings was one of the masters of finding a fine balance between the two, putting his own modernist poetics in the service of a wider corporatist vision of British society. But Jennings is, of course, a memorable exception; not all documentaries produced in the Griersonian mould or afterwards were poetic or experimental in the same way as those most often discussed in cultural histories and theses on the form. In the same way that the films of, for example, the New Zealand-born Documentary Movement filmmaker Len Lye, whose films *A Colour Box* (1935) and *Rainbow Dance* (1936) are joyously experimental to the extent that their actual informational purpose is (if recognisable at all) somewhat cursorily glued on, many documentaries are, inevitably, rather dull, prosaic efforts, serving merely to convey a particular piece of public information, or, in the era of the sponsored commercial documentary, to promote a particular product, company, or government department. Patrick Russell and James Piers-Taylor discuss this issue in *Shadows of Progress*. There they adopt a useful term - "applied art" - for the kinds of documentary that carried within them the creative impulses that fuelled the documentary as a form from the 1930s, but, due to the constraints of purpose, were unable to exercise those impulses particularly freely or overtly. 'If the pre-war Movement had indeed had its leftist and avant-garde strands,' note Russell and Piers-Taylor, 'these were never the whole story. At least as robust a strand of the Movement was a conception of documentary as an *applied art*' [emphasis added].[55] Yet they note that in the post-war commercial sector (though the idea is certainly applicable to the films produced under direct government sponsorship), there simultaneously emerged the notion of the "prestige documentary":[56]

> At its purest, [the prestige documentary] meant films about subjects only tangentially, or not at all, related to their sponsor's main business [...]. Many film-makers judged the prestige film [...] to be the most liberal of sponsored genres, and to offer them the greatest artistic rewards and possibilities for recognition.[57]

While the authors of *Shadows of Progress* do not formulate it in precisely this way, it seems to me useful to view documentary practice of the sort I have been examining so

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[55] Russell and Piers-Taylor, *Shadows of Progress*, p. 5.
[56] Indeed, "prestige" had become the preferred technical term for this kind of programme at the BBC some time in the 1950s. See BBC Written Archives Centre, T16/225/2.
[57] Russell and Piers-Taylor, pp. 108-109.

far on a sliding scale or spectrum, or perhaps as existing somewhere between two poles.[58] This is a way of conceiving an aesthetic tension that many historians and theorists of documentary have recognised.[59] At one end we have the purely informational and formulaic "expository"[60] documentary - in Eisenstein's terms the 'affidavit exposition' - on the other we have the kind of overtly lyrical, experimental work of someone like Len Lye, or perhaps directors such as Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz of the Free Cinema movement of the late 1950s. It is crucial to note, then, that permeating everything on this scale were both the artistic aspiration fuelled by the broad understanding of "film" form that I have been discussing (hence the validity of the term "applied art"), and a concern with social *purpose* of various kinds and gradations. The importance of this point will become clear shortly, when I undertake a closer examination of the different aesthetic forms that Ormond's films adopted.

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[58] It may seem simplistic to view documentary practice on a linear scale. As Bill Nichols noted in his seminal work on documentary, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), as well as in his later *Introduction to Documentary*, there is a wide variety of documentary forms and paradigms that complexly intersect and inform one another (in *Introduction to Documentary* Nichols counts six: the "poetic", the "expository", the "observational", the "participatory", the "reflexive" and the "performative"). As Nichols notes, 'The characteristics of a given mode function as a dominant in a given film; they give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organisation. Considerable latitude remains possible.' (*Introduction to Documentary*, p. 100.). This invites us rather to view the form in a more nuanced way: perhaps adding another axis to the scale, or even adding to this model a third dimension. Nevertheless I believe there is a vaildity to the linear scale, particularly in the context of the era with which I am interested. This was, after all, in television production in particular, before the age of lightweight and silent cameras and sound-recording devices that made possible the new forms of cinéma vérité and Direct Cinema (broadly the "observational" and "participatory" genres), and before the intense, reflexive questioning of the postmodern era of cinema that opened up the highly experimental and theoretical later genres (the "reflexive" and the "performative"). Documentary editor and theorist Dai Vaughan traces the development of these forms back to 1963, the year when the Éclair – a silent-running 16mm camera – and the Nagra – a lightweight tape recorder – came into wide use. The ease of use that such devices offered radically changed the face of documentary. (see Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 12-14.) Yet Ormond was lumbered with older technology – generally clapped-out hand-me-downs from London - well into the 1960s. Yet despite the frustrations of such circumstances, the sheer logistical difficulties of film production seem to have nurtured a more exacting approach to the creation of a filmic artefact (as opposed to a piece of cinéma vérité).

[59] John Corner, for example, notes in *Television Form and Public Address* that 'perhaps the most important tension at work within the movement (one that gets implicated in most of the others) is the one between 'documentary as art' and 'documentary as report'. (p. 83.) Similarly Richard Kilborn and John Izod state in their useful *Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) that 'it is the 'relationship between the selection and filming/recording of actuality material and its transformation into a skilfully crafted artefact that lies at the heart of the whole documentary enterprise.' (p. 13.)

[60] This term is Bill Nichols': see his *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

Expository Documentary

The humanist-modernist strain of artistic practice that became fused with the very

principle of documentary during this period thus seems to me a useful explanation of

the fact that Ormond's work at the Welsh Film Unit satisfied so many of his creative

impulses. The use, in Jennings' work, for instance, of the Eisensteinian principle of

montage – of using film to synthesize a whole range of forms, fragments, images and

sounds into a 'magnificent system' – seems to me to resonate strongly with Ormond's

'organic mosaic', the notion that, as I argued in the previous chapter, underpins so much

of Ormond's creativity: 'from acute observation of particularities, you build up a kind

of organic mosaic',[61] he once explained to an interviewer. Indeed, Ormond's statements

on the subject of his poetry are frequently applicable to the craft of film that had been

utilized by filmmakers like Eisenstein and Jennings: '[n]early all a poet can do is make

something out of the material and experience available to him at a given time,' he once

stated.[62] Poetry was for Ormond a question of crafting, of "making" (the artisanal idiom

is significant) a unified art-object from the resources available in the world around him.

Moreover, as is signalled by the fact that, according to David Berry, Ormond

'frequently referred to his film direction as "making my mosaic"',[63] there were

significant discursive and practical overlaps between his poetic imagination and his

approach to film:

> All true documentary has to have an element of revelation: that of the camera in
> place as proxy witness for the audience; of a complex circumstance revealed in a
> simple and understandable form; of people and things in a seemingly ordinary,
> workaday world poetically revealed, inductive rather than deductive at heart,
> moving from particular observation to general, universal conclusion.[64]

Such statements can thus, in turn, be quite easily applied to his poetry: Ormond's

reasoning here invokes that quintessentially modernist faith – or perhaps anti-faith – in

the art-object's capacity to explain the 'complex circumstance' of modern life, and of

reaching out to higher, 'universal conclusion[s]'.[65] Furthermore, that additional

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[61] Ormond, quoted in Poole, 'Conversations', *New Welsh Review*, 41.

[62] Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2*, p. 163.

[63] Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 291.

[64] Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision*, p. 10.

[65] Granted, much literary and artistic modernism rarely sought out 'simple and understandable form[s]', but rather the contrary; modernism was broadly interested in reinventing artistic forms, of pushing them to their conceivable limits in order to find artistic correlatives for those complex circumstances.

emphasis on the process of forging an art out of the material available to the documentary- (or poet-) observer – on 'people and things in a seemingly ordinary, workaday world poetically revealed' chimes with Eisenstein's notion of forging a new art out of 'objectively expressed representations'. There is an important distinction to make from Grierson's notion of poetic "revelation", however. Grierson had reached his conclusions about the uses of the documentary form from his idealist conception of the "Absolute", and viewed the "revelation" that came from what Ormond calls 'particular observation' as providing access to that greater, totalizing 'ultimate reality'.[66] The documentary form was one means of cultivating this understanding of 'ultimate reality' that could simultaneously contribute to Grierson's (related) political vision. Ormond, however, as I discussed in the previous chapter, possessed no faith in an 'ultimate reality'; his vision was a fragmented one, an 'organic mosaic'. Though as the almost oxymoronic nature of this phrase suggests, there was, for Ormond, something compensatory about this vision. While 'ultimate reality' was an illusion, art could at least provide a means of comprehending a basically incomprehensible world – it constituted a 'negative metaphysics', to repeat Eagleton's phrase. This led Ormond to a strikingly similar aesthetic to that advocated by Grierson, one which viewed documentary's montage of particularities as "revelatory". What is clear, then, is that Ormond was practising the art of documentary filmmaking on television at a time when it was possible to refer to the practice in just these terms: as a form of "poetry", an "art". The passage above seems to me to convey the extent of this discursive and, as a result, *practical*, aesthetic overlap.[67]

But on this score it should be remembered that film production is itself an enormously laborious and complex process; the final comprehensibility of the completed art-object, in the realm of filmmaking, should be viewed as a highly sophisticated illusion, the result of an elaborate sequence of artistic and technical processes.

[66] Aitken notes that Grierson had drawn much of his philosophical understanding from the notion of 'Absolute Idealism' associated with Hegel, Schelling and Bradley. These argued that 'ultimate reality' was 'neither empirical nor material, but essentially spiritual in nature. [...] [T]here was only one ultimately real thing: the Absolute, and the phenomenal reality was a contradictory and fragmentary representation of the Absolute.' (Aitken, *Film and Reform*, pp. 19-20.) Interestingly, Grierson's idealism, like Ormond's skepticism, also stemmed from a post-religious environment. Grierson, like many post-Calvinist Scots, pursued idealism as a philosophical discourse that, unlike strict Calvinism, could accommodate the enormous intellectual challenges brought by industrial modernity: scientific discovery, economic liberalism, working-class unrest and so on. (See Aitken, *Film and Reform*, p. 20) For Ormond, on the other hand, only a sublime skepticism (and the subjectivity that this afforded) could accommodate his modernity.

[67] It is worth noting here that some commentators have suggested that there was, besides Grierson's formulation, another important precedent to television documentary: the radio "feature" programme. Media historian Paddy Scannell has noted that this was a form of radio programme that blurred the

But, as I have been arguing, there is a central duality at the heart of the documentary form. It is then instructive also to examine the work that can be seen to have contributed something to Ormond's more social sensibilities, as these too had a profound influence upon his practice as a filmmaker. Indeed, Ormond did not receive the kind of practical apprenticeship in documentary filmmaking that many of his era did. It is useful to compare him, by way of example, with two Welsh documentary makers who were his contemporaries: Paul Dickson and Jack Howells.[68] Both Dickson and Howells, unlike Ormond, started their careers at the heart of the documentary movement. Dickson received initial training as a cameraman in the Army Kinematograph Corps, and went on soon after to work under two of the biggest names in documentary film production: firstly for Basil Wright at the Crown Film Unit, and later for Paul Rotha at his independent company, World Wide Pictures. It was at World Wide that Dickson made the two dramatized documentaries that, as critic Leo Enticknap states, 'established his professional reputation'[69]: *The Undefeated* (1950), a film that promotes the work of the Ministry of Pensions and *David* (1951), a film that views the culture of the south Wales valleys through the eyes of school caretaker and poet, Dafydd Rhys.[70] From there Dickson went on to produce a variety of films under commercial sponsorship, including some of the first adverts on commercial television in Britain.[71] Jack Howells' early career followed a similar trajectory. Beginning his

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boundaries between the already established genres of music, drama and scripted 'talks', and attempted, as Scannell notes, to '[combine] words and music to produce an artistic effect which could not have been produced by either separately'. There is certainly a sense of poetic "montage" in such an endeavour, and, like the documentary being pioneered by Grierson and his followers in film in the same era, the strategy was to utilize this poetic, revelatory capacity for informational effect: 'the impulse behind the search for new forms of social documentation can most simply be understood as a continuing commitment to overcoming the dehumanizing effects of institutional discourse'. Paddy Scannell, "The Stuff of Radio': Developments in Radio Features and Documentaries Before the War', in John Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 1-28. This was, of course, part of the shared impulse between producers at the BBC and within the British Documentary Movement toward the liberal strategy of finding new ways to inform the public and thereby create a better sense of citizenship. I will explore the implications and particular characteristics of this liberalism in more detail in a later chapter. For now it suffices to state that such programmes were working from the same formal and ideological principles that I have discerned in the documentary film.

[68] David Berry has called the three men a 'formidable trio of post-war Welsh documentarists'. Dave Berry, 'The World Still Sings: Jack Howells', in Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain* (London: BFI, 2010), p. 144.

[69] Leo Enticknap, '"I don't think he did anything after that": Paul Dickson', in Russell and Piers-Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain* (London: BFI, 2010), p. 156.

[70] The former won Dickson a BAFTA for best documentary film, and the latter, made for the 1951 Festival of Britain, is a seminal text in post-war screen representations of Wales.

[71] Enticknap, "I don't think he did anything after that', in Russell and Piers-Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress*, p. 166. Dickson later went on to teach at the National Film and Television School.

filmmaking career in the 1940s under another stalwart of the documentary movement,

Donald Alexander, at Alexander's staunchly left-wing production company DATA Film

Productions (Documentary and Technicians Alliance),[72] Howells later moved on to

work as a newsreel editor for British Pathé and, in the early 1950s, set up his own

production company, Jack Howells Productions. It was with his own company that he

saw some of his greatest successes, with affecting films on local Welsh culture for HTV

(Harlech Television) in the 1970s (in particular *Return to Rhymney* (1972) and

Penclawdd Wedding (1974)), and, most notably, his Oscar-winning documentary for

TWW (Television Wales and West) *Dylan Thomas* (1963), starring Richard Burton.[73]

Ormond, on the other hand, gained his apprenticeship in the different – though

not unrelated – realm of print journalism. As I noted in my introduction, Ormond joined

the ranks of the immensely successful and influential photojournalist magazine *Picture

Post* shortly after leaving university,[74] and the years he spent there were, as M. Wynn

Thomas has stated, to be 'probably the most profoundly educative of his life'.[75] Ormond

had early on acquired a taste and a talent for the visual; while at Swansea Grammar

School, Ormond would at lunchtimes hurry down to the Glynn Vivian art gallery, and

later at University would sneak off from lectures to take drawing lessons at Swansea

School of Art.[76] Indeed, he admitted later in life that he had, in school, 'badly wanted to

try to be an architect',[77] and claimed that he had 'a heightened sense of seeing and

looking and gazing.'[78]   This visual literacy undoubtedly contributed to his skills as a

filmmaker. As he noted himself: 'I suppose, no I *know* that the keen visual examination

of the world and my response to that observation intensified year after year in all the

time I was making documentaries.'[79] But it was during these early years at *Picture Post*

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[72] Alexander and a number of his colleagues were members of the Communist Party; the company took on a number of commissions on industrial relations from the Board of Trade and, later, the NCB's newsreel *Mining Review*. (See Russell and Piers-Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress*, pp. 34-35.) Howells later proudly recalled the pedigree of this apprenticeship: '[DATA] was an offshoot of Paul Rotha and in direct line from John Grierson. You couldn't get more purist than that.' Quoted in Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 285.

[73] *Dylan* was the first and only Oscar-winning Welsh film (to date).

[74] He moved to *Picture Post* after a brief sojourn at the *Brentwood Gazette*. See Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 14.

[75] Ibid, p. 15.

[76] See Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2*, p. 159.

[77] Ibid, p. 156.

[78] John Ormond, 'Letter from Tuscany', *Poetry Wales*, 24:1 (1988), p. 22. This letter in fact contains a small, understated sketch similar to those which would illustrate his posthumous Gregynog Press book *Cathedral Builders* (1991).

[79] Ibid, p. 22.

that he truly learned something of the art of film production, particularly the
fundamental filmic art of what Eisenstein called 'vertical montage': that is, the
synchronic juxtaposition of sound and image. As Eisenstein explains, in sound film
'[t]he search for correspondence [between the aural and the visual] must proceed from
the intention of matching both picture and music to the general, complex 'imagery'
produced by the whole'.[80] Of course, for print journalists like Ormond, this
juxtaposition was the relationship between printed word and image; but the principle
certainly still applied. In M. Wynn Thomas's perceptive words, this was the art of
'mak[ing] words complement images, rather than repeating or competing with them'.
Thomas continues: '[at *Picture Post*] he learned to write arresting but not patronizing
captions; he learned to think like a camera'.[81] And as Ormond himself confirmed, these
were crucial skills for the documentary filmmaker:

> Writers on *Picture Post* were not only responsible for the words which
> accompanied a picture story, but to a large extent for the photographs too. Now I
> was being paid to observe and to write about what I saw, and to think in terms of
> pictures. All this was to be important to my future as a documentary filmmaker.[82]

Indeed, examining some of his articles at the magazine, it becomes clear that Ormond
was already beginning to learn something of the art of "vertical montage". In an article
on the Gower folk singer Phil Tanner, for instance, Ormond seems determined to break
free from the silent motionlessness of the printed page in order to create a new unity
through the juxtaposition of image and text by evoking a moving filmic scene rather
than merely describing the accompanying pictures. A photo of the singer is
accompanied by a caption, written in the present tense, which seems to attempt to bring
the image to life:

> Phil Tanner settles himself back into his chair, and his hands close upon the stick
> between his knees. Once more, he raises his chin, chooses his key and strikes out
> his first word.[83]

Ormond even provides the reader with a musical score and lyrics to one of Tanner's
interpretations ('Fair Phoebe and the Dark-Eyed Sailor') to accompany this, again

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[80] Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, p. 64.
[81] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 15.
[82] Ormond, 'John Ormond', in Stephens, ed., *Artists in Wales 2*, p. 161.
[83] John Ormond Thomas, 'The Old Singer of Gower', *Picture Post*, 19 March 1949, p. 32.

augmenting this sense of filmic "vertical montage" by insisting readers *hear* the scene as well as see it.[84] These valuable skills were further honed during his work moonlighting as a verse caption writer for one newspaper's (the London-based *News Chronicle's*) 'Saturday Picture'.[85] There Ormond was similarly expected to create a fresh poetic unity from the juxtaposition of word and image; as Thomas remarks, 'when, occasionally, a picture would really reverberate through his imagination, the result was not resourcefully pliant verse but compelling poetry.'[86] This was a short-lived project, however,[87] and his work as a journalist was, on the whole, not a space for creativity. Like the strictly numbered columns of the headlines at the *Evening Post*, *Picture Post* similarly had its own strict format to which its journalists had to adhere. Moreover, unfortunately for Ormond, even after acquiring the position of head of the Welsh Film Unit, his creative skills were not always exercised in the way that he no doubt hoped. Some of the early films he produced for the unit slot very much into the more "prosaic" end of the documentary scale. It is nevertheless worth examining a few of them briefly in order to get a better sense of the ways in which his more poetic, "personal" films function.

Ormond was, it should be remembered, initially employed by the BBC on the merits of his experience as a journalist; his first job was as a 'Television News Assistant' for the Welsh region. Accordingly, in some of his earliest films for the Welsh Film Unit, he was called upon in this journalistic capacity to produce documentaries in the "current affairs" mould. An early film, *Enquiry: Fitness for Work* (1960), for instance, was an episode in a series based on a programme format that had been devised by Cecil McGivern and Norman Swallow in 1952, *Special Enquiry*.[88] Evidently Ormond's previous experience rendered him the ideal candidate as producer for such a programme; according to Paddy Scannell, Swallow had viewed *Special Enquiry* as a

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[84] It was this meeting with Tanner that inspired Ormond's poem, 'Homage to a Folk-Singer'; once again, we see Ormond creative life intersect with his work. (I commented upon this poem in more detail in chapter 1.)

[85] Ormond had been invited to contribute to *News Chronicle* in 1955 by its editor, Tom Hopkinson, the man who had earlier given Ormond a job at *Picture Post*. (See Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 27.)

[86] Ibid, p. 28.

[87] Thomas notes that the commission lasted eight months before Hopkinson terminated it for financial reasons. Ibid, p. 28.

[88] *Special Enquiry* ran for six years, and was a seminal series in British current affairs broadcasting. As John Corner notes, the format 'significantly re-structured the discourses of British television journalism. [...] It carried the democratising potential of documentary representation further than either filmed or photo-journalistic depiction'. (Corner, 'Documentary Voices', in John Corner, ed., *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFI, 1991), p. 48.) I will explore in a later chapter the important discursive precedent this set for some of Ormond's later films.

'television equivalent of *Picture Post*.'[89] Presented by one of *Special Enquiry's*

presenters, Robert Reid, Ormond's programme was made by the Wales Film Unit but

was produced for a national network audience, Swallow having intended the archetype

to 'state an important national issue in local terms', and to have 'a strong regional

bias.'[90] As such, *Enquiry: Fitness for Work* finds much of its footage in south Wales in

its examination of the ugly range of work-related illnesses that flourished in the wake of

the cotton, coal and steel industries.[91] Given that Ormond was essentially standing in as

a producer on a pre-established format, then, it is unsurprising that the programme

displays little of the creative flair for poetic montage that, as I will shortly demonstrate,

permeates his other work. But its adherence to this strict format does offer us a useful

insight into the "expository" documentary form. Bill Nichols' remarks on such

documentaries are useful here:

> Expository documentaries rely heavily on an informing logic carried by the
> spoken word. In a reversal of the traditional emphasis in film, images serve a
> supporting role. [...] The commentary [...] serves to organise these images and
> make sense of them just as a written caption guides our attention and emphasises
> some of the many meanings and interpretations of a still image. [...] We take our
> cue from the commentary and understand the images as evidence or
> demonstration for what is said.[92]

Thus, there is little space at this end of the scale for Eisenstein's principle of poetic

montage, in which the juxtaposition of sounds and images clashes and blends in a way

that kindles new, higher meaning out of them; rather, the aim of the "expository" form

is to make words "organise" the image on screen within an "informing logic".

Similarly, in *Enquiry: Fitness for Work*, the narration on the whole serves solely to set

the images on screen within a fixed argumentative framework. For instance, there are

few ambiguous or wider meanings contained in a voiceover that deictically points out

the events taking place on screen: 'This man is a pneumoconiotic who has volunteered

to undergo tests'; cue images that very literally show us a man undergoing medical

tests. This, then, is the "expository" representative strategy that dominates the film. Yet

Enquiry: Fitness for Work does hint at some of the wider creative possibilities of the

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[89] Paddy Scannell, 'The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', *Media, Culture and Society*, 1:1 (1979), 103.

[90] Ibid, 103.

[91] I will return in the following chapter to a discussion of the national politics of such representations; for now, it is necessary to focus on the aesthetics of this film.

[92] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 107.

documentary form in a way that corresponds with Russell and Piers-Taylor's idea of documentary of this kind as an "applied art". A sequence illustrating the mechanisation of the cotton industry reaches out tentatively to a sort of expressionism: the camera abruptly swivels left and right in rhythm with the noise of the machinery in a way that invokes something of the dizzying monotony of the industry.[93] Moreover, the film's opening sequence utilizes the medium's capacity for generating (in this case, a rather bleak) irony through the juxtaposition of conflicting sounds and images; a confident, booming drumbeat accompanies an image of two legs striding in time with the beat, when suddenly a sharp pan upwards reveals a middle-aged man breathing through a medical ventilator.

Such brief forays into more poetic territory demonstrate the usefulness of Russell and Piers-Taylor's notion of the "applied art" documentary. Whatever the functionalism of a documentary on this more "expository" end of the scale, the form itself always carries within it a latent poetic potential as a combined result of the artistic connotations and expectations of the "documentary" as a concept, and of the poetic inevitability of juxtaposing, in Eisenstein's words, 'two film pieces of any kind'. However, Ormond finds even less space for such forays in his two other films in this vein. One of these, *Operation Salvation* (1964), is another episode in an established national programme format, this time the BBC's long running religious programme, *Meeting Point*.[94] *Operation Salvation* examines a range of religious institutions designed to rehabilitate the socially excluded: an Approved School for girls operated by a group of Roman Catholic nuns, a boarding residence for young single mothers operated by the Salvation Army, among others. There are few overtly or self-consciously artistic flourishes in the film beyond the occasional attempt to find visual images in the same key or mood as the voiceover's pronouncements: 'The help they've needed has come from people who believe that from first to last we all need care, compassion and tenderness [...]. The need for fun and affection is as basic as the need for food.' Shots of babies and of the elderly, and later of young children playing and laughing, thus corroborate the voiceover in a visually pleasing way, but, equally, do not challenge its essential authority or argument. Similarly *Troubled Waters: Harry Soan*

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[93] This is perhaps an allusion to Fritz Lang's expressionist masterpiece *Metropolis* (1927).

[94] *Meeting Point* began in 1956 and continued until the early 1970s. It was broadcast on Sunday evenings from 6.15, after the Sunday afternoon transmission break. See Asa Briggs, *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 147 and 279.

Investigates (1965) adopts a similar format to *Enquiry*, with a layman presenter exploring the debates surrounding a particular political issue; here the question of the changes in fishing rights on the River Teifi.[95] The film displays a sensitive visual appreciation of the countryside surrounding the Teifi, but, again, little of the filmic poeticism we see in Ormond's more "personal" documentaries.

Yet, as I have been arguing, these films should not be dismissed out of hand; they are important texts that illustrate the potential range of the documentary as a form, as well as of Ormond's individual practice. Indeed, on the subject of his own practice, we might compare the lessons in restraint and purpose taught by these more prosaic documentary programmes in the same light that M. Wynn Thomas views the effect of Ormond's experience as a journalist upon his poetry. In his book on Ormond, Thomas suggests that the poet's work as a journalist encouraged him to rein in his early tendency toward overwrought, Dylan Thomas-esque verbosity and develop a 'deftness of touch and a simplicity that was not simplistic.'[96] I would similarly suggest that Ormond's work on such plainly "expository" programmes perhaps taught him the lessons in filmic restraint and social purpose that are central to the documentary form. Indeed, we should not forget that the majority of Ormond's documentaries, however creative, functioned firmly within the "expository" mould; they had an essentially *informational* function. Ormond's remarks on this matter confirm this idea that he possessed an understanding of the documentary idea as one that, crucially, held in careful balance both creativity and informational/social purpose:

> In the new unit a number of things I was committed to could come together: my social concerns, my involvement with the graphic [...], my writing and my love of music.[97]

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[95] Harry Soan was an author and occasional broadcaster for the BBC – mostly radio – on agricultural affairs. See National Archives website, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/searches/subjectView.asp?ID=P54051 (accessed 13 April 2013.)

[96] Thomas, *John Ormond*, p. 15.

[97] Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, *Wales in Vision*, p. 5. Indeed, it is useful on this score to compare Ormond's successes with the form with what David Berry views as the limitations of Ormond's contemporary, Jack Howells. Where Ormond seems to have found in his films a working balance between the purely artistic and the informational, some of Howells' later work, Berry argues, 'suggests a conscientious craftsman who lacked the 'reforming' motivation that energised the early Movement documentarists. [...] He was more interested in documentary film form and the ordering of expressive images and commentary than radical, or even 'socially purposive', subject matter.' David Berry, '*The World Still Sings*: Jack Howells, in Russell and Piers-Taylor, eds., *Shadows of Progress*, pp. 143-144.

I will go on in the chapters that follow to examine the range of Ormond's informational documentaries, and specifically the ways in which his creative approach to filmmaking shaped in profound ways the very forms of, I want to argue, *national* knowledge it was possible for them to convey. Before this, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at the films Ormond made at the more poetic end of the scale, and examine the extent to which we can refer to such works as, in Norman Swallow's terms, "personal" documentaries.

Poetic Documentary

On the subject of the aesthetics of Ormond's purely "poetic" work on film, it is perhaps appropriate work from the beginning, with the very first film produced under the banner of the new Welsh Film Unit, *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* (1959). This short film – barely fifteen minutes in length – is undoubtedly the most freely "poetic" in Ormond's oeuvre. In the mould of Jennings's *Listen to Britain*, the film does not attempt to expound a direct argument; rather, as the indefiniteness of its title implies, *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* juxtaposes silent filmed material from the real world with classical music and a verse narration to create a poetic expression around a given theme. It is worth noting, incidentally, that "spring" was also the theme of one of the first films produced at the National Film Board of Canada, the prestigious Canadian government-sponsored film department set up by John Grierson in 1939.[98] We could perhaps speculate that the theme of "spring", with its optimistic connotations of fruition, flowering, birth, was deemed appropriate for two national film units embarking on their first films. Spring is, after all, the ideal season to film the nation at its most vibrant and scenic, and there is certainly a hint of local pride in *A Sort of Welcome to Spring*'s joyful evocation of a fine spring day in the new capital city.[99] Indeed, Cardiff had recently, in 1955, been named capital of Wales, and in 1958 had hosted the 'Festival of Wales'.[100] In this sense, the film could be said to be a descendant of the experimental "city symphonies" of the 1920s. It is, however, debatable whether such a joyful paean to

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[98] The film was called *A Study of Spring Wild Flowers* (1939). According to the National Film Board of Canada, the producer of the film is not known, since 'at this period filmmakers were not viewed as creators but rather as civil servants employed by the Motion Picture Bureau.' (*National Film Board of Canada History*, http://www.nfb.ca/historique/about-the-foundation [accessed 23 April 2013])

[99] Cardiff had, of course, recently been named the capital of Wales (1955).

[100] On the last day of which, Queen Elizabeth II's announcement of her young son's future ascendancy as 'Prince of Wales' served as a gentle reminder to this newly confident Wales of where its priorities should lie.

the new capital was a long held plan for Ormond as head of the new unit; more likely, the film was a product of Ormond improvising with little guidance, a tiny budget and pitiful technical resources.[101] David Berry has noted that the film had a total budget of just four hundred pounds,[102] and as Ormond later wrote, this was a time when 'one of the chief requirements for working in television in Wales was ingenuity enough to get around obstacles clearly designed to prevent one getting any kind of picture on the air'.[103] The BBC Wales television "studio" consisted of a disused Cardiff chapel and vestry. Ormond continued: 'one felt like the little Eastender who said, 'if we had a swing we could have a swing in the park, if we had a park.''[104] Yet, according to Norman Swallow, the haphazard nature of television production in these early years resulted in a culture of improvisation and spontaneous creativity that in many ways enhanced the producer's capacity to create more "personal", "poetic" films. As he notes in *Factual Television*:

> This is one of the essential differences between a documentary on, say, how a computer works, and one that concerns itself with human relationships and human aspirations. The first can be prepared in advance, but the second cannot – or, if it is, then it is unlikely to succeed. Ask the director of the personal documentary to produce a shooting script, and he will either show you a few scribbled notes or else a very general treatment.[105]

Despite a somewhat unpolished finish, then, *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* is an aesthetic success, and offers us a useful insight into the ways in which Ormond was able to find the space at BBC Wales to create self-consciously "poetic" non-fiction films in contrast to the expository documentaries I have already examined. The film plays off a verse narration on the theme of spring, read by Welsh actor Meredith Edwards,[106] with a

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[101] As I note in the following chapter, the BBC was reluctant to equip the regions with adequate resources in the 1950s, and in the earliest days of the BBC Wales Film Unit much of the equipment available consisted of second-hand equipment passed on from London. However an internal BBC memo dated 16 February 1959 indicates that the Welsh Film Unit had at that time recently been equipped with a new Arriflex silent 16mm camera. It is likely, then, that *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* was the product of Ormond experimenting with his new piece of equipment. Memorandum dated 16 February 1959, BBC Written Archives Centre T16/645.

[102] Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 291.

[103] John Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision*, p. 1.

[104] Ibid, p. 2. Incidentally, as I will discuss, it would appear to be *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* that Ormond was referring to when he added, 'We got around this by borrowing somebody else's swing and park.'

[105] Swallow, *Factual Television*, p. 183.

[106] Edwards was by this time famous for his roles in radio and cinema. He had performed the part of Mr Waldo in the first production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1953), and had acted in a variety of

range of disparate but connected springtime images and scenes: ducks and swans frolic in a lake; a young couple hold hands in a park; a man sells daffodils to passers-by; a spring shower rains down upon shoppers on Cardiff High Street. In contrast to the expository documentary, whose aim is, to return to Nichols, to "organise" images within an "informing logic", here Ormond utilizes the principle of vertical montage in order to generate new poetic resonances out of the juxtaposition of sounds, words and images. This he does in a number of ways. In one scene a group of children slide, swing and play in a playground, and the otherwise refined, mannered verse narration complements the images by switching register to a variation on the well-known bedtime nursery rhyme, 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John':

> Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
> Bless the seat that I slide on,
> Patch my trousers, one two three,
> Winter's in the cupboard and can't see me.

Sometimes music alone will work with images to similarly pleasing, complementary effect; later in the same scene the rise and fall of a child on a swing is accompanied by the rise and fall of a musical phrase; indeed, even when its use is not this overtly referential, music is always carefully chosen to augment the mood.[107] There are, moreover, instances in which Ormond finds a visual correlative for a spoken idea: 'With every hour of the sun the slow sap rises'; here intriguing images of shadows cast by plants and flowers upon the ground nicely capture this notion of the sun's profound influence on life. And occasionally playful conceits are generated from oblique juxtapositions of word and image; a cut from footage of a raft of ducks swimming in a pond to rubber ducks floating in a baby's bath is accompanied by narration that archly states, 'some other ducks swim where the water's warmer'. Later we see shots of a statue of a young boy frolicking in a fountain,[108] over which Edwards intones: 'heedless of chills, one [little boy] stands and thinks it cute,/ brazen and smiling in his birthday

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Ealing comedies. Perhaps the most notable of these in a Welsh context was *A Run For Your Money* (1949), in which two happy-go-lucky Welshmen win tickets to the Wales rugby international at Twickenham.

[107] This is the case in all Ormond's films. Often Ormond will use popular and classical music, but the Welsh composer Arwel Hughes – who later became head of music at BBC Wales - was a frequent collaborator.

[108] The statue is 'Joyance', situated in Thompson's Park, Cardiff.

suit,/ to catch the spray from fountains as they rise/ towards his fixed and never-seeing eyes.'

These seem to me splendid examples of Eisenstein's principle of 'vertical montage'. But the film can further be understood to enact Ormond's own poetic philosophy in a way that allows us to view it as a "personal" documentary. We have only to examine the verse narration more closely to find Ormond's poetic philosophy at work:

> Ageless proportion, ageless incantation
> Patterns and lines at once permanence, impermanence,
> A world of abstract shapes and opening lips
> The silent forms unravelling to sing
> Relentless multiplicities of spring[109]

This isn't the throwaway greeting-card verse we might expect, but thoughtfully considered poetry; immediately recognisable in the lines above is Ormond's favourite theme of 'relentless multiplicity', the Wittgensteinian notion of the infinite ways of comprehending an ultimately elusive 'true' reality. Here reality is not total or final, but the sum of a plurality of, often, contradictory parts, an organic mosaic: 'Patterns and lines at once permanence, impermanence [...].' This sense of unending "multiplicity" is further embodied phonetically in the lines' variations upon similar sound patterns: 'ageless *proportion*, ageless *incantation*'; ' *permanence, impermanence* [...] *opening lips*'. This is subtle, suggestive poetry, then, even without the accompanying visual images. But the poem should of course be read in its context as a piece of film narration. While Edwards reads these lines, the film cuts between extreme close-up shots of a whole variety of dewy, freshly trembling plants and flowers. The verse thus pleasingly complements the images, but on another level it simultaneously - and ingeniously – hints at its own situatedness within the film that houses it. The couplet 'Silent forms unravelling to sing/ relentless multiplicities of spring' could be viewed as a pleasing description of the very principle of film montage and, more specifically, this very film itself. R.S. Thomas, in a lecture delivered some years later, interestingly described the capacity for the moving film image to capture such scenes that chimes nicely with Ormond's efforts here: in a lecture delivered at the National Eisteddfod in 1976 he

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[109] There are thematic and sonic echoes of these lines in Ormond's poem 'Finding a Fossil': 'Graftings so fused in chance/ Among cold starts that dance/ Gestures of permanence'. *Selected Poems*, p. 27.

praised film's ability to represent life as it exists in the flow of time, to 'show flowers and the leaves quivering in the breeze, and not still to the point of lifelessness as on a postcard'[110] – an effect Ormond was surely striving for in his effort to convey a sense of the permanent impermanence of nature. For *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* is a film that enacts the very principle of "multiplicity" referred to in the narration; it attempts to capture the infinite variousness and elusiveness of existence through the 'unravelling' of 'silent forms' - its juxtaposition of disparate but connected images and scenes of spring becomes, in effect, an 'organic mosaic', an artistic embodiment of meaning in an otherwise meaningless world. The film thus clearly aspires to a far higher status than mere "documentary" or mere "television". In its poetic ambitiousness, *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* seems to me closer to the Stevensian ideal of "supreme art" to which Ormond aspired in his poetry. Indeed, it is significant that, towards the end of the film, the verse narration reveals itself to be written in the first-person:

> From all the springs that I've seen come and go,
> I'd say that when the praise of spring is sung,
> Chiefly I'd put the pleasure that I know
> From watching young things grow

The film thus essentially takes the form of a personal lyric poem, or perhaps more accurately a lyric *film*-poem. I view *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* as the purest "prestige" film in Ormond's oeuvre. It possesses no explicit educative or informational purpose beyond promoting the existence of the BBC's new Welsh Film Unit (the unit's name is scrawled onto a brick wall in chalk at the end of the credits, and indeed is the last thing we see) and, perhaps more broadly, inaugurating a new age of BBC television in Wales. Its principal aim is a broadly artistic one, which seeks to infuse the medium of television with the higher qualities of poetic discourse.

   A Sort of Welcome to Spring is proof of a fascinating yet short-lived period of considerable creative freedom in television production not only in Wales, but also in the wider realm of British television production, a time when "personal" documentary makers could leave their distinct mark on programmes, and utilize the medium purely in the service of a set of higher aesthetic ideals. I refer to the period as "short-lived" because, while this intensely creative strand of documentary informed many of

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[110] R.S. Thomas, 'Abercuawg', trans. by Sandra Anstey, in Sandra Anstey, ed., *R.S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1983), p. 161.

Ormond's films throughout the 1960s, there was a noticeable shift in emphasis from the early 1970s that leaves its mark on Ormond's films of this later period. Under considerable financial constraints following the massive expansion of output in the 1960s,[111] the BBC had appealed to an already uneasy Wilson government for a rise in the licence fee levy three times in as many years, so, 'as part of a show of its earnest intentions to exert greater financial discipline',[112] in 1968 it employed the management consultant McKinsey and Co. to help reorganize management and balance the books. The result was far more stringent financial discipline and a total reorganization of management, which in turn percolated into the context in which producers like Ormond - who, throughout the 1960s, had enjoyed considerable creative freedom - operated. As historian of the BBC Georgina Born notes, 'individual ideas were integrated into a prediction of the bulk programming requirements for each channel; and a management system to monitor costs and operate the planning.'[113] Producers were, perhaps understandably, disgruntled. In interviews conducted for his important 1977 book *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*, historian Tom Burns noticed a considerable shift in attitude amongst BBC producers and personnel between 1963 and 1973. By the early 1970s there was a 'more widespread, more specific, and more intense disgruntlement displayed with superiors and with what was called 'the management''[114] than ten years previous. Perhaps most tellingly, Burns also noted 'a change in mood, in style, conveyed in the use of 'working for the BBC' as against 'working in the BBC'.'[115] Among documentary producers, this mood was no doubt exacerbated by the publication of an internal BBC document, *Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes* (1972). The document sought a formulation and formalization of the television documentary format, the 'equivalent to a newspaper's style book',[116] according to historian Richard Collins. This did not sit well with creative minds who were accustomed not only to free rein over their approach to programmes, but were also working with an extremely slippery and un-formulaic format. As Collins notes, the

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[111] Between 1960 and 1975 the number of BBC employees increased from 15,886 to 24,779. (Tom Burns, *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 227.) These were, of course, the years of expansion in the regions and in the BBC's range of output.

[112] Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 71.

[113] Ibid, p. 72.

[114] Burns, *Public Institution and Private World*, p. 211.

[115] Ibid, p. 212.

[116] Richard Collins, 'Seeing is Believing: The Ideology of Naturalism', in John Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 131.

document in fact 'uneasily manages the contradiction'[117] between the documentary's informational and poetic poles; indeed, it is arguable that to set out too firm a definition of the documentary is to fatally restrain its potential as a televisual form. *Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes* accepted that idea of documentary as a 'creative work, open to subjective enjoyment, and [...] conceived for interpretation on different levels.'[118] Yet at the same time it severely, and even belligerently, limited producers' capacity to exercise their individual voice: 'If the producer [is] [...] intent on expressing his views, he should leave the BBC and make his name in some other field. Perhaps one day he will be invited back in his own right to express his views as a contributor.'[119] The document thus represented a substantial shift in values at the BBC, one that impinged heavily upon the creative freedoms of producers like Ormond. Indeed, Ormond seems to have been responding to these new, more restrictive, practices in television production when, in his film interview with John Grierson for the series *Private View* from around the same time (1970), he abruptly ends the programme with one of Grierson's characteristically bold declarations; an endorsement from the doyen of documentary that seems to me to function as a defiant message from Ormond to his superiors: 'There is no revelation, finally, without having to depend on creative men of [a] particular quality, and the sooner television, and particularly the BBC, looks into the future of its visual poets, the better.'[120] Evidently those superiors did not pay much heed to such warnings. By 1975 Norman Swallow was looking back nostalgically at a "golden age" in television documentary production – an age he views as the decade between 1955 and 1965.[121] Similarly Ormond, writing near the end of his life, surveyed gloomily the development (or demise) of the form as he knew it: 'sometimes looking back, as I do now, from where most of television broadcasting stands today, I have a feeling of having been a man who never was.'[122]

Nevertheless, Ormond was at the height of his career during an exciting era in which television filmmakers were free, in Norman Swallows words, to project a 'vision of the world as personal and as intense as the creations of the most serious poet or

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[117] Ibid, p. 131.

[118] *Principles and Practice in Documentary* (London: BBC, 1972), p. 18.

[119] Ibid, p. 23.

[120] John Grierson, *Private View*.

[121] Norman Swallow, 'Denis Mitchell: Master of Documentary', *The Listener*, 24 April 1975, p. 551. Judging by this article's tone, it seems that by the mid-1970s many in the BBC documentary tradition were becoming disillusioned by the circumstances in which they were forced to work. This was a period in which Ormond took a year's leave from the BBC (1974-1975).

[122] Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision*, p. 10.

painter, novelist or dramatist'.[123] As I have been arguing in this chapter, this equation of documentary production with the world of the traditionally "high" arts is characteristic of this era, and speaks volumes about the assumptions and circumstances that helped shaped the form. The purpose of later chapters will be to trace the important and diverse ways in which the creative approach to documentary I have outlined here helped to shape the forms of knowledge they were being used to convey. Indeed, these two poles – the "poetic" and the "informational" are always in productive tension with each other within the documentary form, and the tensions that arise from this can tell us much about the kinds of information it is possible to produce and transmit. But before I embark on an examination of these wider, ideological issues, it is necessary to discuss in some detail the institutional context in which those films were produced. As Richard Kilborn and John Izod state in their book on television documentary,

> In determining the uses to which documentary can properly be put, a great deal will hinge on the institutional or broadcasting context in which the film or programme in question in being produced.[124]

This, as I want to explain in the following chapter, is no side issue. Ormond was engaged in the production of documentaries with a *national* function at a broadcasting institution that possessed a peculiarly conflicted national character. Therefore, in order to understand more fully the character of his films, and the kinds of knowledge they attempted to convey, it is necessary to examine in more detail the characteristics of that institution.

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[123] Swallow, 'Denis Mitchell: Master of Documentary', p. 551.
[124] Kilborn and Izod, *An Introduction to Television Documentary*, p. 6.

Chapter Three: BBC Wales and the Politics of Documentary

The problem for [...] a nation without a state, or at any rate, for those elements within it who are most active in valorizing its distinctiveness, is how to further the exclusionary-inclusionary dialectic necessary to all collective identities' cultural defense. It is the missing machinery of the state, or the merely partial character of existing institutions, that turns the eye to other forms of identity-maintenance. It is for this reason that so much attention has been paid to media and what they might contribute to the making and reshaping of collective identities.[1]

Philip Schlesinger, 'Media, the Political Order and National Identity'

If you are called BBC Wales you have got to have Welsh things to broadcast about.[2]

Patrick Hannan, *Wales in Vision*

This thesis has so far been an examination of John Ormond the poet-cum-filmmaker. It has attempted to view Ormond's work in verse and on film in terms of an historically-conditioned ideology of the aesthetic; a modernist, Wittgensteinian epistemology of culture that views all artistic artifacts as contributions to - as ways of seeing - a world that has no internal, essential coherence. While this is, as I will go on to demonstrate in the chapters that follow, a central aspect of all of Ormond's work on film, and indeed crucial to a full understanding of the ways in which his films operate as both stand-alone "artworks" and as socio-cultural "texts", it is necessary also to understand the broad historical and institutional circumstances within which these films were made. For, though many of Ormond's films were produced on a shoestring budget, they are not amateur, avant-gardist independent movies but institutionally-embedded texts, and, as such, subject to powerful and identifiable historical and ideological forces. Thus, as I want to get closer to an understanding of the ways in which Ormond's works in important ways reflected and contributed to - indeed were, to borrow Raymond Williams's phrase, 'literally parts of [the] social organization' of - a changing Welsh

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[1] Philip Schlesinger, 'Media, the Political Order and National Identity', *Media, Culture and Society*, 13 (1991), 302.

[2] Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision: The People and Politics of Television* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), ix.

society in the 1960s,[3] it is necessary to spend some time examining the socio-historical and institutional contexts in which Ormond was working.

Peter Dahlgren is one theorist of the media who has eloquently emphasized the importance of such an approach. In his book *Television and the Public Sphere* (1995), Dahlgren underlines the multifaceted nature of television production and consumption, and the consequent analytical challenges these pose to the observer. As he notes, 'the very polymorphous quality of the object itself makes it elusive. The closer we try to get to it, the more it seems to slip out of our conceptual grasp.'[4] In order to combat this, Dahlgren formulates a conceptual model that enables us to clarify our observations and bring into focus some of the more pertinent aspects of this slippery medium. This is his useful idea of the televisual "prism". Dahlgren suggests that there are three facets of television that can be differentiated in a way that allows for a more focused analytical perspective. Each of these should be treated, says Dahlgren, as three sides of a "televisual prism": 'television is simultaneously an industry, set of audio-visual texts, and a sociocultural experience.'[5] Television is thus an "industry" in the sense that it is subject to the political-economic forces of funding, ownership and government policy. It is a "set of audio-visual texts" insofar as its output exists on the plane of cultural signification; we might also refer to this as the "representational" aspect of television, that which Dahlgren describes as 'what the media portray, how topics are presented, the modes of discourse at work, and the character of debates and discussion.'[6] And it is finally a "sociocultural experience", in the sense that it is viewed by audiences that live within real socio-historical circumstances. It is thus subject to the cultural and ideological forces that are themselves generated by those circumstances. The model is, of course, necessarily a simplification; in reality, each facet interacts with the other in complex ways that make it extremely difficult to differentiate between them. Yet this is acknowledged in the very metaphor of the "prism", which, as Dahlgren argues,

> implies the difficulties of seeing all the sides at the same time. As we turn our attention to one side of the prism, the others vanish from our view (even if we are able at some point, through conscious effort, to develop a degree of

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[3] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2012 [1961]), p. 58.

[4] Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 24.

[5] Ibid, p. 25.

[6] Ibid, p. 15.

multiperspectivalism). Television cannot be reduced to any one or even two of these angles, but instead remains a composite and complex configuration.[7]

It is, then, crucial to keep in view, as far as possible, each of these important facets of the medium in which Ormond's films were produced. As it is my intention to focus in the chapters that follow primarily upon the "representational" aspects of these films, it is necessary in this chapter to consider the two corresponding facets of the "prism": the sociocultural and political-economic circumstances peculiar to broadcasting in Wales.

National Broadcasting

In his groundbreaking (and forbiddingly thorough) history of BBC broadcasting in Wales, John Davies places considerable emphasis on the role played by broadcasting in the development of modern Wales. He asserts on the very first page of *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* (1994) that Wales is a place in which 'to a greater extent than perhaps any other country in Europe, broadcasting has played a central role, both positive and negative, in the development of the concept of a national community.'[8] While Davies is perhaps guilty of a certain presumptuousness in his placement of Wales at the head of a continent in which *every* nation – be it stateless, semi-autonomous, or indeed fully sovereign – relies on broadcasting in the 'development of the concept of a national community' in ways that are nothing short of profound, he is nevertheless right to rest a certain significance on the issue in the context of Wales. Indeed broadcasting does inevitably carry a particular significance in nations, like Wales, that lack political autonomy and the whole range of institutions that come along with this. As Philip Schlesinger observes, it is 'the missing machinery of the state, or the merely partial character of existing institutions, that turns the eye to other forms of identity-maintenance.'[9] And as Davies suggests later in his book, 'the entire national debate in Wales, for fifty years and more after 1927, revolved around broadcasting'.[10] One clear example of this tendency can be seen in the issue of the teaching of the Welsh language. Throughout (at least) the first half of the twentieth century, Welsh intellectuals lacked the strong political-institutional base from which to raise concerns to Parliament regarding the sharp decline in speakers of the Welsh language. As a result, the nation

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[7] Ibid, p. 25.
[8] John Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. ix.
[9] Schlesinger, 'Media, the Political Order and National Identity', 302.
[10] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 50.

did not see its first Welsh-medium primary school until 1939, and its first state-funded Welsh-medium school until 1946.[11] Yet, as a result of the efforts of nationalist lobbying groups,[12] the first Welsh voice on radio was heard in 1923, and the BBC's schools broadcasts in Welsh began (albeit sporadically at first) in the late 1920s.[13] This is just one instance in which broadcasting has provided the ground for the promotion of an important facet of Welsh nationality in the years before other wide-reaching national institutions were put in place. As Davies notes, 'concessions to Welsh nationality won in those years were consequent upon the victories in the field of broadcasting.'[14] Broadcasting in Wales has, then, from its outset been at the heart of Welsh public life.

This fact hardly seems surprising when we take into consideration the importance of national broadcasting in a more general, theoretical way. Broadcasting, particularly in the context of small, stateless nations such as Wales, provides not only the fertile institutional ground upon which it is possible to field nationalist linguistic, cultural and political arguments, but also a powerful means of promoting a sense of mass community. This is, of course, true of all nations. Indeed most theorists of nations and national identity now attest to the importance of communication technologies in building and maintaining cohesive modern national identities. Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work on national communities, *Imagined Communities* (1983), points to the advent of the printing press as the origin of the nation as we now understand it. For him, this technology contributed to the emergence of the modern nation-state by unifying the disparate dialects and ideologies of vast territories. 'Print-capitalism', says Anderson, was 'a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together', making it possible for 'rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate

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[11] Jamie Medhurst, 'The Mass Media in Twentieth-Century Wales', in *A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1998), p. 331.

[12] In this instance, Cylch Dewi was the most vocal participant. Cylch Dewi was a small group of university graduates including Saunders Lewis and W.J. Gruffydd that started meeting in Aberystwyth around 1919 to 'discuss ways of promoting the Welsh language and culture'. They saw in broadcasting 'the salvation of the Welsh language and the particular cultural heritage of Wales'. See Rowland Lucas, *The Voice of a Nation? A Concise Account of the BBC in Wales 1923-1973* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1981), p. 24. As we will see, Cylch Dewi became one of the prominent pressure groups in Wales in the 1920s.

[13] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, pp. 96-97. Though this is not to say that the BBC was in general terribly understanding of Wales's linguistic needs. As Jamie Medhurst notes, E.R. Appleton, the then Director of the Cardiff Station, complained to the *Western Mail* in 1927 that '[if] the extremists who desire to force the language upon listeners in the area [...] were to have their way, the official language [i.e. English] would lose its grip'. Medhurst, 'The Mass Media in Twentieth-Century Wales', p. 334.

[14] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 50.

themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.'[15] Karl Deutsch, furthermore, is another influential theorist who views 'social communication' as not only a contributing factor but as the single key component of nationhood. In fact Deutsch goes as far as to see the nation as basically a function of organized communication between large groups of people. He asserts in his 1953 work *Nationalism and Social Communication* that '[t]he *essential* aspect of the unity of a people [...] is the complementarity or relative efficiency of communication among individuals – something that is in some ways similar to mutual rapport, but on a larger scale' (emphasis added).[16] As Schlesinger notes, Deutsch's argument is 'at root [...] about how shared cultural and communicative practices strengthen the identity of a group by *creating boundaries*' (emphasis added).[17] In summary, then, broadcast media should clearly be understood as central to the formation of cohesive national communities. Because of this, control over them should be viewed as a natural aim of those people (whether in power or seeking it) whose concerns lie with the most efficient and effective means of bringing about internal national cohesion. Indeed, as Monroe E. Price notes, this is precisely what happened in nations across the globe:

> during the entire historical period from the introduction of radio until the 1960s, there was virtually universal determination to maintain control of broadcasting, generally speaking, within national boundaries. If one looked at the world's radio and television systems, an essential, almost ever-present feature would be their rootedness in a single place and their exclusive relation to that place.[18]

Yet, while these general observations as to the formation of national communities are instructive, they do betray certain limitations when we take into account some of the recent developments in thinking about cultural and national identities. Price's remarks above reveal this when he speaks of the "rootedness" of broadcasting from a "single place". Indeed, it could be said that such observations fall short on three counts. In one sense, they fail to address the extent to which national cultures are, to quote Stuart Hall, 'cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences,

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[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 40.

[16] Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, 2nd edn (London and Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1965 [1953]), p. 188.

[17] Philip Schlesinger, 'The Nation and Communicative Space', in Howard Tumber, ed., Media *Power, Professionals and Policies* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 102.

[18] Monroe E. Price, *Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 11.

and "unified" only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power.'[19] In the

context of thinking about a minority nation such as Wales, the omission of such issues

is a significant error. Wales has, after all, for a long time been the product, to borrow M.

Wynn Thomas's words, of its 'bilateral character',[20] one that is 'highlighted by

(although by no means identical with) the differences between [its] Welsh-language and

[...] English-language culture[s]'.[21] Or in historian Dai Smith's pithy words, Wales is a

'singular noun but a plural experience.'[22] Moreover, in a second sense, even taking such

internal differences into account (indeed few nations can claim to be 'mononational' in

these respects[23]), any analysis that focuses solely on the mechanics of a single national

community immediately runs the risk of becoming, in Philip Schlesinger's terms,

"internalist".[24] In other words, in assuming that the only 'politically salient container for

communicative space is the sovereign nation-state,'[25] these analyses evade the complex

and, in the case of Wales, highly pertinent questions raised by the situation of "sub-

state" nations, and the ways in which national and cultural identities are invariably

complex and conditional things that frequently cut across national boundaries. Indeed,

this leads us towards a third problem. The fact that Wales has for five centuries and

more been economically and politically annexed to that equally problematic and divided

nation – Britain - is of particular significance to an examination of Welsh broadcasting -

a phenomenon that rests so heavily upon political-economic structures which, like

identities, cut sharply across national boundaries. Part of this significance is usefully

underlined by John Davies when he notes that 'the greater part of the Welsh people's

experience of radio and television has consisted of BBC broadcasting *to* Wales' (my

emphasis: the preposition in that phrase is significant). Therefore, as Davies goes on,

'the activities of the Corporation as a whole and the central role of London must loom

large.'[26] Clearly, then, it is necessary to adopt an analytical perspective that takes into

account these complex and boundary-crossing cultural and political-economic factors. I

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[19] Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 297.

[20] M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 6.

[21] Ibid, p. 45.

[22] Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p. 1.

[23] Political scientist Walker Connor, writing in 1993, estimated that only 15 of 180 nations were at that time not 'multinational'. Quoted in Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p 27.

[24] Schlesinger, 'The Nation and Communicative Space', p. 102.

[25] Ibid, p. 107.

[26] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. ix.

believe that a useful approach to consider in this respect is a certain version of Jurgen Habermas's conception of the "public sphere".

BBC Wales and a Welsh Public Sphere

Habermas's idea of the "public sphere" has been, since at least the translation of his important book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* into English in 1989, an influential concept in the field of media studies. As with the conceptions of national communities outlined above, it too rests upon the concept of a shared communicative space, yet where those earlier formulations concern themselves with the idea of "nationality" or "national identity", the notion of the "public sphere" rests upon a terminology more amenable to the discourse of liberal democracy. Indeed "identity" in contemporary theoretical parlance is now understood to be a highly complex and problematic construction. "Identities", to quote Chris Barker, are 'social and cultural [...] all the way down', and do not 'exist outside of cultural representations and acculturization.'[27] And while "identity" is, as a concept, indispensible to contemporary cultural analysis, its somewhat slippery, conditional existence makes it difficult to employ in the context of an examination of political-economic structures and institutions. (Indeed, it could conversely be said that the close examination of those structures and institutions actually inhibits a full and sophisticated understanding of the complex phenomenon of "identity".) The "public sphere", then, and its attendant concept of "civil society", is, I feel, a more appropriate model to adopt in this context. It allows us to bring into focus the fraught institutional factors that are central to an understanding of broadcasting media, while retaining an emphasis on the kinds of communicative space – in the context of this thesis, the kinds of national community – that these forms of communication have the potential to bring about.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas traced the emergence of the public sphere back to the unrestricted communicative space that developed in the interstice between the state and the market in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was here that the bourgeoisie formulated its own public ideas and ideals. According to Habermas, this was a space that opened up gradually as the result of a variety of factors: widened political participation, public meeting places that

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[27] Chris Barker, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 16.

were (in theory) freely accessible to all members of society (such as coffee houses in Britain and salons in France), and, importantly, the emergence of cheap and widely available print media (newspapers, journals, pamphlets and so on). Indeed, Habermas saw the public sphere as a fundamental facet of liberal democracy; it was the sphere of communication within which people who had previously been mere "subjects" of feudal and autocratic states could discuss issues of common political concern and become "citizens" of modern nation states. It was also, Habermas argued, the space in which that crucial third sector of democratic society emerged (as distinct from "the state" and "the market"): "civil society". Thus, as David Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley explain in their book *The Media in Wales, Voices of a Small Nation* (2005), the public sphere is best viewed as the 'communicative dimension of civil society.'[28] It is understandable, then, that theorists of the media have warmed to the concept of the public sphere. It essentially offers a way of designating, amongst a vast range of cultural and political possibilities, one precise area of social life within which the mass media can be seen to operate: that area of life in which people comprehend themselves as "citizens" of a wider political community. In societies such as ours, in which membership of the traditional spheres of civic interaction (churches, trade unions, community centres, libraries and so on) is rapidly diminishing, the mass media, as Dahlgren argues, 'have become the chief institutions of the public sphere'.[29]

Yet such an observation as to the centrality of the mass media to the production of the public sphere in modern societies does perhaps signal one serious limitation in Habermas's theory. Indeed, Habermas's designation of the public sphere as a common communicative space where 'extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized'[30] is rendered problematic when we consider the ways in which the mass media, those 'chief institutions of the public sphere' are quite far from being ideologically neutral.

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[28] David Barlow, Philip Mitchell and Tom O'Malley, 'The Communicative Dimension of Civil Society: Media and the Public Sphere', in Graham Day, David Dunkerley and Andrew Thompson, eds., *Civil Society in Wales: Policy, Politics and People* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p. 17.

[29] Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, pp. 7-8. Monroe E. Price is another theorist who emphasizes the centrality of the media in the formation of the public sphere. As he notes in his useful book *Television, the Public Sphere and National Identity*, 'no account of the public sphere in the twentieth century would be complete without addressing radio and television. Over time, the electronic media have become so pervasive, so linked not only to political institutions, but to the machinery of debate and decision, so seized with importance, that they suffuse and overwhelm other aspects of public discussion.' Price, *Television, the Public Sphere and National Identity*, p. 27.

[30] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 115.

Habermas was himself hesitant on the question of an "ideal" public sphere free of commercial and political interest; he suggested that developments in these areas in the nineteenth century steadily contributed to what he called a "refeudalization" of the public sphere: a process by which, to quote Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley, 'state and private control over the flow of public information became a matter of the manipulation of public opinion'.[31] But where Habermas retained a belief in the possibility of an ideal, disinterested sphere of public interaction, commentators in an important anthology of essays, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1993),[32] published shortly after the English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, were highly skeptical of this. Geoff Eley, in this collection, for instance, drew readers' attention to Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony", noting that all communicative spaces, however ostensibly "open" and democratic, are always, inevitably, inflected by existing conflicts of interest:

> for Gramsci civil society [...] was an arena of contested meanings, in which different and opposing publics maneuvered for space and from which certain publics (women, subordinate nationalities, popular classes like the urban poor, the working class, and the peasantry) may have been excluded altogether.[33]

Thus, by Gramsci's logic, in the context of a rapidly modernizing nineteenth-century Britain - a society that was already divided by class, gender and national differences - a truly universal public sphere could never arise; powerful state and private interests immediately came into play and began to hold sway over the direction of public discourse. Nancy Fraser elucidates this point in the same collection when she notes that 'publicity in the sense of critical scrutiny of the state gave way to public relations, mass-mediated staged displays, and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion.'[34] The growing mass media were, then, major agents of this manipulation. It is therefore perhaps more appropriate, given the existence of these powerful hegemonic forces, to view a fully disinterested "public sphere" less as a realistic possibility than as, in Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley's terms, a '"yardstick" against which judgements can be made about [...] systems of public communications.'[35]

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[31] Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley, *The Media in* Wales, p. 19.

[32] Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993)

[33] Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 325-326.

[34] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 113.

[35] Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley, *The Media in Wales*, p. 20.

As Eley signals with his mention of 'subordinate nationalities', these forces of hegemonic dominance can be seen to be of crucial concern to Wales. But it is important to clarify at this point that the "nation" and the "public sphere" are two very distinct phenomena: Habermas's concept is not concerned with the myriad cultural, ethnic, linguistic and, indeed, emotional factors that contribute to a sense of "nationhood". But it is nevertheless necessary to recognize that the classical notion of the public sphere itself *implies* the existence of a modern nation-state with its own political apparatus and firmly-defined boundaries. Indeed, by Habermas's logic, the public sphere is the very communicative space within which people recognize themselves as citizens of nations. It is thus possible to see the national public sphere as a space that shares the boundaries of the nation-state. As Eley notes, in the cultural and ethnic regions that emerged as modern nations out of the ruins of the empires that fell in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'the emergence of nationality (that is, the growth of a public for nationalist discourse) was simultaneously the emergence of a public sphere.'[36] This is particularly true of the situation in the development of Wales as a political nation in the twentieth century. Indeed, the fact of Wales's status as a "sub-state" nation - that is, its existence within the confines of an overarching British state – renders its own situation a peculiar one. Developing as it has done within this British context, Wales has encountered numerous obstacles to the development of a truly "national" public sphere of its own. The situation that Aled Jones has recognized in the Wales of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – that pivotal era in the emergence of nations - is a case in point. This was an era in which Wales's relatively weak political-economic status rendered it unable to compete with the British national public sphere dominated by the London press, and thus unable to forge its own. Where London, the economic and political metropolis, saw its first daily newspaper in 1702, Wales did not have its first legal printing press until 1718, and its first newspaper not until the following century.[37] Granted, the eighteenth century was an era of low levels of literacy in Wales – as elsewhere in Britain – but a situation in which London was the central producer of newspapers meant that those in Wales who could read – that is, those most likely to be in positions of influence in areas of national-political concern – tended towards, as

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[36] Eley, 'Nations, Publics and Political Cultures', p. 290.
[37] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012 [1992]), p. 41.

Jones notes, 'an English-speaking British national identity.'[38] This predicament is a
good illustration of the central problem that David Morley has identified in the context
of multinational states:

> If the national media constitute the public sphere which is most central in the
> mediation of the nation-state to the general public, then whatever is excluded from
> those media is in effect excluded from the symbolic culture of the nation.[39]

In the context of a multinational state in which one or more of its constituent nations
explicitly seeks – or at least has the potential to seek – political autonomy, this problem
is a significant one. Indeed, Morley goes on to clarify his point in the context of a
multinational Britain:

> The imagined community is, in fact, usually constructed in the language of some
> particular ethnos, membership of which then effectively becomes a prerequisite
> for the enjoyment of a political citizenship within the nation-state. On this
> argument, the Englishness of the public sphere in the UK is its most crucial
> characteristic.[40]

We are thus left with a situation in which Wales, and any desire for political autonomy
it might have, is left in an undesirably marginal position by a media complex dominated
by its politically and economically powerful neighbour. Add to this the predicament of
Wales's "plural" identity, and the interpretation of the nation's use of media becomes
decidedly complicated. Clearly, then, while Habermas's notion of the public sphere is a
useful one, we need to view it with a degree of critical skepticism, and perhaps adopt
Geoff Eley's perspective on the phenomenon as not a single, all-encompassing arena of
communication, but as 'the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or
negotiation among a *variety* of publics takes place' [my emphasis].[41] This brings us
back to our discussion of the BBC in Wales and to John Davies's assertion that in any
discussion of the BBC in Wales, 'the activities of the Corporation as a whole and the
central role of London must loom large.'

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[38] Aled Jones, 'The Nineteenth-Century Media and Welsh Identity', in Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David
Finkelstein, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave,
2000), p. 317.
[39] David Morley, 'Broadcasting and the Construction of the National Family', in Robert C. Allen and
Annette Hill, eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 428.
[40] Ibid, p. 428.
[41] Ibid, p. 306.

A *British* BBC?

Upon closer examination of the BBC's operations, this perspective is certainly borne out. The "Beeb" was, from its very earliest days, enlisted as a mechanism of a hegemonically *British* public sphere. Though it did take a few years to find its feet. In the first years of its existence, there was a degree of uncertainty as to how to employ 'wireless telegraphy' as a means of mass communication. Though the six engineering and telecommunications companies that had agreed to form a cartel under the name the 'British Broadcasting Company' were interested in 'mak[ing] the service [...] as widely available as possible',[42] they were in order to sell radios rather than provide a national public service per se. Indeed, in the very earliest days, the idea of providing a uniform national service was likely laughable to engineers whose transmitters were capable of broadcasting across a radius of 'twenty miles at most'.[43] Nevertheless the enormous potential of the new medium was soon understood. As radiuses widened and synchronized transmission developed in the years between 1922 and 1927, the British government established two major committees (the Sykes Committee of 1923 and the Crawford Committee of 1926) that designated a set of legal parameters and an appropriate discourse that regulated its use. The legal parameters involved moving the BBC from private to public control; in 1927 the 'British Broadcasting Company' became the 'British Broadcasting Corporation', a public institution funded entirely by licence fee. The discourse was one that centred upon a fundamental proposition: broadcasting was to become a 'public utility', a 'national service in the public interest.'[44]

This development of the rhetoric of 'national service' was to be expected in the turbulent 1920s. Britain was suffering the aftermath of a murderous World War that had marked the beginning of the end of its imperial dominance. It was attempting the gruelling task of rebuilding itself in the context of economic instability while suffering the social and political upheavals that came along with this, and against the ascending

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[42] Paddy Scannell, 'The Origins of BBC Regional Policy', in Sylvia Harvey and Kevin Robins, eds., *The Regions, the Nations and the BBC* (London: BFI, 1993), p. 27.

[43] Ibid, p. 28.

[44] Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting: Volume 1 1922-1939* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 6. Indeed, this is the guiding principle of the BBC to this day. The present governing body of the BBC, the BBC Trust, still paraphrase Reith's pronouncements of the 1920s: ': 'The BBC exists to serve the public, and its mission is to inform, educate and entertain'. See www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust (accessed 11 June 2013).

economic and cultural dominance of a new global superpower, the U.S.A. It was simultaneously the beginning of the era of universal suffrage in Britain. It is, therefore, entirely unsurprising that the British state grasped at this immensely powerful new medium of national cohesion with both hands; this was a medium that had the historically unprecedented potential to communicate to every member of the population simultaneously and instantaneously. Naturally, a technology as powerful as this required a formidable helmsman. In 1922 the General Post Office, under whose remit the BBC fell, employed John Reith, who, over the course of his sixteen-year career at the head of the Corporation, set about forging an institution of enormous national and international renown and reach.[45] Reith, a man usually described in tellingly grandiose terms,[46] had, in line with the requirements of the British state in the 1920s - a specific vision for the BBC. This was one that viewed its task as helping to promote a fully integrated and unified British population, a task, in Habermas's idiom, of influencing the precise shape of the public sphere. Where it was the role of the British government to reap taxes, direct wars and pass laws in the interests of maintaining the ascendancy of the islands at the core of the Empire, Reith saw it as the role of the BBC to assist this project by fostering a degree of national-ideological cohesion among its inhabitants. To this end, following the rather chaotic early days of British broadcasting, Reith used the first opportunity he could to extend a strict policy of cultural centralization. As BBC historians Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff note in their history of the period:

> [Reith] stressed [...] the importance of one general policy and one set of standards for the whole country. [...] The regime of control was to replace informality by a studied formality; to replace local variety and differences by a standardized conception of culture and manners; to replace audience participation by a more distanced, authoritative and prescriptive approach to broadcasting.[47]

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[45] Asa Briggs notes that in 1939, the year after Reith retired from the BBC, there were seventy-three licences for every hundred households in Britain. Asa Briggs, *History of Broadcasting in the UK, Vol II: The Golden Age of Wireless*, p. 235. By the end of the same year, the BBC was broadcasting in some way to every continent, and in a range of languages.

[46] Welsh writer and broadcaster Gwyn Thomas referred to him as 'our own contemporary version of God's appointed thunderer'. *A Few Selected Exits* (Bridgend: Seren, 1985), p. 186. Indeed, Thomas here taps into the religious discourse that is frequently evoked in discussions of Reith. Anthony Smith notes that '[i]n the 1930s Reith came to think and feel about the BBC as if it were a kind of national church, its producers a priesthood and himself a kind of cardinal or pope, at times even perhaps a Messiah.' 'Licences and Liberty: Public Service Broadcasting in Britain', in Colin MacCabe and Olivia Stewart, eds., *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 8. But perhaps the best indicator of Reith's influence on British society in the twentieth century is the entrance of his very name into Standard British English: the term 'Reithian' has been listed by the *OED* since 1950.

[47] Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, p. 16.

Scannell and Cardiff's phrase 'regime of control' may sound hyperbolic, but it is in

most ways reasonable. Reith sought to turn the BBC into a 'distanced, anonymous,

collective voice' that could speak authoritatively to the inhabitants of Britain and its

Empire by establishing a committee on the correct pronunciation of English.[48] He

ensured London became the central, dominant station, from which local stations could

"opt-out" for fewer and fewer hours each week. He was uncompromising on the

question of maintaining the highest of cultural standards. He pushed for nearly ten years

for a royal Christmas speech, the first of which in 1932 was, as Scannell and Cardiff

have punned, the 'crowning seal on the role of broadcasting in bringing the nation

together.'[49] In short, he promoted the nationwide cultural hegemony of a white, middle-

class, educated south-east England, and he did so in the name of public service and the

British national interest. 'What was always presumed', says Paddy Scannell of Reith's

BBC, 'was the unity of the culture and identity of the UK, a presumption which glossed

over its many disunities.'[50] Reith was, then, promoting a British national public sphere

that was to a considerable extent at odds with cultural, class and, importantly, national

differences within Britain.

It is worth saying a few words here about the BBC's operative relationship to

the British establishment in these years. I have suggested here that the BBC has,

historically – and certainly in the first three decades of its existence – operated in the

interests of an anglo-centric British establishment. This is not to say that it functions as

a direct mechanism of the state. The BBC, since its inauguration as a public

"corporation" funded by licence fee in 1927, had been, in administrative terms,

governed not by the state but by a statutorily independent governing body, the BBC

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[48] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 86. 'The BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English' had Welsh-born phonetician Arthur Lloyd James as its Honorary Secretary, and published a remarkable series of seven pamphlets under the title *Broadcast English: Recommendations to Announcers* (the first was published in 1928). Reith notes in his foreword to the first in the series that the committee's pol);ty was to '[seek] a common denominator of educated speech'. John Reith, in *Broadcast English I: Recommendations to Announcers Regarding Certain Words of Doubtful Pronunciation* (London: BBC, 1932 [1928]), p. iii. Interestingly, the decision to clarify a form of 'BBC English' seems to have been a curious mix of both British Imperial arrogance and anxiety. Lloyd James's introduction to the first pamphlet hints at a certain concern that the 'territorial expansion of our language sowed the seeds of its disintegration'. Yet the attempt to perfect the voice of a global BBC was simultaneously itself a tentatively imperial gesture: 'In our outlook upon the future we cherish the delusion that our language will remain as we know it now, the optimistic even seeing in it a future world-language.' Arthur Lloyd James, in *Broadcast English I*, p. 7.

[49] Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, p. 280.

[50] Scannell, 'The Origins of BBC Regional Policy', p. 34.

Board of Governors (since 2007 the BBC Trust). It was thus in the peculiar position of being editorially and politically independent and yet in a curiously proximate relationship with the state: it was the Board of Governors that independently oversaw the BBC's editorial content, yet the government appointed the members of the board, as well as allocating the wavelengths and channels on which the BBC broadcast and dictating the level of the licence fee. Opinions as to the BBC's relationship to state interests thus vary widely. There are those who wholly endorse the BBC's editorial independence, and argue that the BBC consistently acted according to the national public interest; one recent academic example is Thomas Hajkowski's *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53* (2010), which argues that, whatever its ties to the state, the BBC consistently maintained its editorial integrity and in doing so adhered to its remit of 'help[ing] to construct a consensual and tolerant sense of Britishness that was inclusive of all the peoples of Britain.'[51] I am inclined, however, to side with those who are more skeptical. The idea of the BBC's statutory independence, for instance, was complicated somewhat in the 1980s when it emerged that the government had directly and routinely intervened in the hiring of personnel at the BBC. In 1985 the *Observer* newspaper revealed that a retired army officer had been employed by the BBC as a 'Special Advisor' to the Director of Personnel, and it soon emerged that 'routine MI5 vetting of BBC journalists and of senior appointments had been in practice since 1937'.[52] Yet, as illuminating as this instance of direct state intervention is, for my purposes a broader ideological conception of the BBC's general proximity to the interests of a British establishment is perhaps more appropriate. There are a number of ways of approaching this. William Maley, for instance, in a polemical article published in a book on the nature of the BBC's relationship with the idea of "public service", argues that the BBC should be understood in bluntly Althusserian terms as a 'an ideological state apparatus' that

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[51] Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 236.
[52] Krishan Kumar, 'Public Service Broadcasting and the Public Interest', in Colin MacCabe and Olivia Stewart, eds., *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting* (Manchester: MUP, 1986), p. 48. This was later documented in full in Mark Hollingsworth and Richard Norton-Taylor, *Blacklist: The Inside Story of Political Vetting* (London: Hogarth Press, 1988). The fraught relationship between the BBC and Government is, of course, ongoing; the resignation of Director-General Greg Dyke in 2004 following the Hutton Inquiry is a major case in point.

operates not merely as a transmitter of messages, as a disseminator of a neutral web of news and information, but as a producer of highly selective texts and images designed to present a specific view of "British" society and the struggles waged within it.[53]

While I would endorse this broad theoretical perspective, it is perhaps best to qualify it somewhat. Kumar Krishan's excellent essay 'Holding the Middle Ground: The BBC, the Public and the Professional Broadcaster', examines more closely some of the specific motivations behind this peculiar ideology of "Britishness" at the BBC. He identifies an ideology of professionalism that emerged at an institution that, regardless of its ostensible statutory independence, has been perpetually required to 'find the middle ground' or 'walk the tightrope [...] between the drop on the one side into utter governmental dependence and that on the other into suicidal opposition to it.'[54] On top of this balancing act, particularly in the years before the emergence of competition in 1955, was the further requirement to juggle the interests of 'the groups and institutions that the BBC had most to worry about',[55] in particular the Church and the Oxbridge academic establishment. In such a highly ideologically regulated environment, then, Reith's policy of ensuring the BBC, in Kumar's words, 'did not clash with the general cultural assumption of the English ruling classes' is hardly surprising; it could be said that 'routine MI5 vetting' would almost have been unnecessary.

The BBC's activities at this time were, then, a clear confirmation of David Morley's assertion that national public spheres are 'usually constructed in the language of some particular ethnos', and that in the case of the BBC's role in the production of a British public sphere at this time, this was an "English" or perhaps, at best, "Anglo-British" one. It was certainly operating in the interests of the British state. Yet in the context of a Britain that was emphatically *multinational*, this proved to be a considerable limitation. Indeed, what happened was something that commentator Nancy Fraser argues an inevitability in democratic societies in which one version of the public sphere becomes dominant. Confirming Eley's assertion as to the invariably "contested" and "various" nature of the public sphere, she points to the historical record of 'members of subordinated social groups' that have 'repeatedly found it advantageous to

[53] William Maley, Centralisation and Censorship', in Colin MacCabe and Olivia Stewart, eds., *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 33.
[54] Krishan Kumar, 'Holding the Middle Ground: The BBC, the Public and the Professional Broadcaster', in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott, eds., *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 239.
[55] Ibid, p. 245.

constitute *alternative* publics [my emphasis].'[56] She terms these 'subaltern counterpublics' in order, she says, to

> signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.[57]

This idea of 'subaltern counterpublics' seems to me a useful way to view those Welsh voices that have voiced their dissatisfaction with a state of affairs in which English voices dominate the putatively "British" public sphere. Since the very earliest days of the BBC there have been consistent calls for greater representation of Welsh interests in its activities. The first coherent group to embark on such a scheme had formed itself around 1919 and called itself 'Cylch Dewi'. This was a group of white-collar university graduates containing prominent Welsh nationalists such as W.J. Gruffydd, R. Hopkin Morris and Saunders Lewis. Cylch Dewi had 'met in Cardiff to discuss ways of promoting the Welsh language and culture.'[58] Understandably, the group immediately saw in broadcasting 'the salvation of the Welsh language and the particular cultural heritage of Wales,'[59] and began lobbying their local BBC station accordingly. Further, as Jamie Medhurst notes, the 1930s in particular saw a spate of discussions about the BBC in Welsh quarters, particularly in Welsh-language journals. Medhurst quotes one contributor to Plaid Cymru's publication *Y Ddraig Goch*: 'The majority of the material broadcast is alien to our traditions, damaging to our culture, and is a grave digger to everything special in our civilization.'[60] Such criticisms, Medhurst rightly notes, 'clearly show the depth of feeling that existed and the anger that was felt towards the BBC's perceived ignorance and lack of support for things Welsh.'[61] Thus with Wales lacking any substantial official representation at the BBC at an administrative level, and with a hegemony of Britishness holding ground, it could be said that it was only as a result of the pressure from these quarters – often, it should be added, Welsh-speaking quarters - allied with the support of the few Welsh institutions recognized by Parliament at that time – the Welsh Parliamentary Party, the University of Wales and the National

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[56] Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 123.

[57] Ibid, p. 123.

[58] Lucas, *The Voice of a Nation?*, p. 24.

[59] Ibid, p. 25.

[60] Jamie Medhurst, '"Minorities With a Message": The Beveridge Report on Broadcasting (1949-1951) and Wales', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19, 2 (2008), 223.

[61] Ibid, 223.

Library of Wales – that brought about the BBC's concession of a Welsh Region with its own wavelength in 1937.[62]

Indeed, despite its official and tellingly oxymoronic status as a 'national region',[63] the emergence of the 'Welsh Region' was an important development. John Davies suggests that its significance 'can scarcely be exaggerated. All the subsequent recognition of Wales in the field of broadcasting (and, it could be argued, in other fields also), stemmed from this victory.'[64] Davies's tentative gesture in the direction of 'other fields' here can perhaps be read as implying that the BBC in Wales was helping to forge a national public sphere that was an "alternative" to a hegemonic British one and specific to Wales. I would endorse this point; however, it is important to emphasize at the same time that while an institution as wide-ranging and influential as the BBC was certainly a key mechanism in the development of the national public sphere, it was certainly not the only one. Indeed, there is a certain risk, in the kind of analysis I am proposing here, of overemphasizing the role of broadcasting alone in the development of the wider national public sphere. It is important, firstly, to note that Wales had possessed, even upon the advent of broadcasting, a healthy print culture for well over a century. It acquired its first newspaper, the *Cambrian*, in 1804, and as Aled Jones notes, with the repeal of the Stamp and Paper Duties in the middle of the nineteenth century, the expansion of Welsh newspapers and periodicals was rapid and enormously influential: '[e]very new title, by its very nature, acknowledged and identified both the presence and the difference of Wales.'[65] Secondly, even taking into consideration the role of print media, it is important to bear in mind the range of other fields in which public life was playing out in Wales: its long-established religious, cultural, sporting (and, indeed, less wholesome) activities, as well as the formal institutions that were established during the era that Kenneth O. Morgan terms the 'reawakening' in Wales in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the University of Wales in 1893 and, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the National Library and National Museum. These were all important areas in which a national public sphere could thrive. I would

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[62] Though it did not occur without setbacks. In 1933, there were some considerable grievances expressed when the BBC opened a transmitter in Washford, Devon. This transmitter was set up to broadcast to a new region called the 'West', a botched amalgamation of the West of England and South Wales bizarrely justified by E.R. Appleton – the then director of the West region – as 'the re-creation of the kingdom of King Arthur'. Quoted in Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 58.
[63] Sylvia Harvey and Kevin Robins, *The Regions, the Nations, and the BBC* (London: BFI, 1993), p. 4.
[64] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 205.
[65] Jones, 'The Nineteenth-Century Media and Welsh Identity', p. 313.

therefore not wish to subscribe to the kind of 'media-centric' analysis that theorist John

Corner has warned against:

> In such a view, the media are firmly placed as central and attributed with a high
> degree of political, social and cultural power. They are regarded as 'causal' across
> many aspects of contemporary social structure, action and belief.[66]

The BBC in Wales should thus be seen as an important, but certainly not the only,

means of contributing to a Welsh public sphere; it is perhaps best viewed in Dahlgren's

terms as a part of the 'nexus of institutions and practices'[67] that, combined, 'interlock

with each other'[68] and constitute the general field of common public understanding we

call the public sphere. To be sure, as Medhurst notes, without the lobbying pressure

from these others quarters, the Welsh Region would likely not have appeared in 1937, if

at all.

However, the cultural, political and administrative bodies that did contribute to

the emergence of the first 'Welsh Region' in 1937, despite their evident role in

providing the critical mass for this small expansion of the Welsh public sphere, were

evidently not enough to produce this expansion alone. Indeed, it could be said that the

Welsh Region's emergence within a firmly British administrative broadcasting

structure, combined with this fairly weak Welsh national-institutional context, was

perhaps less a contribution to the expansion of a Welsh public sphere than to a

diversification of an already powerful British one. Indeed, with the outbreak of the

Second World War, Wales's status as a mere region of Britain was dutifully confirmed.

At the BBC, this was manifested in a policy of *re*centralization and the abandonment of

the National Regions; mainly, of course, due to the massive economic strain of War, but

no doubt partly because the British Government saw the immense ideological power of

broadcasting and needed its population loyal to one single, unified nation. Accordingly,

those nationalist voices whose interests lay in the promotion of a separate Welsh public

sphere had no real basis from which to oppose the BBC's decision to place BBC Wales,

in Emyr Humphreys' terms, into 'cold storage'.[69] As Dahlgren notes, it is in such

situations that 'the public sphere's entwinement with the state and with society's overall

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[66] Corner, *Television Form and Public Address*, p. 4.

[67] Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, p. 9.

[68] Ibid, p. 11.

[69] Emyr Humphreys, 'A Lost Leader', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., *Emyr Humphreys: Conversations and Reflections* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 146.

political situation comes most clearly to the fore.'[70] Indeed, 'the public sphere cannot be seen as a space operating in isolation from all other social, political, and economic domains as if it were a self-contained entity. [...] Such policy is shaped to a great extent by forces and actors located within the state and the economy.'[71] In the case of the Welsh public sphere, in the years up to the end of the Second World War, this lack of political-institutional support led to a British dominance.

However, the massive transformations that took place in British society in the decades that followed the end of the War provided the ground for considerable and surprising changes to this state of affairs. This was the era that one historian has termed the 'Golden Years',[72] a time of exponential growth in Western capitalist states that brought unprecedented prosperity and, as a result, seismic social and cultural shifts. Most prominent in Britain were the changes in the structure of the workforce, with more people than ever employed in light manufacturing and white-collar jobs. This change was signalled in Wales by the sharp decline of "traditional" occupations. In 1931, for instance, 92,000 people had been employed in agriculture; by 1971 the figure was 45,000.[73] Similarly in 1960 there were 106,000 miners; by 1970, this figure had dropped to 60,000, and by 1979, 30,000.[74] But these shifts did not equate to a rise in unemployment; rather, employment in Britain was at an all-time high, and in the years between 1948 and 1965 the average wage leapt up 47 per cent.[75] Furthermore, this rise in prosperity manifested itself in Wales in a rise in national consciousness. Cardiff received capital city status in 1955, and the Red Dragon became the official flag of Wales in 1959. Saunders Lewis's delivered his seminal speech, 'Tynged Yr Iaith' ('Fate of the Language'), on BBC radio in 1962, and instantly galvanized a Welsh-language movement into action: the result was the formation of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society) which campaigned relentlessly – and successfully - for greater Welsh-language provision in Welsh civic life. These were also, as I have

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[70] Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, p. 12.

[71] Ibid, pp. 12-13.

[72] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2010 [1994])

[73] Ibid, p. 155.

[74] Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 317.

[75] Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 71. Though it should also be said that the average income was in Wales was consistently lower than the UK as a whole during this period. In 1962, for instance, the average monthly income in Wales was £375. For Britain as a whole the figure was £452. Ibid, p. 74.

discussed elsewhere, the years of the 'Second Flowering' of Anglophone Welsh poetry and the rise of English-language Welsh nationalism. Whether or not we view these developments in Welsh cultural life in historian Eric Hobsbawm's terms as mere kneejerk reactions to a social situation in which 'communities in the sociological sense [were becoming] hard to find in real life',[76] they were nevertheless translating into real developments on a political-institutional level. Plaid Cymru won its first parliamentary seat in 1966. The formation of the Welsh Office in 1964 consolidated affairs of Welsh concern that had previously been 'dispersed through a range of government departments, Transport, Agriculture, Health, Labour, and many more'.[77] And as John Davies notes, 'although [The Welsh Office] was not an independent body in any sense, its existence strengthened the concept of the territorial unity of Wales and created the need for other organizations reflecting that unity.'[78] The establishment of the Councils for the Arts (1967), for Sport (1972) and for Consumers (1975), as well as the Welsh TUC (1973), was a direct response to this. These developments set in motion a sequence of events that led to a referendum on devolution in 1979, and despite the overwhelming "no" vote from the Welsh public,[79] the very fact that devolution was on the agenda demonstrated that Wales was now being conceived as a civic national space in its own right. It is worth quoting Kenneth O. Morgan at length to get a sense of how much things had changed in these years:

> Welsh life had been reinvigorated through the rise of nationalism and the debate on devolution [...]. No longer did Welsh and Scottish issues attract the patronizing indifference that they had so often done prior to 1964. The teaching of Welsh in schools had made steady progress. The government had given its approval to a new Welsh-language television channel, scheduled for 1982. Radio and television programmes in both languages emphasized national themes. The most unexpected of bodies now proclaimed their Welshness, [...]. The debate on Welshness and the future of Welsh government was a passionate one in the late 1970s. It was clearly destined to continue [...] in years to come.[80]

As Morgan suggests, the developments in the field of broadcasting were no small part of these wider changes. Indeed, these were the years of substantial gains in the BBC's activities in Wales. The Welsh Region had been resurrected in 1945 under the

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[76] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 428.
[77] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 332.
[78] John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 2007 [1993]), p. 641.
[79] 243, 048 people voted yes – 20.2 per cent of the vote. Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 651.
[80] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 408.

new name the 'Welsh Home Service'. This was obviously to be celebrated, but was essentially a return to the order of things as they were before the War. The development that was of real importance after 1945 was the establishment of the 'Welsh Advisory Council' (WAC) in 1947. This council was in many ways a more formally recognized formation of members of existing lobbying groups and public figures but its status as a state-sanctioned component of the BBC provided these members with a more stable footing from which to push for further concessions during the writing of the Government's important Beveridge Report on broadcasting of 1951. Indeed this is precisely what the council did do. As Medhurst has documented, the WAC's submission to Beveridge was able to argue that

> Wales should not be considered as a mere region of the BBC. [...] Wales should be regarded as a national broadcasting unit within the pattern of British broadcasting, with its own particular and peculiar needs.[81]

The council's arguments were heeded. After the renewal of the BBC's Royal Charter in 1952, the Welsh Advisory Council was replaced by the 'Broadcasting Council for Wales' (BCW), and Wales effectively became a 'national' unit within the BBC. As Rowland Lucas, an ex-BBC employee and historian of the Corporation, has stated, no longer was the BBC in Wales to be controlled via 'post and long-distance telephone from London'.[82] The BCW would have direct responsibility for the content of the Welsh Home Service and, soon after, television in Wales. It led to the two formative decades of broadcasting in Wales in the 1950s and 1960s that were closely connected with the developments in Welsh civic life. Television arrived in 1952 with the opening of the Wenvoe transmitter near Cardiff.[83] Budgets increased and, with them, technical expertise, resulting in Wales having the capacity to produce programmes of real quality, in both languages and on its own terms. [84] As Davies notes, the television hours produced by Wales specifically for its own viewers 'exceeded those produced by any other region. Of the total of 222 hours of such programmes broadcast in 1958, Wales

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[81] Quoted in Medhurst, "Minorities With a Message', 227.

[82] Lucas, *The Voice of a Nation?*, p. 160.

[83] Jamie Medhurst, 'Television in Wales, c. 1950-1970', in Michael Bailey, ed., *Narrating Media History* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 143.

[84] As John Davies notes, '[i]n 1951 [...] Wales's allowance was £1500 [per week]. [...] Following the establishment of the BCW, Wales's allowance rose to £1800 and it was further increased to £2000 in 1956.' *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 267.

was responsible for a third, its 75 hours comparing with between 21 and 23 hours apiece for the Midland, Northern Ireland, West and North regions and 60 for Scotland.'[85]

It is, of course, important to note that these developments were, as in the political realm, as much a consequence of changes in the wider culture and society of Britain as the product of a homegrown nationalist movement. The 1960s in particular were the years of what some have called the 'permissive society' – increases in income and the rise of global capitalism were shaping new identities and expectations. BBC producer and historian Anthony Smith has noted that these manifested themselves in the BBC in what he has called the 'Greene Era' (after the Director-General of 1960-1969, Hugh Greene), the 'second cultural system' after Reith.[86] The BBC mothership had been attempting to pull itself free from the strong gravitational pull of Reithianism since the end of the War by becoming increasingly flexible in its regional structure and splitting its radio service in three. At the same time, the Conservative government of the first half of the 1950s had been keen to break the BBC's monopoly (Winston Churchill allegedly believed the BBC to be 'riddled with communists'),[87] and so, with the re-emergence of television on a national scale in the early 1950s, sold a number of television wavelengths to independent regional franchises. This emergence of commercial television worked in Wales's favour; the purchase of the West region by 'Television Wales and the West' meant that, although South Wales was, once again, linked by broadcasting to the West of England, it could at least start seeing itself on the small screen for the first time. And with ITV an instant and colossal success,[88] the BBC had to respond with a more regional-friendly structure of its own. As Smith remarks, the BBC's totalising vision 'collapsed under the impact of the new cultural pluralism of the 1960s. It was simply impossible for the BBC to sustain a totalistic attitude towards every strand of the culture in this no longer homogeneous society.'[89] Take, for instance, the concern that Welsh Controller Alun Oldfield-Davies expressed in an internal BBC memo in 1959:

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[85] Ibid, p. 262.

[86] Smith, 'Licences and Liberty', p. 14.

[87] Jamie Medhurst, *A History of Independent Television in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 23.

[88] Some 72 per cent of viewers were watching the channel over the BBC in the late 1950s, and this in spite of the BBC's wider transmission coverage. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 20. I will explore in the following chapter the interesting ways in which these commercial forces played out.

[89] Smith, 'Licences and Liberty', p. 14.

> TWW is an important factor; poor though much of its output may be it is being increasingly regarded by the man in the street as "our" programme. They are not afraid to put on local talent in light entertainment programmes. TWW makes contribution to 'local feeling'. We do little or nothing.[90]

The central product, therefore, of the reciprocal pressures of a vociferous Welsh nationalist contingent[91] and a newly pluralistic British society was the Government's 1962 white paper on broadcasting, the Pilkington Report. This advocated the establishment of a 'BBC Wales' proper, with its own television wavelength, headquarters,[92] and far greater autonomy than ever before.

Thus, despite developing in tandem with a more decentralized BBC, the considerable developments that took place in Welsh public life in these years allow us to move beyond a view that Welsh broadcasting functioned as a merely 'regional' phenomenon within a firmly British milieu. The activities of BBC Wales in this period were both a significant part of this massive regeneration of Welsh political and cultural life and, simultaneously, a means of reflecting these developments back to the Welsh public. Indeed, John Davies has suggested that these developments were in no small part 'media-driven, for all-Wales institutions came into existence in part because BBC Wales was there to report their activities.'[93] These considerable political-institutional changes were mirrored in a discursive shift in Welsh public life. This is not to say, however, that the Welsh 'public life' in question was in any way settled or unified at this time. On the contrary, the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were a period of intensified internal difference and discontent in Wales, and much of the focus of this discontent became focused - somewhat ironically, perhaps - upon this new Welsh institution. Indeed, BBC Wales in this respect found itself in an invidious position. Opinions in Wales were often polarized between those who viewed the institution as, in Davies's words, 'in hock to Welsh fanatics'[94] and those who viewed the activities of a *British* Broadcasting Corporation in Wales as being inherently antipathetic to the interests of the Welsh. In 1956 the BCW came under fire from Conservative MP for Cardiff North David Llewellyn, who was convinced that 'there is a distinct bias in the Welsh Region

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[90] Alun Oldfield Davies, Memo dated 11 March 1959 (T/16/235/3, WAC, Caversham).

[91] Jamie Medhurst examines some of the Welsh contributions to the Pilkington Committee in his useful essay, '"You Say a Minority, Sir; We Say a Nation": The Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting (1960-2) and Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 22, 2 (2004), 305-332.

[92] Broadcasting House at Llandaff, near Cardiff, was opened in on 1 March 1967.

[93] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 319.

[94] Ibid, p. 288.

of the BBC in favour of Welsh Nationalism and Plaid Cymru'.[95] His criticisms resulted

in a lengthy internal enquiry, but while John Davies suggests that Llewellyn's qualms

'articulated […] the somewhat unfocused unease with which many of Wales's monoglot

English-speakers viewed the BBC's activities in Wales',[96] it was found that there were

no substantial grounds for concern. Meanwhile, there were similar criticisms from

Welsh-language quarters, and, as Davies notes,

> [t]hey had a case. The Census of 1971 showed that one in five of the inhabitants
> of Wales spoke Welsh, but only one in eighteen of the hours of television beamed
> to the households of Wales from transmitters sited on Welsh soil spoke to Welsh-
> speakers in their own language.[97]

The most high profile campaigns against the BBC came from the newly-formed

Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, who between 1968 and 1970 organised sit-ins and

disruptions at studios in Bangor and Cardiff.[98] Moreover, intellectuals were

simultaneously writing in damning terms about the effects of British broadcasting in

Wales. The Welsh writer Ned Thomas dedicated an entire chapter to broadcasting in the

early editions of his influential book *The Welsh Extremist* (1971).[99] There he wrote of

British television as a dystopian tool that, he argued, 'brings straight into the home the

anglicising forces of the official world and brainwashes children out of their native

tradition under the eyes of their parents.'[100] Emyr Humphreys was speaking in similarly

ominous, science-fictional terms in lectures in the early 1970s:

> [t]he television set has insinuated itself like a sinister visitor from an alien
> universe and sits in the corner of every household exerting its hypnotic rays and
> quietly changing the natures of the inmates even as they go about their daily
> business.[101]

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[95] Quoted in John Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 248.

[96] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 252.

[97] Ibid, p. 288.

[98] The organization also published a pamphlet, *Broadcasting in Wales*, in 1969, that 'attack[ed] the established broadcasters and assert[ed] the need for a Welsh-language TV channel.' Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley, *The Media in Wales*, p. 147.

[99] Though this was excluded from editions published after 1982 on the basis that Wales had by then acquired its own Welsh-language channel, S4C.

[100] Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist: Modern Welsh Politics, Literature and Society* (London: Gollancz, 1971), p. 84.

[101] Emyr Humphreys, 'Television and Us', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., Emyr Humphreys: Conversations and Reflections (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 175.

Perhaps the most imaginative effort came from Welsh anthropologist Alwyn D. Rees, whose 1961 letter to the Pilkington Committee invited its recipient to imagine an England some six hundred years into the future in which the Soviet Union had conquered the British Isles and the English language was under threat of extinction.[102] These debates continued throughout the 1970s, when demands became focused on the establishment of a dedicated Welsh-language channel. They reached their apogee in 1979, when, after Conservative Home Secretary William Whitelaw reneged on his pre-election commitment to a Welsh-language channel, Gwynfor Evans, president of Plaid Cymru, threatened to fast to death.[103] The protest famously resulted in a government U-turn and the establishment of S4C in 1982. It is fair to agree with commentator Jonathan Coe, then, when he says that in Wales 'broadcasting, more than any other sphere of public life, has been the focal point of political and linguistic conflict.'[104] Though this is not to be viewed in a negative light; indeed, I am suggesting that broadcasting in these years provided the battleground upon which these cultural and political debates could play out at a time when Wales had few other institutions to provide the same function.

BBC Wales should thus be viewed as a core agent of the enormous civic developments that were taking place in Wales between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s. Indeed, further developments came in the early 1970s with the emergence of Wales's BBC radio stations in both languages.[105] Though the BBC's activities in Wales were a boon to some and a point of contention to many, to all it provided the grounds for the reflection of a complex Welsh society beginning to see itself in increasingly independent civic and political terms. As the first chairman of the BCW announced in the year of its inauguration,

> Wales as we know it today, the Wales of song and sport, the Eisteddfod, of the drama and the Delyn, of the pulpit and platform; the Wales of youth, the Wales of the aged, the Wales of the businessman and the financier in Cardiff, the Wales of industry and of the far-flung farming communities, Wales in its entirety, with all

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[102] Alwyn D. Rees, *Dear Sir Harry Pilkington: An Open Letter from Alwyn D. Rees* (Carmarthen: Radical Publications, 1961).

[103] See Barlow, Mitchell and O'Malley, *The Media in Wales*, pp. 137-138.

[104] Jonathan Coe, 'Sianel Pedwar Cymru: Fighting for a Future', in Simon Blanchard and David Morley, eds., *What's This Channel Fo(u)r?: an Alternative Report* (London: Comedia, 1982), p. 55.

[105] Radio output in Wales increased dramatically within a short space of time. In the year 1973-4 the BBC's Welsh radio stations had a combined output of 1625 hours. By 1981-2 this figure was 7110. TV, however, remained around the same, with an average total of 12 hours per week. See Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 361.

its variation and differences – that's the Wales the BBC must keep in mind. That's the Wales whose highest interests it must serve.[106]

This was thus a shift from a purely cultural Wales to one defined as much by its civic institutions as its cultural and linguistic heritage. Indeed, in the BCW annual reports of this era, it is possible to see a discursive transition between an emphasis on Wales's distinctiveness in relation to Britain as a whole, towards, as the BBC in Wales gradually won greater autonomy, a focus on the challenges posed by its own *internal* differences. The report of 1959-60, for instance, smacks of a peripheral region seeking recognition from its dominant neighbour:

> The people of Wales as a national group with its own language, traditions, and institutions are justly entitled to a separate, distinct, and adequate provision of television programmes – a bilingual service which would in Wales be additional to what is provided for the United Kingdom as a whole.[107]

Yet by the end of the 1960s the reports illustrate the extent to which the BBC in Wales was able to stand apart from the fraught politics of national identity and adopt the far more neutral posture of 'fairly [...] reflect[ing] the many different and sometimes contradictory facets of the society.'[108] '[BBC Wales] has tried hard to display a lively interest in present-day Wales and to reflect as many as possible of the varied facets of the country's life.'[109] This civic terminology of "the society" was in itself a far remove from the term "principality" favoured in the earlier reports, and signalled this significant change in perspective. The role of the BBC in Wales was, then, no more one of merely upholding a sense of *cultural* national identity. Its function now was to provide the communicative element in a fledgling public sphere, and widen the *political* vocabulary of Wales – whatever its internal differences. For good or ill, Wales was now talking to itself.[110] And if its programmes could not, in the words of one BCW report, 'define the

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[106] Lord Macdonald of Gwaesgynor, quoted in Lucas, *The Voice of a Nation?*, p. 176.

[107] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1959-60*, p. 2.

[108] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1968-69*, p. 2.

[109] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1969-70*, p. 2.

[110] This was true in more than one sense. John Davies notes that in the 1960s and 1970s, Wales's television contributions to the British network were 'very few, for the advent of BBC Wales obliged Cardiff to devote its resources to home output.' *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 317. And while this would no doubt have reinforced Wales's sense of itself as a nation, such a state of affairs was certainly not conducive to improving Britain's understanding of its internal national diversity – as media historian Jean Seaton has written, 'devolving to the regions only does its transformative, enlarging work if then the regional insights are brought back to amend and correct the whole picture.' Jean Seaton,

Welsh 'identity'', they could at least 'provide the opportunity for extensive fact finding, analysis and the expression of opinion.'[111] It is, of course, important to be careful not to overstate the case for the political efficacy of the BBC in Wales in these years. As Geraint Talfan Davies has pointed out, with the eastern flank of Wales contiguous with England - and well within reach of English television transmitters – many viewers in this era were turning their aerials towards the Midlands transmitter in Sutton Coldfield and the Northern transmitter in Holme Moss.[112]   Added to this is the fact that Welsh television had been limited to around 12 hours of broadcasting per week – 7 in Welsh and 5 in English - since the early 1960s.[113] Nevertheless I believe that the efforts of the BBC in Wales at this pivotal time in Welsh history were a crucial communicative contribution to the public life of the nation.

The BBC Wales Film Unit

This impetus toward utilizing BBC Wales in order to reflect upon and invigorate Welsh public life had been greatly enhanced by the establishment of the Welsh Film Unit, with its particular emphasis on the production of documentary films, in 1957. Indeed, the story of the establishment of this unit is an interesting one insofar as it reveals many of the tensions and conflicting attitudes at play in the relationship between the BBC's London headquarters and its regional units. In particular, it confirms the fact that developments in Welsh broadcasting were rarely the product of the BBC's benevolent largesse, but rather its fear of outside pressure. As John Davies notes, there was initially 'no intention of building regional television studios nor of producing regional alternatives to the main output.'[114] The BBC's main consideration in the mid-1950s was the threat of competition from commercial television, which was to arrive in 1955; cognizant that commercial television was to be not only more populist (and thus more popular), but also, given its model of multiple regional franchises, more recognizably

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'Metabolising Britishness', in James Curran and Jean Seaton, eds., *Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain*, 7th edn. (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 304.

[111] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1968-69*, p. 6.

[112] Geraint Talfan Davies, 'The Role of Broadcasting in the Referendum', in David Foulkes, J. Barry Jones and R.A. Wilford, eds., *The Welsh Veto: The Wales Act 1978 and the Referendum* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), p. 192. Talfan Davies quotes then recent HTV research that found 35 per cent of viewers were tuning into English broadcasts. He further makes an interesting comparison with the situation in Scotland, which was, in contrast, relatively self-contained in broadcasting terms.

[113] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 318.

[114] Ibid, p. 202.

regional in flavour, the BBC mooted the idea of expanding the capacity for programme "origination" in its regions in late 1954. Until this time, television footage had been obtained via the use of temperamental 'Outside Broadcast' units, which were designed solely for live transmission. As Ormond noted in an essay that recalled these early days, in Wales's case this was a 'hand-me-down set up that having done its time in London, had been replaced with new equipment and then passed down the line to Wales.'[115] Accordingly, the output of programmes produced in Wales was minimal; in the last quarter of 1954 the BBC in Wales broadcast a monthly average of 1 hour 52 minutes in English and 1 hour 10 minutes in Welsh.[116] But with competition from commercial television looming, the development of regional units fast became a priority, in particular the development of 'regional magazine programmes', which were deemed, as prominent BBC producer Cecil McGivern noted in a 1955 memorandum, 'a necessary move in view of the regional development of commercial television.'[117] Given the cost involved in equipping the regions with the means of producing programmes – extra cameras, sound recording equipment, telecine devices for transferring film to the screen, not to mention extra staff – progress was slow. The BBC decided to prioritize the three English regions, Midlands, West and North; these received most of the necessary resources in 1956. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, however, received theirs in a more piecemeal fashion in the years that followed, with Ormond being made head of the Welsh unit in 1957, and this unit moving to larger premises in 1960.[118] Ormond was joined by other talented producers in the years that followed, such as Selwyn Roderick, Gethyn Stoodley Thomas and Derrick Trimby.

There was, moreover, considerable debate about the ways in which these new regional resources should be used; specifically, what kind of programming should be prioritized. A London memo from the Controller of Programme Services to the Director of Television Broadcasting in early 1957 identifies four main areas: 'Sequences for drama, light entertainment, documentary'; 'Prestige films for network and maybe sale abroad'; 'Topical and semi topical sequences for Regional magazines, contributions to

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[115] John Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision: The People and Politics of Television* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 1.

[116] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 209.

[117] Cecil McGivern, Memorandum, 22 February 1955, BBC Written Archives Centre T16/225/2.

[118] Resources seem often to have been delivered to the regional units with some reluctance, as one miserly internal memo between two London staff in 1959 notes: 'Ideally [Scotland and Wales] should each have [a 16mm silent cut-away camera], but up to now neither of the two regions referred to has made a case for it, and in view of the financial stringency it seemed unnecessary to encourage additional expenditure.' Memorandum 8 January 1959, BBC Written Archives Centre T16/645.

"Panorama", "Tonight", sports reports, etc.'; and 'News film for network and for Regional news.'[119] However, in the absence of a clearly defined policy, what soon emerged were two different ideas about whether regional or network programmes should be prioritized. London seems, naturally, to have prioritized the latter, even occasionally making judgments about the allocation of equipment based on the extent to which regions were 'satisfactorily carr[ying] out' their contributions to major network programmes such as *Panorama* and *Tonight*.[120] Equally naturally, however, the national regions in particular were keen to use their newly acquired equipment to produce programmes of their own, as was recognized in a London memo of 1959:

> as regional television resources have grown, the regions themselves have tended, perhaps understandably, to regard their opt out programmes as being almost the most important things they do and, therefore, to suppose that the order of priority in the use of those resources is opt out first and network second. I think this tendency it particularly marked in the two national regions, i.e. Wales and Scotland.[121]

The kinds of programmes that were produced as BBC Wales acquired more autonomy and better resources throughout the late 1950s and 1960s demonstrate the ways in which broadcasting was being harnessed in the development of a Welsh public sphere. Besides the fare of sport and drama,[122] there was, importantly, a focus on Welsh news and current affairs; programmes that, in other words, encouraged audiences to view Wales's borders as newly political and civic as well as historical and cultural. Radio programmes such as 'Welsh Forum', and its Welsh-language counterpart 'Trafod Cymru', 'vigorously discussed [...] current affairs and many political questions of

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[119] Memorandum 12 April 1957, BBC Written Archives Centre T16/225/2.

[120] Memorandum 23 April 1958, BBC Written Archives Centre T16/645.

[121] Memorandum 22 October 1959, BBC Written Archives Centre T31/79/2.

[122] This is not to understate the importance of such programming; both were crucial to the establishment of a common national identity in Wales. Davies notes that 'during Welsh rugby's great years BBC Wales saw it as an instrument of nation-building'. (Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 320.) Indeed, Martin Johnes's suggests that television coverage itself allowed for a new national engagement with the sport, drawing together new allegiances: 'television enabled internationals to become national events that touched areas outside the game's historic hinterlands, notably in north Wales, traditionally a football area.' Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 282. Moreover Steve Blandford has written about the importance of national drama on television, particularly in the context of a national-institutional complex which has historically favoured the "high" arts: What [...] television has the capacity to do is transform the old debates much more rapidly and within discourses that can most readily reach out and fire the imaginations of the young in geographical areas not traditionally blessed by the visitations of the Welsh cultural establishment.' Steve Blandford, ed., *Wales on Screen* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 2000), p. 16.

strong Welsh interest';[123] as a BCW report from 1960 notes, '[e]xamples of topics that

were so treated are the functions of a Secretary of State, the prospects for the

employment of youth, and Wales and the new Parliament.'[124] These were topics that

could – and indeed would - not have been addressed in such detail from London. On

television, this role was fulfilled with the daily Welsh-language *Heddiw* and the

English-language *Wales Today*, from 1961 and 1962 respectively. These daily

programmes filled roughly half of BBC Wales television's allocated 12 hours per week

(7 in Welsh and 5 in English) after 1964.[125] Soon after, the weekly *Week In Week Out*

was introduced, which was to 'give regular treatment in English to the industrial, social

and political issues of the day.'[126] However, seeing as the focus of Ormond's work at

the film unit was the production of "prestige" documentary films,[127] I want to spend the

remainder of this chapter examining the reasons why such a format was so useful a

contribution to the process of nationalizing the public sphere.

National Documentary

If we take, as I have done in this chapter, one of the core, guiding purposes of BBC

television from its earliest incarnation to the present day to be that of engaging with and

contributing to the public sphere (whatever judgments we make as to its motives), and

examine more closely the form that the documentary film itself takes, it becomes clear

that the documentary is, in many senses, one of public service television's central

formats.[128] John Corner sums up the observations of many commentators when he calls

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[123] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1956-57*, p. 2.

[124] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1950-60*, p. 3.

[125] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 318.

[126] Lucas, *The Voice of a Nation?*, p. 211.

[127] Moreover, if fiction is any indication of truth, it would appear from one Alun Richards short story that Ormond and the BBC Wales film unit got up to rather more than making films. Richards was a regular contributor to BBC television in addition to being a close friend of Ormond, so it is probably fair to assume that there is some truth to his story 'The Scandalous Thoughts of Elmyra Mouth'. Here the protagonist, Elmyra, a native of Dan-y-Graig Street, spends an evening agonizing over the activities of her husband Dai – an Assistant Cameraman at the BBC Wales Film Unit – who is on a night out with his colleagues. "That Film Unit!' Elmyra said in much the same way as her mother would have said, 'That pit!' or 'That club!'" See Alun Richards, 'The Scandalous Thoughts of Elmyra Mouth', in *Dai Country* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2009 [1973]), pp. 298-313.

[128] Granted, the imperatives and statutory requirements of broadcasting in Britain have shifted considerably since the advent of commercialism in 1955 and, further, of satellite and cable television and the proliferation of channels from the 1980s onwards. I will explore some of the effects of the former in particular in the chapters that follow. However, as I noted earlier, the BBC to this day subscribes to Reith's guiding principles, and this was certainly true of the era in which I am interested.

it 'one of the medium's defining modes.'[129] Indeed, it is no coincidence that the peculiar

use of the medium of film we call "documentary", in its dominant informational,

didactic form, developed under John Grierson in the same decade that John Reith was

formulating a plan and a purpose for BBC broadcasting. As Corner notes, the

development of the documentary in the 1920s was, like broadcasting, 'interwoven with

the development of citizenship in modern society and with the cause of social

democratic reform.'[130] As I explored in the previous chapter, given the explicitly

informational and didactic function of the documentary film, and further the remarks I

have made in this chapter about the inescapably *national* inflection of much of the

content of the public sphere, it surely follows that the documentary must have

considerable potential in this specifically national capacity.

This is something that has been recognised by commentators on documentary

from a number of quarters. Though few commentators on Welsh film and television

have commented on the specific uses of documentary, those who endorse the use of

television in the shaping of public attitudes to Welsh national ends have at least

acknowledged its potential. I believe these acknowledgements are revealing. The Welsh

author and nationalist intellectual Emyr Humphreys, in his polemical lecture 'Television

and Us' which examines the importance of harnessing television's power to 'serve

creative and socially beneficial ends by societies that still have the will to continue to

celebrate their own existence',[131] praised the documentary as 'the form of cinema which

has proved in the end to have been the most influential and to have had the greatest

impact on the use of the 'picture', either still or moving, in the business of

communication.'[132] Similarly, the Welsh producer and commentator Michelle Ryan, in

an important essay stressing the power that film and television possess in 'articulat[ing]

those progressive notions of national identity', implicitly endorses the documentary

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[129] Corner, *Television Form and Public Address*, p. 77. Corner points to the remarks of the distinguished producer and theorist of documentary Paul Rotha upon his (brief) appointment as Head of Documentary at the BBC in 1953. '[Rotha] noted the 'paramount importance' which nightly access to a mass audience had for 'those who still believe that documentary has a specific social job to do"(quoted in Corner, *Television Form and Public Address*, p. 83.). It is worth noting, also, that the documentary principle found an outlet in mass broadcasting some time before the advent of television in the radio "feature" programme of the early 1930s; see Scannell, '"The Stuff of Radio": Developments in Radio Features and Documentaries Before the War', in Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media*, pp. 1-26.

[130] John Corner, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 15.

[131] Emyr Humphreys, 'Television and Us', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., *Emyr Humphreys: Conversations and Reflections* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 180. The lecture was first delivered in 1972.

[132] Ibid, p. 159.

when she laments the lack of official funding and support for independent documentaries produced in the 1970s and 1980s.[133] Moreover, outside Wales, many critics of the Marxist tradition match these kinds of acknowledgements, although they do so from a somewhat more oppositional perspective that focuses, rather, on the documentary's power to bolster certain forms of hegemony. Critical studies of the Griersonian documentary movement, such as Raymond Durgnat's *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Influence* (1970) and Don Macpherson's edited *Traditions of Independence: British Cinema in the Thirties* (1980), deconstruct the idea that the documentary arose out of socially progressive intentions, and argue that whatever Grierson's pronouncements about 'public education' and the 'public mind',[134] the documentary arose, like the BBC, in the crisis years of a British Empire keen to consolidate power at home and abroad. Indeed Brian Winston, in his capstone book on this critical reevaluation of the British documentary movement, *Claiming the Real II* (2008 [1995]), argues that Grierson should be viewed in Tom Nairn's terms as part of the 'mechanism of hegemony' crucial to the stability of the British establishment.[135] Winston here refers to Tom Nairn's seminal thesis on the nature of the fragmentation of British dominance, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (1981), and finds 'few careers as apt for [Nairn's] thesis as Grierson's.'[136] Indeed, Winston's thesis is supported by the fact that the British Establishment was, by the 1920s, becoming acutely aware of the potentialities of the film form in shaping public opinion. As Zoe Druick notes in her study of the National Film Board of Canada, the British Imperial Conference of 1926 discussed at length the uses of film in 'shaping [...] ideas'.[137] The following remarks are lifted directly from the conference proceedings:

> [film] is a powerful instrument of Education in the widest sense of that term; and, even where it is not used avowedly for purposes of instruction, advertisement, or propaganda, it exercises indirectly a great influence in shaping the ideas of the

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[133] Michelle Ryan, 'Blocking the Channels: T.V. and Film in Wales', in Tony Curtis, ed., *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1986), pp. 183-184. Ryan singles out Karl Francis's BBC 2 documentary *Ms Rhymney Valley 1984* (1985), as a film that 'made far more impact in the communities of Wales in terms of the relevance it had to people's lives and experience than any opera or play' (p. 184).

[134] John Grierson, 'The Documentary Idea: 1942', in Hardy, ed., *Grierson on Documentary*, pp. 250 and 257.

[135] Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 36.

[136] Ibid, p. 36.

[137] Zoe Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board of Canada* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 28.

very large number to whom it appeals. Its potentialities in this respect are almost unlimited.[138]

This realization was shortly to be translated into policy. The Cinematographic Films Act, which introduced a requirement for British cinemas to show a quota of British films, was passed in 1927,[139] and John Grierson was soon to make the film that began his government-sponsored documentary film movement, *Drifters* (1929), under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board. Indeed, in the decades that followed, Grierson built a career promoting the idea of national documentary units across the Commonwealth, firstly in Canada in the late 1930s, and, after the War, in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. His own remarks on the uses of documentary in not only a "civic" context but, further, a distinctly *national* one – particularly in a nation, like Canada, riven by cultural and linguistic differences - prove that he was fully cognizant of its potential on this score:

> In most discussions, I presented the notion that the most important federal media were those which imaginatively brought alive one part of the country to another, and dramatised relationships as distinct from differences.[140]

Indeed, in the Canadian context, Grierson was concerned with utilizing the documentary's capacity to 'make [Canada] more of a nation and less of an appendage to anyone – and articulate its own particular destiny better than it has managed to do before.'[141] Such remarks chime strongly with those of Humphreys and Ryan, and signal the importance of viewing documentary as a powerful medium of national communication. Thus, while Marxist commentators such as Winston and Druick necessarily – and with good reason - foreground the political economies of the emergence of national film units in the first half of the twentieth century, their critiques carry with them an implicit attestation as to the strength of the format in a national context.

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[138] Quoted in Druick, *Projecting Canada*, p. 30. The implicit distinction here between the "avowed" or direct use of film and its "indirect" influences is significant and hints, I feel, at the essential "duality" of the documentary form. I will return to this issue shortly.

[139] Though this was in part an economically motivated attempt to bolster a waning British film industry, the simultaneous ideological motivations of the Act are clear.

[140] John Grierson, quoted in Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London: Faber, 1979), p. 93.

[141] Ibid, p. 103.

In the previous chapter I discussed the aesthetic and cultural legacy of the documentary film; its development in tandem with the wider cultural discourses that shaped the uses of "film" as a technology. There I figured the documentary as a form that sustains within it a perpetual tension between two interactive cultural impulses: one, the pull towards pure creativity or "art", and two, the usually civically-motivated pull towards didactic exposition. This is a tension that can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Sometimes these poles are sharply at odds, with one greatly exaggerated at the expense of the other: in the previous chapter I illustrated this via a comparison between Ormond's self-consciously creative efforts such as *A Sort of Welcome to Spring* with his more formally prosaic and informational films such as *Troubled Waters*. Occasionally, documentary makers find a more harmonious balance between them; Humphrey Jennings's *Listen to Britain* is often cited for the ways in which its aesthetics and its propagandistic purpose inform one another in profound and powerfully effective ways. This internal differential of course varies considerably according to the purposes to which the documentary in question is put, and to the intimately related factor of its contexts of production. In the pages that follow, then, I want to examine more closely the public-informational pole that exerts such influence on the documentary field, and to focus in particular on the question of why documentary has, in turn, proven to be so amenable to national purposes. This is, in effect, a shift in focus from the *poetics* of documentary, to a focus on its *politics*.

One way to begin to address this issue is to consider the documentary's peculiar relationship with reality. Whatever a documentary's poeticism or creativity - or lack of these - it is always, by definition, undergirded by an act of documentation, or - to borrow the title of Brian Winston's important book - of 'claiming the real'. Commentators have attributed this to an extension of what film theorist André Bazin calls the 'ontology of the photographic image' – the conception of the photographic or film camera as a purely objective instrument of representation. Bazin suggested that the camera was able to overcome 'those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime'[142] that muddies the lens of the human eye. Bill Nichols formulates this in another way with reference to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce had noticed in the late nineteenth century that the camera possessed a peculiar relationship with reality; its technology was such that it was 'physically forced to

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[142] André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 15.

correspond point by point to nature', which resulted in what he called an 'indexical

bond', between representation and reality, a 'seemingly irrefutable guarantee of

authenticity'.[143] Nichols concludes that this contributed to documentary's own

ontological status, one that is always putatively historical. To clarify this point, it is

worth quoting Nichols at length:

> The subjective dynamics of social engagement in documentary revolve around our
> confrontation with a representation of the historical world. What we see and hear
> ostensibly reaches beyond the frame into the world we, too, occupy. The
> subjectivity of John Grierson exhorted the documentarist to support was one of
> informed citizenship [...]. Other subjectivities are also possible – from curiosity
> and fascination to pity and charity, from poetic appreciation to anger or rage, from
> scientific scrutiny to inflamed hysteria – but all function as modes of engagement
> with representations of the historical world that can be readily extended beyond
> the moment of viewing into the social praxis itself.[144]

This is a key assertion: whatever the creative possibilities and potentialities of the

documentary format, whatever the context in which it is employed or its individual

purpose, it is always, at a fundamental level, predicated on this assumed relationship

with social reality; to reiterate Nichols' words: 'what we see and hear ostensibly reaches

beyond the frame into the world we, too, occupy.'

This ontology is, as Nichols notes, the basis of Grierson's use of the format:

exploiting the 'indexical bond' to manufacture 'informed citizenship.' This is also the

basis from which many theorists of the documentary mount their critiques of the form.

John Corner points to two major strands of critique in documentary studies. These can

be seen to stem from these two central assumptions that guide the uses of the format:

one, its supposedly unproblematic relationship with reality; two, the social purposes to

which this ontology is put. 'There are those', Corner states, 'which address themselves

primarily to a critique of documentary evidentiality, to its claimed capacity to reference

the world.' And there are, further, 'those which address themselves primarily to a

critique of the institutional character of documentary, to its specific location within

political, economical and social systems.'[145] Corner identifies the first of these to be the

product of structuralist and post-structuralist critical theory. Theorists of these leanings

take the documentary to task on its assumed ability to unproblematically represent

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[143] Charles Sanders Peirce, quoted in Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 149-150.
[144] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 178.
[145] Corner, *The Art of Record*, p. 16.

reality; for them, 'documentary has seemed to be so bold and complacent in its epistemological assumptions and its devices of showing as to be, in itself, an offence to theory, an outrageous act of naivety'.[146] Such critiques view documentary as a perhaps even more "outrageous" construction of reality than fiction; the latter – even in its more realistic modes - at least does not in the end explicitly claim to be "real". While this line of argument is perhaps most useful in the analysis and deconstruction of documentaries of the more explicitly "realist" varieties (such as Direct Cinema and its variants), the second that Corner identifies is undoubtedly more applicable to the kinds of institutionally-embedded documentaries with which I am interested – particularly those concerned not only with physical social reality but with the realm of ideas that constitutes the ideological dimension of social existence. Emerging out of the Marxist tradition, this approach emphasizes the documentary's ability to create and sustain social and ideological realities or hegemonies, and seeks to explore the political motivations for this. Corner views Brian Winston as the exemplar of this tendency. As I have already noted, Winston's book *Claiming the Real* mounts a sustained and detailed critique of the Griersonian tradition, viewing its utilization of the ontology of the filmed image as being in the service of the British Establishment and a particular political status quo. In Winston's words: 'claiming the Griersonian documentary as a 'realist' enterprise was critical for its success [...] [as an] instrument of social engineering.'[147] Richard Kilborn and John Izod usefully elaborate on this point in their own useful book on television documentary:

> [documentaries] conceal the ideologies which they embody. They do this by making the values they embrace appear to be inherent characteristics of the people and objects in front of the lens, as if they had no relation to the perspective from which the film makers looked at their subject.[148]

While Winston, in his book, does not explicitly concern himself with national cultural politics, his critique does carry within it the implicit suggestion that the Griersonian documentary was often employed in the service of a particular – and problematic - version of Britishness. For instance, one strand of his argument in *Claiming the Real* focuses on what he terms the 'problem moment' structure of many films of this

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[146] Ibid, p. 10.
[147] Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 39.
[148] Kilborn and Izod, *An Introduction to Television Documentary*, p. 43.

tradition. These are films that, while in one sense unprecedentedly offering a radically "realist" perspective on working class lives, at the same time framed this perspective in such a way that 'removes any need for action, or even reaction, on the part of the audience.'[149] He points to a film such as *The Face of Britain* (1935), which finds its subject in the appalling slum conditions in some of Britain's industrial heartlands of the 1930s. Though the film is admirable for its representation of the harsh reality of working class life in the 1930s, Winston argues that the film structures this in such a way that 'the slums [...] are sandwiched between a wonderful past and a beautiful future. The slums are but a moment – what might be termed a 'problem moment' – in the unfolding history of the nation'.[150]

Yet, while Winston's is an important critique of a tradition whose self-congratulation is still in full swing,[151] it is questionable how useful such cynicism is in all contexts in which the documentary is utilized. Borrowing John Corner's words, it could be said that 'from the perspective of the strongest of these critiques, documentary is nothing more than a sham – a fraud – which needs exposing.'[152] Corner's comments on Winston are useful here:

> Winston's deconstruction of the Grierson holistic vision usefully problematizes phrasings that have too often been allowed to carry a self-evident grandness, but the requirement is still to explore further the different levels at which documentarist practices relate to the 'real' and the different ways in which 'creativity' can operate, within various political and social conventions of representational propriety.[153]

In refuting its capacity to generate immediate and identifiable social change, Winston perhaps asks too much of the documentary format; indeed, he seems to ignore its less immediately consequential but nonetheless potent power to infuse the public sphere with images which would otherwise likely be ignored. It is questionable, for instance, how many films containing real Welsh miners would have been produced in the 1930s and the 1940s had it not been for the requirements of the British state;[154] indeed, it was

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[149] Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 54.

[150] Ibid, p. 49.

[151] See the recent BFI book, Scott Anthony and James Mansell, eds., *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* (London: BFI, 2011), an almost entirely uncritical overview of the movement.

[152] Corner, *The Art of Record*, p. 21.

[153] Ibid, p. 20.

[154] The same could be said of images of working class Britain more generally; it is unlikely, for instance, that the pioneering BBC producer Denis Mitchell could have pioneered the representation of working

these years that saw the production of films such as *Today We Live* (1937), *Eastern Valley* (1937), *Wales: Green Mountain Black Mountain* (1942), and *David* (1951), which, though each representing Wales in a way that fully confirms Winston's arguments about the British establishment, nevertheless constitute important and – at that time – virtually unprecedented representations of Wales.[155] Thinking in terms of the requirements of national communities whose aims are, as I explored earlier, primarily to communicate to themselves, or, to put it in civic terms, to influence the shape of the national public sphere, the documentary's ability to construct narratives of the real clearly renders it a powerful tool. Indeed, framing this in another way, it is possible to say that the documentary's peculiar ontology – its use of the medium of film to construct narratives of the real world - can be viewed as naturally attractive to – perhaps a product of - the democratic nation-state that requires a means of mass communication in order to reinforce the colour of its imagined community. It is, after all, no accident that the BBC and Grierson's documentary movement emerged virtually simultaneously in the 1920s out of the communicative requirements of the British establishment, for whom, in a politically and economically turbulent inter-war period, the consolidation of "Britishness" was crucial. By this logic, then, we can argue that for a minority nation such as Wales - seeking, as we have seen, a means of mass communication of its own in order to maintain the vitality of its own public sphere - the documentary is a potent format: it is able to construct and reinforce not only images and ideas of "reality", but also ideological and intellectual narratives of history, culture, and society: the very stuff of nations.

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class people on British television from the late 1950s onwards had Grierson and his followers not set the precedent in earlier decades. Indeed, as I will explore in detail in the following chapter, this had further effects in Wales; Mitchell's work can be seen in part to have contributed to the new culture of democratic documentary making at the BBC that in turn allowed Ormond to produce films that examined the working class and multiculturalism in Wales.

[155] On *Today We Live* and *Eastern Valley* as important early filmic representations of Wales, see Gwenno Ffrancon, 'Documenting the Depression in South Wales: *Today We Live* and *Eastern Valley*', *Welsh History Review*, 22:1 (2004), 103-125. and Bert Hogenkamp, '*Today We Live*: The Making of a Documentary in a Welsh Mining Valley', *Llafur: Journal of Welsh Labour History*, 5:1 (1988), 45-52. *David* was produced by Welsh filmmaker Paul Dickson for the 1951 Festival of Britain. Dickson later recalled being asked by the Central Office of Information to 'show Wales to the world'. See David Berry, *Wales in Cinema*, p. 249. Yet, as cultural historian Becky Conekin notes, it was one of a number of films made for the festival that characterized Britain's constitutive nations and regions solely in terms of their productive capacities. See Becky Conekin, '*The Autobiography of a Nation': The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 7. The narration for *Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain* was famously written by Dylan Thomas, as is plainly clear in certain phrases with a resonantly abundant disregard for the rules of grammar: 'Morning is breaking over Wales at War. Not the long and far away wild war of the mountain Welshmen and the English kings, but the terrible near war of England and Wales and her brothers and sisters all over the earth, against the men who would murder man.'

This argument can be extended further to incorporate the "creative" or "poetic" dimension of the documentary film that I examined in detail in the previous chapter. It is again useful here to contrast this view with Winston's. In *Claiming the Real II*, Winston suggests that the creative dimension of the Grierson movement, its "prettifying"[156] tendency toward 'mannered composition and baroque image flow',[157] was additional evidence of its strategy of 'running away from social meaning'[158] and inscribing a socially mollifying ideology of the state. Yet I am inclined to agree once again with Corner. The poetic aspect of a cultural form that attempts to construct and communicate the narratives through which national communities exist, while admittedly in one sense perhaps distracting from its more direct informational effects, surely, in another sense, contributes to its more symbolic resonances. As Corner notes, documentary is no mere document, but

> a more symbolically expansive form than news, able to develop a range and density of depiction which becomes more open to interpretative variation as it extends beyond direct exposition into the implicit and the associational, often in the process touching on imaginative territories more closely associated with narrative fiction.[159]

Elsewhere Corner usefully describes the sense in which the "poetic" and "referential" poles of the documentary form are often 'extremely difficult to determine, not only because of their complexity but also because they shift.'[160] Of course, this does not detract from their incredibly potent '"civic" (and often national) dimension as an agency of knowledge and discussion, both a provider of information and a common cultural resource.'[161] It merely makes it necessary to attend, in addition to the explicit forms of knowledge that these films propound in a "referential" way, to the 'symbolically expansive' effects of Ormond's work. These too, as I hope to show, contribute in profound ways to the creation of a national public sphere.

Of course, I do not wish to imply that Ormond's documentaries are "Welsh" in any straightforward way. The deeply symbolic nature of the ways in which documentaries – like all other forms of cultural signification – communicate to their

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[156] Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 63.
[157] Ibid, p. 43.
[158] Ibid, p. 39.
[159] Corner, *Television Form and Public Address*, p. 81.
[160] Ibid, p. 6.
[161] Ibid, p. 7.

audiences renders them enormously complex in their articulation of social meaning. And as I have been emphasizing throughout this chapter, public spheres – of whatever inflection – are complex entities too, always in dialogic tension with one another, and often firmly at odds. This is especially the case in a "multinational" nation such as Britain, which is constituted by a number of distinct national communities. BBC Wales's situation – like that that of any other of the BBC's 'national regions' – is in no way simple; indeed the oxymoronic term 'national region' alone signals BBC Wales's fraught position within an overriding institution whose central priority is, by definition, the civic health of a unified British nation. Moreover, as I shall discuss, many of Ormond's films were broadcast on the UK network, and thus reached homes all over Britain; this fact further complicates any understanding of the effects of these films on a simple "national" level. In the chapters that follow, I want to examine the ways in which these tensions play out textually in Ormond's films in order to focus, in Dahlgren's terms, on the "representational" facet of the televisual prism. These are films that sometimes gloss over national difference, sometimes overstate it, and sometimes ignore it. But they are, I want to argue, complexly encoded by the socio-cultural and political circumstances that constitute the national public sphere(s) within which the BBC and BBC Wales conducted themselves, circumstances to which these films in turn, and in equally complex ways, contributed. To return to Peter Dahlgren, whose work is particularly useful on these matters:

> The point is we understand the phenomenon of television – like the public sphere with which it overlaps – as intricately interwoven into mutual reciprocity with an array of other political, economic and sociocultural fields. It is via such interplay that television in its present forms is made possible by, and makes possible, these other fields.[162]

Given the peculiarly direct nature of these documentary films – direct in the sense that the documentary is a cultural form that draws explicitly from social discourses in order to communicate directly to audiences on matters of shared public concern – it surely follows that they must be useful textual resources for the cultural critic concerned with the ways in which television interacts with the public sphere and matters of national interest. And conversely, by the same logic, it must also follow that the documentaries are a rich resource for the cultural critic concerned with the effects and pressures that

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[162] Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, p. 44.

history and national discourses exert upon culture and cultural forms. I will thus be examining in the chapters that follow the range of ways in which Ormond's films draw upon and activate Welsh national public discourses, and further the ways in which those discourses impinge upon the films themselves. It is through this form of reciprocal analysis that I hope, in the chapters that follow, to reveal some of the cultural tensions and textures that constitute this pivotal era in Welsh history. To achieve this, the chapters that follow will be differentiated in accordance with three broad national discursive categories. In this, they will match the trichotomy of categories that John Davies discovered in his examination of the development of Welsh radio programming in the post-war years. There he observed that the radio "feature" programmes – which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, are often seen as precursors to the "prestige" documentary form in which I am interested – fell into three broad categories: 'Welsh history and topography, cultural developments in Wales and investigations into issues of current concern.'[163] This seems to have been the broad tripartite pattern into which Ormond's documentary films of the decades that followed fell. The following chapters will thus examine respectively Ormond's 'cultural documentaries', his 'history documentaries', and finally those that concern themselves with, broadly, 'issues of current concern' – the dominant theme of which, in Ormond's films, appears to have been the diversity of the Welsh people and the ethnic make-up of Wales in the 1960s and 1970s.

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[163] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 196.

Chapter Four: Culture

It is in fact by examining the act of creation that television most successfully exalts the finished work of art; it is also in probing and presenting the creative imagination at work that the television producer seems to come nearest to producing something original of his own, a work of art.[1]

Angus Wilson, *Tempo: The Impact of Television on the Arts*

[T]he way a camera is used to explore a painting or piece of sculpture has imprinted into its movements and sequences a theory about painting, and a theory about what the audience will find important about painting.[2]

Stuart Hall, 'Television and Culture'

In the preceding chapter I examined what Peter Dahlgren terms the "industrial" and "sociocultural" facets of the "prism" of television broadcasting; the related industrial and sociocultural conditions under which BBC Wales developed as a sub-national broadcasting institution under the overarching umbrellas of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the British state. As I argued there, the BBC has long been an institution with a decidedly *British* agenda, and has historically sought to respond to changes in, but also define the parameters of, the idea of Britishness at any given time, and has done so often in tension with the national cultures and identities that constitute Britain itself. I also examined the ways in which, equally, elements within Wales sought to utilize the enormous potential of broadcasting to its own ends; to respond to changes in and define the parameters of Wales and Welshness. I want to use this chapter to examine some of those films for which Ormond is most famous, those "cultural" documentaries he produced between the early 1960s and early 1980s. These are films · that sought to disseminate or, in Peter Lord's terms, "activate" Welsh culture to Welsh regional - though sometimes also British network – audiences. In his useful critique of dominant Welsh visual art institutions, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (1993), Lord argues that that the processes through which the incorporation of culture into the public sphere is never a neutral process but rather one of "activation" into dominant 'intellectual structures':

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[1] Angus Wilson, *Tempo: The Impact of Television on the Arts* (London: Headway, 1964), pp. 9-10.
[2] Stuart Hall, 'Television and Culture', *Sight and Sound*, 45 (1976), 251.

A tradition is a concept, not a collection of material. It is an intellectual structure into which – in this case – visual images are fitted. It is this structure, or simply this story, which activates the images in a culture. Without being activated in this way, by recognition and incorporation in a tradition, to all intents and purposes the images do not exist.'[3]

One of the things I will explore in this chapter is the sense in which these films constitute further interesting examples of Ormond's characteristic creative idiom. But I will also be considering the fact that they seek to "activate" Welsh art during an era of unprecedented social and political upheaval in Wales, a time when, as I argued in the previous chapter, BBC Wales was helping to develop a more distinctively Welsh national public sphere. This was thus a time when culture, so often on the front line of such developments, was heavily politicized in Wales. I will therefore be exploring the ways in which these films embody a fascinating range of social, political and national tensions, and in fact promote Welsh culture in an identifiable interpretative idiom.

Ekphrasis and the Cultural Documentary

In Chapter One I explained Ormond's approach to culture with reference to his own term, the 'organic mosaic'. There I discussed the ways in which this idea of the "mosaic" stood in for Ormond's notion – informed by the ideas of thinkers and artists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rush Rhees and Wallace Stevens – that creativity in all its forms and across all media is able to offer, through the craft of unique imaginative artefacts, ways of mediating and making sense of an ultimately ungraspable reality. I argued that in many of the poems he dedicated to artists, such as 'Salmon' to Ceri Richards and 'Landscape in Dyfed' to Graham Sutherland, Ormond attempted to find poetic correlatives for these artists' unique visions in order to present to the reader the enriching epistemological possibilities that art can offer an otherwise spiritually floundering humanity. It is perhaps already clear, then, that this idea of the 'organic mosaic' further seems to me a useful way to understand Ormond's approach to the cultural documentaries he produced at BBC Wales. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter Two, I feel that it is possible to find in Ormond's general approach to film a formal and philosophical homology with his approach to poetry. Given, as we have seen, Ormond's efforts to invest a fair degree of creativity in the production of his films, I would suggest

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[3] Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1993), p. 7.

that he would have concurred with novelist Angus Wilson's suggestion in his book on *Tempo*, the ITV arts documentary series of the 1960s, that it is via the contemplation of artworks that television itself comes closest to becoming an art-form. Thus, where David Berry has remarked that Ormond's films about artists often fall foul of being 'too deferential',[4] I feel that this is, as with the poems he wrote in this vein, precisely the intended effect. Ormond seeks in these documentaries to find *filmic* correlatives for the artistic visions of his subjects, which was precisely the impulse that drove those poems that offer the reader something of the multiplicity of epistemological perspectives available. If, therefore, those poems can be considered to be "ekphrastic" in their 'verbalization, quotation, or dramatization of real or fictitious texts composed in another sign system',[5] these films too should be viewed as an embodiment of the same impulse. Indeed, as Laura M. Sager Eidt notes in her book on filmic ekphrasis – the concept is a useful one, given the 'hybrid, collaborative nature of the cinematic medium [...] [and] the relationship between words and images which are central to the filmic discourse'.[6] Of course, the manifestation of this impulse on national television necessarily entails a wider range of socio-political implications than on the printed page. Indeed, such efforts to transform existing artworks into other media often prove to be revealing reifications of wider socio-political forces. As Eidt goes on to suggest, it is possible, through the examination of such texts, to 'gain insight into the similarities and differences in the interpretation of famous works of art in high and in popular culture,'[7] interpretations which are necessarily bound up with wider ideological assumptions. I will go on shortly to examine the socio-political implications of this kind of filmic "ekphrasis" for Welsh national television. For now, I want to focus on the aesthetics of one exceptional example of this filmic strategy. Indeed, *Alone in a Boat*, Ormond's 1966 film about Welsh sailor Val Howells's 1960 solo race across the Atlantic,[8] is a remarkable and surprising example of this impulse to portray on screen a unique way of experiencing the world, and bears further examination.

Far from the quotidian special-interest documentary we might expect it to be, *Alone in a Boat* is perhaps the best example of Ormond's attempt to use every means at

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[4] Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 297.
[5] Eidt, *Writing and Filming the Painting*, p. 19.
[6] Ibid, p. 9.
[7] Ibid, p. 19.
[8] This, the OSTAR (*Observer* Single-Handed Trans-Atlantic Race – sponsored by the *Observer* newspaper), was the first solo transatlantic yacht race of its kind.

his disposal to convey the sense of another artist's (in this case sailor-writer's) perspective on screen. Indeed, of Ormond's cultural documentaries, it is, I would suggest, the closest to the "prestige" form of documentary making that Russell and Piers-Taylor identify. It is a deeply ruminative film on the nature of solitariness, sociability and the self. Characteristic of Ormond's tendency to create art inspired by that of others, the film was, according to Howells, 'based on [Ormond's] reading of *Sailing into Solitude*',[9] the sailor's 1966 book about his experiences alone on the open ocean. The book is itself an idiosyncratic and deeply meditative portrayal of a decidedly unusual experience of the world, and this is likely what attracted Ormond to the idea of adapting it to film. Indeed, Ormond was moved enough to write a poem alongside, and, unsurprisingly, this takes the form of his many other poems dedicated to fellow artists. Thus, *Alone in a Boat* should be viewed not only with Howell's book in mind, but also with Ormond's poem 'Message in a Bottle'; read together, these three texts illuminate one another in a way that sheds useful light on Ormond's approach to the production of cultural documentaries.

Consistent with his other poems dedicated to artists, 'Message in a Bottle' borrows unashamedly from the visual, philosophical, and lexical vocabulary of Val Howells' book. The poem is buoyed by the diction of maritime life - 'all your change of rigging, the fine/ Rejigs to jib, genoa, spinnaker/ Are vain',[10] and, in line with this, *Alone in a Boat* uses every filmic means available to portray the subjective - and sometimes disturbingly solitary - experience of Howells' journey. After a few contextual remarks from an external voiceover,[11] the film raises anchor, so to speak, to embark on its own journey. Visually, the film is austere, restricting itself solely to life on the boat and to the ubiquity of the ocean. Howells makes a cup of coffee below deck, checks the rig, trims his beard. The film returns repeatedly to shots of the sheen of the rippling surface of the sea filling the frame, occasionally a distant, empty horizon. The constant bobbing of the camera almost lulls the viewer into a sense of being herself on the boat. But despite its fluid, unmoored feel, the film does not lack an organising structure. Indeed, like Ormond's poem on the same subject, the film loosely mimics the soul-searching pattern of Howells' book. There, Howells encounters no life-threatening

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[9] Email correspondence with Val Howells, September 2011.

[10] John Ormond, 'Message in a Bottle', *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 24.

[11] The narrator states that 'this film is about the thoughts of a man who is crossing the Western ocean single-handed'. The suggestion that the film is about the 'thoughts' of a man crossing the ocean as opposed to being about simply 'a man crossing the ocean' is significant.

storms or major navigational problems - only the formidable antagonism of the mind. Howells' book, with its experimental form, presents the author's expansive physical voyage as a profoundly internal experience. Its formal strategy is close to that of a work of literary modernism; Howells' narrative voice becomes increasingly obscure and fragmented as the psychological trials of the journey begin to take their toll, and the final outcome is a strange blend of poetry, prose, and an almost schizophrenic stream-of-consciousness:

> Hell, I've been at sea thirty days already, and only have not much more than half the distance made good.
>
> Another thirty days to go.
> Not only will I be a tail-end Charlie
> I'll be fit to be tied when I dock.
> *If* I dock.
>
> *... you'll dock all right.*
>
> How can you be so sure?[12]

Accordingly, the nautical symbolism of Ormond's poem begins to take on a decidedly personal significance:

> trust old courses
> On interim charts, find reasons for the silence
> On the radio, check your batteries,
> Ignore the sinister becalment threatening
> Your brain.[13]

Similarly, in the film, once calming shots of the water's wavering translucence take on a portentous quality as Howells' narration becomes increasingly anxious: 'Nothing between me and the sky, nothing between me and the bottom of the sea.' Mimicking the book's occasional slips into semi-schizophrenic madness, the film more than once adopts the peculiar technique of having Howells in voiceover talking to Howells on screen. In one scene, Howells lies in his cot:

HOWELLS' VOICEOVER: 'I feel small out here. How about you?'

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[12] Val Howells, *Sailing into Solitude* (Narberth: Landsker, 2011), p. 128.
[13] John Ormond, 'Message in a Bottle', *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1987), p. 24.

> HOWELLS ON SCREEN: 'Insignificant I think. Small isn't the word. An irresponsible dot. Not even marking the ocean by our passage.
> [...]
> HOWELLS' VOICEOVER: 'A dot. Is a man a dot?

Alone in a Boat, then, is a poetic-filmic rumination on the self. Its title, as with that of Howells' book, *Sailing into* Solitude, points to the philosophical frame of reference within which it operates: a godless one, in which humans are finally alone in their world. This is not to say, however, that these texts end on a nihilistic note; as the title of Ormond's poem hints – 'Message in a Bottle' – they offer a way of seeing/being in a finally unknowable world. In all three texts, Howells the protagonist reaches a moment of internal crisis, the moment at which, as he states in *Alone in a Boat*, 'the crossing of an ocean [...] stretches the imagination perhaps to its breaking point.' Yet this moment is a quintessentially sublime one, the point at which the self reaffirms its subjectivity in the face of an almost incomprehensible threat. The crisis is overcome with an affirmation of selfhood, and the film ends with a peaceful calm. Again shots of the surface of the ocean fills the frame, but this time with barely a ripple on its surface; the only sounds are those of water lapping gently against the side of the boat.

Thus Howells's nautical experiences offer a self-preserving philosophy of the self in a threatening, godless world, a philosophy that Ormond consequently takes up and translates into his poetic/filmic vision. Indeed, this sense of 'offering' the viewer/reader a new perspective on reality is further reinforced by the ambiguity with which the pronoun 'you' is used in both 'Message in a Bottle' and *Alone in a Boat*. In the latter, for instance, Howells claims that at sea 'you begin to get an inkling into what went into the making of the old myths.' Given the extent to which the film attempts to enclose itself in the subjective experience of life at sea, the pronoun 'you' takes on the double role of becoming both an informal nuance of speech and a way of drawing the viewer further into the experience. Moreover 'Message in a Bottle' uses the word in a similar way; though addressed to Howells, the poem at the same time invites the reader to experience life through this nautical lens: 'So far/ Your luck's held out. The sun's come up/ Roughly where you expected'. Thus in both 'Message in a Bottle' and *Alone in a Boat*, Ormond adopts Howells' nautical perspective and, with the help of these other creative media, adds texture to it in order to add another tile to the 'organic mosaic'. And this humanist perspective is, significantly, framed in terms of the artist, in which it is the artist's unique vision that is the ideal. These are the film's closing words:

> I believe that every man can be his own artist. I don't really think you need to
> have a brush to be an artist. By an artist I mean a man with a freshness of eye,
> living on distances, though they are close about him. Living, if you like, on the
> horizon of himself [*sic*].[14]

As I have been arguing, this individualist conception of culture and creativity had a quite identifiable impact upon the overall aesthetic of each of his films. *Alone in a Boat* is perhaps the most formally experimentalist, "prestige" of Ormond's films on this theme, but, as I will show, like his poems on artists, each of his cultural documentaries attempts, on the whole, to evade any single rigid format; instead each adapts itself aesthetically to the artist-subject that it profiles. As I will demonstrate, some of them operate on the more "expository" end of the scale that I discussed in Chapter Two, and are perhaps better described in Russell and Piers-Taylor's terms as "applied art". But each has this essential creative aim at its core. This is, of course, a commendable project, and one that Ormond executes skilfully. But it would appear that underpinning it is a particular conception of culture, and particularly of the artist, that is not as unique to Ormond himself as the readings I have so far offered may seem to imply. Indeed, while I maintain that Ormond does have a distinct approach to documentary film-making, his films, in their broad attempt to exalt individual artists for broadly humanist purposes, correspond rather well with a description of such documentaries that film producer and critic John Wyver has offered:

> Art, for television, is what artists make – a comment not as tautologous as it may
> first appear. For art on television is above all about people; individuals who are
> special, skilful, gifted, perhaps inspired. Most of them work on their own,
> creating, in whatever medium, for the pleasure, edification and enlightenment of
> us all [...]. Artists usually have a 'vision' or 'something to say' [...] and
> individually use their chosen medium to express that.[15]

We should not forget that Ormond's films are the product not only of an individual imagination – as the films themselves might have us believe – but of a quite specific discursive context, a context that evidently has enormous influence over assumptions about the nature of 'culture' and its uses within society. Indeed, it is no accident that

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[14] Ibid.

[15] John Wyver, 'Representing Art or Reproducing Culture?: Tradition and innovation in British Television's Coverage of the Arts (1950-87), in Philip Hayward, ed., *Picture This: Media Representations of Visual Art and Artists* (London: John Libbey, 1988), p. 34.

these films, themselves produced within a well-defined and extremely influential institutional context, should share many of the assumptions about culture that were dominant in Britain at this time. These films were, after all, produced at the BBC at a time when that institution possessed a rather specific definition of 'culture'. To be sure, the very fact that public funds flowed in the direction of such films at all is testament to the value the BBC placed upon "culture" as an ideal.

Cultural Policy in Britain

Cultural theorist Tony Bennett has formulated an approach to culture that I believe is particularly useful with regard to documentaries produced under the auspices of the BBC. This he terms 'cultural policy studies':

> Culture is more cogently conceived [...] when thought of as a historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which the forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation – in part via the extension through the social body of the forms, techniques and regimens of aesthetic and intellectual culture.[16]

Ormond's documentaries, being films that utilize the mass medium of television in order to disseminate culture, undeniably engage in this attempt to 'target for transformation' the 'forms of thought and conduct of extended populations'. Indeed, this kind of documentary could, in the terms outlined above, be conceived as one of the key interfaces at which government policy on culture meets its object, the public. In this sense, they are ripe for the kind of analysis Bennett proposes. Critics of a Marxist persuasion tend to view this project of 'targeting for transformation' the public mind as a product of the Reithian ideal of 'public service' that was itself a symptom of the dominant "paternalist" conception of the role of culture that had emerged in Britain in the late nineteenth century. David Lloyd and Paul Thomas have written a detailed history of the emergence of this hegemonic definition of "culture" in modern political states, tracing it back to the post-enlightenment demise of autocratic rule and the emergence of modern nation states that required a new form of political coercion.[17] In

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[16] Tony Bennett, 'Putting Policy into Cultural Studies', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 26.
[17] In this they chime with many other prominent theorists on the same subject; see, for example, Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (London: Sage, 1998) and Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

their book *Culture and the State* (1998), they suggest that this need became particularly urgent in the late nineteenth century; a time when industrial developments required a literate yet politically neutered working class. Happily, as the notion of "culture" was itself, as Raymond Williams demonstrates in *Culture and Society* (1958), simultaneously evolving and acquiring new connotations consistent with the developments and needs of industrial capitalism, it gradually became bound up with the very notion of strong social citizenship required by the liberal state. As a result, in the second half of the nineteenth century, 'a convergence [took] place between the ideological formulations of liberal thinkers on culture, education and representation and the state institutions that emerged in order to contain the demands of a highly mobilized and articulate working class.'[18] Lloyd and Thomas date the "crystallization" of this convergence to the years between 1860 and 1870, the decade of the second parliamentary Reform Bill of 1867 and the Education Act of 1870. Indeed, it is no accident that it was in this decade that the most influential articulation of this new cultural principle was first published: Matthew Arnold's 1869 book *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold's seminal work was an attempt to render hegemonic a definition of culture that could assist the maintenance of the existing liberal social order of British society. Its expressed aim was to apply elite culture - 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' - to each subject of that society as the principle through which to 'help [get] out of our present difficulties'.[19] Evidently this was a project of social cohesion and control. If the core principle of the "cultured" individual could be applied to the entire population it was clear that it would have enormous potential in ensuring social stability and, consequently, the persistence of the modern liberal state. Indeed, this was precisely the project that Arnold embarked on. Consistent with his conviction that the state was the 'natural representative' of the population, that 'culture suggests the idea of *the State*'[20] (Arnold's emphasis), Arnold "groped", in cultural historian Janet Minihan's words, 'for immutable centres where the finest products of human thought and art could be preserved, and from which they could be disseminated.'[21] He saw the key to British national and social cohesion to lie in a coherent national education and in

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[18] David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 115.
[19] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971 [1867]), p. 6.
[20] Ibid, p. 96.
[21] Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), p. 143.

state subsidies to the arts; in effect, a coherent British cultural policy that endorsed the principles of this new cultural-political hegemony.[22]

The dominance of what we can now term this "Arnoldian" cultural hegemony is clear if we look to the principles upon which the BBC was founded in the 1920s. The purposes of public broadcasting were famously to 'inform, educate and entertain', and, judging by the ardently moralizing disposition of the BBC's architect, John Reith, we can surmise that these purposes were listed very much in order of importance. As Minihan notes, '[l]ike Matthew Arnold, Reith wanted to share as widely as possible "everything that was best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement"; unlike Arnold, however, he had the means to do so.'[23] Of course, Reith's desire to use radio to follow in Arnold's footsteps is unsurprising when we consider Raymond Williams's point that new media technologies are never 'simply physical events in an abstracted sensorium',[24] but take shape according to the 'determining limits and pressures of industrial capitalist society'.[25] To be sure, in a society that is so heavily dependent upon a particular cultural hegemony to maintain its dominance, it is inevitable that its technologies should adopt that dominant ideology. As Williams confirms elsewhere in the same book, '[a] need which corresponds with the priorities of the real decision-making groups will, obviously, more quickly attract the investment of resources and the official permission, approval or encouragement on which a working technology [...] depends'.[26] This proved to be the case. One of the major features of the new medium of public broadcasting in the 1920s was its dissemination of pre-defined forms of high culture. As media theorist Krishan Kumar notes, Reith's project at the BBC was to construct a 'cultural church. Politics did not matter: philosophy, religion, music, poetry and drama – laced with "light entertainment" as ground bait – did.'[27] Consequently, the new forms that took shape on the new medium were heavily

[22] As Minihan notes, Arnold was a particular advocate of a national theatre, which he envisioned being managed 'for artistic, not commercial, purposes and supported by Treasury grants' (p. 144.).
[23] Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture*, p. 207. Reith famously quoted Arnold in an early lecture in which he stated his intentions, *Broadcast Over Britain* (1924) '[b]roadcasting is a servant of culture and culture has been called the study of perfection'. Arnold himself had called culture 'the study of perfection' in *Culture and Anarchy*. See Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British* Broadcasting, p. 383.
[24] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974), p. 127. Here Williams writes against what he deems the purely 'formalist' ideas of Marshall McLuhan in that theorist's influential book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).
[25] Ibid, p. 27.
[26] Ibid, p. 19.
[27] Kumar, 'Public Service Broadcasting and the Public Interest', in McCabe and Stewart, eds., *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting*, p. 47.

informed by the requirements of the dominant cultural hegemony. Paddy Scannell has documented, for instance, the emergence of the "feature" programme on late 1920s and 1930s BBC radio. It is useful to understand the "feature" as a precursor to the kind of cultural documentary Ormond went on to produce some time later. This was a genre of radio programme that blurred the boundaries between the already established forms of music, drama and scripted 'talks', and attempted, as Scannell notes, to '[combine] words and music to produce an artistic effect which could not have been produced by either separately'.[28] Interestingly, the creative aspect of their production eventually resulted in a 'perceptible tendency' to recruit producers of a 'literary pedigree',[29] says Scannell – a tendency that continued at least until the late 1950s when Ormond was employed as Head of Documentaries at BBC Wales.[30] Indeed, Scannell argues these feature programmes should be understood as the 'forerunners'[31] of the kind of documentary that producers like Ormond went on to produce on television. It seems this was due not only to the fact that these were new forms that demanded creative thinkers (though that was no doubt partly the case), but moreover because these forms were proving to be an extremely effective means of communicating the appropriate cultural values to the public. Like Grierson's conception of the creative, poetic aspect of the documentary as central to its "revelatory" potential, BBC producers at this time knew that creative radio was key to disseminating the appropriate cultural values. As Scannell notes, 'the impulse behind the search for new forms of social documentation can most simply be understood as a continuing commitment to overcoming the dehumanizing effects of institutional discourse'.[32] The feature programme should thus be understood as an early product of Reith's intention to educate and bring culture to the population, which was itself a product of the wider Arnoldian cultural hegemony dominant in Britain at that time; they attempted to wield the varying possibilities of the medium to add texture to – and thus render more accessible – the 'best that has been thought and said'.

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[28] Scannell, "The Stuff of Radio', in Corner, ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media*, p. 2.

[29] Ibid, p. 24.

[30] Indeed, Ormond was well acquainted with the world of literary BBC employees long before he was himself employed by the corporation. During his time as a journalist in London he had socialized with the likes of Dylan Thomas, Louis MacNeice, John Arlott and Geoffrey Dearmer. An article written for *Picture Post* in 1946 profiled such men. Given that Ormond was at this time writing for *Picture Post* and socializing with these poets, though not credited, it is highly likely that he wrote the article. See 'A Nest of Singing Birds', *Picture Post*, 10 August 1946, 23-25.

[31] Ibid, p. 24.

[32] Ibid, p. 10.

This is not to say that the BBC's cultural project was entirely successful. Inter-war Britain was still riven by regional, national and class differences that on the whole resisted the BBC's persistent attempts to unify the population in accordance with a lofty cultural principle. As Kumar remarks, '[o]ne can at least understand the groans of the south Wales families that, according to a *Listener* survey of 1938, greeted the news that there were to be seven Toscanini concerts broadcast in the month of May.'[33] Indeed Kumar argues that it ultimately took the Second World War for the BBC to build trust and garner popular consensus across regional, national and class-rived Britain.[34] This was a trust built in large part upon its influence as the reassuring voice of the nation during the War, and, later, upon the enormous popularity of the BBC's first real concession to popular taste, the Forces Programme, renamed the Light Programme in 1945. Implemented under the reformist Director General William Haley, this formed the core of a revision of cultural thinking at the BBC, exemplified by the decision to split its radio service in three. Such concessions to popular taste were in part the BBC's response to a new era in British state policy; Attlee's post-War government was implementing measures of an unprecedentedly socialist hue in the form of free secondary education, the National Health Service, the nationalization of industry and the railways, and new housing legislation.[35] This was thus the era in which, as cultural critic Francis Mulhern notes, 'the great new theme of "welfare"'[36] was becoming dominant; welfare not only in economic and social matters 'but also in education, broadcasting and the arts'.[37] But while this was done in an effort to concede to popular sentiment and public need in a haggard post-War society, it was done also with the Arnoldian principle of cultural education still firmly in mind. Indeed Haley's decision to split BBC radio in three, as he was ready to admit, was purely in the interests of 'raising public taste';[38] the classical music in the Light Programme, Haley hoped, would be attractive enough 'to lead listeners on to the Home Service' and the Home Service

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[33] Kumar, 'Public Service Broadcasting and the Public Interest', p. 50.

[34] Kumar argues that 'it took the Second World War and its aftermath to hasten this process decisively. Up until then the BBC's assumption of a "national community" which it could address directly from Broadcasting House in London was premature, and gave it a misleading sense of its influence'. Ibid, p. 53.

[35] Roy and Gwen Shaw, 'The Cultural and Social Setting', in Boris Ford, ed., *Modern Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 6.

[36] Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 49.

[37] Ibid, p. 49.

[38] William Haley, 'Broadcasting and British Life', an address to the British Institute of Adult Education, 21 Sept 1946, quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 71.

'should lead on to the Third Programme'.[39] This, too, was the era in which the Wartime CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) became the Arts Council of Great Britain (referred from here as ACGB).[40] The British state was now taking an active interest in the dissemination of the "best" culture. Social policy may have become more flexibly egalitarian, but the cultural backbone of the state was still rigidly hierarchical, with Arnold's paternalist notions of culture and its uses still very much in force.

This was the broad cultural environment in which television re-emerged in the late 1940s,[41] and the rapid expansion of this medium throughout the 1950s made it the ideal medium for the dissemination of this cultural principle.[42] Moreover, the successes of the Griersonian documentary before and during the War had meant the BBC already had a visual format to draw upon in order to do this. Thus with the coming of television, the BBC quickly went about employing a filmmaker who had been close to the heart of the British Documentary Movement and who could bring the values and expertise of that Movement to television production. That filmmaker was John Read, who went on, in John Wyver's words, to '[shape] the BBC's presentation of the visual arts throughout the 1950s and beyond', and to '[define] the forms of the filmed profile.'[43] Indeed the

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[39] Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV*, p. 70. Briggs quotes Haley's Note for the Governors, 'The Home Programme Policy of the BBC', 4 July 1946.

[40] CEMA was the brainchild of the great liberal economist John Maynard Keynes. It was early on governed by the elite figures of the British cultural establishment: Sir Walford Davies, Sir Kenneth Clark and, significantly, the Welsh Liberal civil servant Thomas Jones. Jones had himself been prominent in Welsh Liberal cultural circles for some time – he had established the important journal *Welsh Outlook* with support from Lord David Davies and worked tirelessly for acceptable forms of workers' education in Wales. He established Coleg Harlech in 1927 (the years after the General Strike) on these Arnoldian principles; primarily, as historian Dai Smith notes, to 'counterbalance [...] the insidious effects of independent working-class education in south Wales.' Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 60. CEMA, moreover, was responsible for what film historian John Wyver deems an important precursor to the kind of televised cultural documentary that Ormond went on to produce. (See John Wyver, *Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain* (London: Wallflower, 2007), p. 13.) This was *CEMA* (1942), a film made by the Strand film company for the government's Ministry of Information. Its purpose was to promote the Council's efforts to bring music and the arts to 'factories, mining towns and seaports, which [...] may be cut off from their normal sorts of entertainment.' Incidentally, the film was produced by Strand during the time that Dylan Thomas worked there, and indeed the film credits the Swansea poet as one of its writers. Though, unlike some of the other Strand productions that credit Thomas, *CEMA* bears no discernible marks of his unique writing style. John Ackermann suggests in *Dylan Thomas: The Filmscripts* (London: J.M. Dent, 1995) that Thomas's only contribution was a scripted conversation between members of the public at an art exhibition. CEMA became the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946.

[41] A short-lived BBC television service had been attempted in the 1930s, but was abandoned with the announcement of War.

[42] Television licenses numbered 343,882 in 1950. By 1955 the number was 4,503,766. See Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV*, p. 221.

[43] Wyver, *Vision On*, p. 17.

films Read produced in these years skilfully absorbed the dual formal approach of the documentary format, finding a balance between formal creativity and didactic exposition, and in this laid down the blueprint for the form of cultural documentary that Ormond went on to produce. It is important to remember, though, that however influential Read was upon this format, he was himself a producer working within the parameters of long and strongly-defined cultural assumptions. That Read was an advocate of such assumptions is clear in this section of an essay he wrote for the journal *Sight and Sound* in 1948, 'Is There a Documentary Art?':

> It is surely the purpose of Documentary to make an effective appeal to the imagination of the layman and to fill the gap so unnaturally imposed, giving the individual a sense of community and purpose. [...] Only this way can freedom be retained whilst social disintegration is avoided and the old standards of civilization are given new life and meaning.[44]

Such notions of the social uses of culture clearly resonate with those that were dominant at this time. Here documentary is posited as a tool of culture whose function is to encourage the use of the 'imagination of the layman' – a principle crucial to social cohesion. Indeed, certain phrases seem to have been lifted straight out of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*; elsewhere Read speaks of the 'apathy and ignorance [that] interact to produce a degree of unrest and frustration'.[45] As Terry Eagleton has glibly but nonetheless aptly remarked of Arnold's own ideas in the same vein: 'If the masses are not thrown a few novels, they may react by throwing up a few barricades'.[46] Evidently Read was thinking in terms amenable to the British cultural establishment; this was the essay that landed him a job as an assistant at the Central Office of Information, no less.[47] The films he produced for the BBC throughout the 1950s, moreover, were frequently made in tandem with the British government's newly found impetus to promote the arts to the population. He produced film profiles of such esteemed English artists as Henry Moore, Stanley Spencer and L.S. Lowry. These were often made in association with and distributed by the ACGB as well as the British Council,[48] and Read's very first film, *Henry Moore* (1951) was made to coincide with the sculptor's contribution to the Festival of Britain.

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[44] John Read, 'Is There a Documentary Art', *Sight and Sound*, 17:68 (1948), p. 157.
[45] Ibid, p. 157.
[46] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 21.
[47] See Wyver, *Vision On*, p. 18.
[48] John Read, 'Artist into Film', *The Studio*, 155:780 (1958), 65-91.

Yet while the BBC was utilizing men like Read in its effort to disseminate this core "Arnoldian" cultural principle, it has further to be remembered that this ideology of culture, particularly in the decades after the Second World War, was itself subject to considerable outside pressure. British society was at this time experiencing the throes of radical social change. As Arthur Marwick summarizes in his book *Culture in Britain Since 1945* (1991):

> [W]hat happened between the late fifties and the early seventies was not a political revolution, not a revolution in economic thought and practice; but it was [...] a transformation in the opportunities and freedoms available both to the majority as a whole and to distinctive individuals and groups within that majority.[49]

A growing economy was bringing into effect a new consumer society, with wage increases providing even the working classes with the cash to spend on the technological fruits of mass production.[50] With the rise of secular, individualist consumerism came the decline of old certainties, and as a result, as cultural historians Roy and Gwen Shaw note, 'it was left to humanists to take the lead in promoting important and widely-welcomed reforms of the moral code'.[51] The results were changes in laws and public attitudes relating to capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality and divorce. Culturally, too, these changes were having profound effects: better wages meant that new subcultures were arising with the means to express themselves. People now had the freedom to choose their culture and their identity, and many made new demands upon established institutions, the BBC included. Haley's effort to reorganise radio had backfired somewhat: by the late 1940s on average 61 per cent of listeners would tune into the 'Light Programme' – which offered things like popular music, comedy and light drama – 38 per cent the slightly loftier Home Service, and just 1 per cent to the highbrow Third Programme.[52] The rise of commercial television after 1955

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[49] Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 67-68.

[50] Marwick notes that 'Average weekly earnings for industrial workers rose [...] 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969; average earnings of middle-class salaried employees rose 127 per cent between 1955 and 1969.' Ibid, p. 69.

[51] Roy and Gwen Shaw, The Cultural and Social Setting', in Ford, ed., *Modern Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History*, p. 24.

[52] Figures from John Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. 182.

entrenched these new cultural preferences,[53] and the proliferation of commericalized images on television, as well as on billboards, and in glossy magazines, was bringing about a reorganization of values and a new era of the image that critic Jim McGuigan describes as 'a crisis of representation [...] associated with a detachment of the sign from the referent, the signifier from the signified, representation from reality, image from truth'[54] – in short, postmodernity. And given how deeply those established Arnoldian values were engrained within dominant British cultural and political institutions, it is perhaps not surprising that the broadcasting authorities found it hard to adjust. The Pilkington Report of 1960 had attempted to splint the ailing spine of traditional culture in the face of these changes:

> [u]nless and until there is unmistakable proof to the contrary, the presumption must be that television is and will be a main factor in influencing the values and moral standards of our society. [...] [B]y its nature, broadcasting must be in a constant and sensitive relationship with the moral condition of society.[55]

The BBC, still the vanguard of public service broadcasting and the chief purveyor of Reithian moral rightness, thus attempted to weather the storm. While it adapted commendably in certain areas – the 1960s saw the rise of irreverent new programmes like the (tellingly) short-lived *That Was The Week That Was* (1962-1963), *Top of the Tops* (1964-2006), and, in the late 1960s, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974) – in matters of high culture it stood firm against a tide of tat. Indeed the cultural documentaries of Ormond's oeuvre that I want to examine here should be understood as, in large part, a product of this attempt to uphold an Arnoldian public service ideal throughout the culturally turbulent 1960s and 1970s. It is no accident that the BBC set aside considerable portions of its budget in London and the "regions" for the utilization of television in the promotion of the "best" of the arts. The apogee of this project of cultural dissemination – or perhaps the desperate last-ditch attempt - was Sir Kenneth Clark's "blockbuster" [56] thirteen-episode BBC series *Civilization* (1969), which sought

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[53] By 1957 ITV had captured 72 per cent of the viewer share, and this in spite of the BBC's wider transmitter coverage. See Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition*, p. 20.

[54] Jim McGuigan, *Modernity and Postmodern Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p. 55.

[55] *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting* (London: HMSO, 1962), p. 15.

[56] John A. Walker, *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain* (London: John Libbey, 1993), p. 77.

to display the fruits of two millennia of Western civilization on the screen within a firmly Arnoldian framework.[57]

BBC Wales and Welsh Culture

This, then, was the broad cultural environment in which Ormond was producing his cultural documentaries. But it is important to emphasise also that the BBC's Reithian-Arnoldian promotion of the "best" culture was bound up not only with its broad role as mechanism of domestic political appeasement, but further with the closely related role that I examined in the preceding chapter: as guardian of a cohesive British national identity. Indeed "culture" in the Arnoldian sense is of course closely bound up with the stability of modern national identity. As A.D. Smith, a political theorist who has written extensively on the nature of the relationship between modern nationalism and the liberal nation state, has pithily asked, '[w]ho, more than poets, musicians, painters and sculptors, could bring the national ideal to life and disseminate it among the people?'[58] The BBC should thus be understood as an institution involved not only in the paternalist application of the Arnoldian cultural principle to the British public, but also in the project of, in Peter Lord's terms, "activating" and maintaining an appropriately British cultural tradition in the service of the British nation state. Lord writes with respect to visual arts, but his core argument can be usefully applied to "culture" more generally: 'The visual image is an essential medium for the assertion of national identity: the denial of the aesthetics of the one is the denial of the politics of the other.'[59] Of course, Arnold's principle of worthwhile culture as the 'best that has been thought and said' proved to be useful in this combined national-political process. As Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon perceptively state in their book on this issue, *Cultural Politics* (1995),

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[57] *Civilisation* presents Western culture as a narrative of geniuses, unaffected by social pressures, each making their unique mark upon the world around them. Such a view inevitably reached its limit with the emergence of new postmodern cultural forms that radically undermined such a view. Accordingly, Clark declares himself 'completely baffled by what is taking place today', and, quoting W.B. Yeats' 'The Second Coming', laments the fact that 'there is still no centre.' His conclusion is gloomy: 'one must concede that the future of civilisation does not look very bright.' See Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (London: BBC and John Murray, 1969), pp. 345-346. Though the audience figures upon first broadcast were 'modest', 'its impact', says John Wyver, 'was remarkable'. Wyver, *Vision On*, p. 36. A book published alongside the series that printed Clark's narration verbatim reached its eighth impression within two years. *Civilisation* has become the standard by which all other arts documentaries are measured, and is regularly repeated on the BBC; indeed, in 2011 the Corporation broadcast a new, digitally re-mastered 'High Definition' version of the series.

[58] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 92.

[59] Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, p. 8.

Arnold's is a notion that 'legitimates the practice of defining the culture of particular social groups as representative of the nation as a whole.'[60] This placed BBC Wales in an invidious position. It too sought to utilize its film unit as a means of activating and disseminating Wales's own national culture – indeed it had a mandate to do so. Yet this was a culture with definitions and needs that often differed substantially from the British Arnoldian idea, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, decades of unprecedented cultural and political stimulation in modern Wales. Ormond's efforts to activate Welsh culture within the confines of a quite rigidly Britishist BBC, and moreover at a time of radical cultural and political upheaval in Wales, thus raised interesting problems.

The prominent figure in the first decade of Ormond's career at BBC was Controller Wales, Alun Oldfield-Davies, who had lobbied consistently for further provisions for the coverage of Welsh culture. In the early days of the film unit he had called upon his London bosses to allow him to utilize the Welsh Film Unit in establishing a 'modest regional counterpart to *Monitor*'.[61] But of course the BBC in Wales, long before the establishment of the BBC Wales Film Unit in 1957 and BBC Wales proper in 1964, had been an active promoter of Welsh culture in its wide variety of forms. It began providing its extensive annual coverage of the Eisteddfod in 1925,[62] and after the BBC's policy of strict centralization was 'relaxed somewhat' around 1930,[63] producers such as Cyril Wood and Dafydd Gruffudd began a long tradition of promoting radio drama that enriched Welsh consciousness in both its languages, as well as providing (often much-needed) employment for Welsh writing talents like Emlyn Williams, Saunders Lewis and, later, Gwenlyn Parry, Emyr Humphreys, Gwyn Thomas

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[60] Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon, *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 63.

[61] Memorandum, Alun Oldfield-Davies, 11 March 1959 (BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham, T/16/235/3). *Monitor* was, of course, somewhat ironically produced by the Welshman Huw Wheldon, the brilliant BBC producer whose loyalty to that institution left him disinterested with matters of Welsh concern. As Emyr Humphreys has remarked (sardonically but nonetheless usefully): 'why should a man with Wheldon's talent for action tie himself or be tied to the same old scorched stake when there were all those sleek and well-oiled vehicles in the English marshalling yards just waiting for the guiding hand of a thrustful and competent commander?' See 'A Lost Leader', in Thomas, ed., *Emyr Humphreys*, pp. 147-8.

[62] See Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 31. Though, it would seem that some, by the 1960s, had grown tired of the extensive BBC coverage of Llangollen. In one BBC Audience Research Report on the 1963 coverage of the festival, one viewer spoke for 'half a dozen' of the sample in complaining that 'The cultural value doesn't warrant the fuss made. We see far too much of the same thing year after year.' Audience Research Report, *Llangollen International Music Eisteddfod*, 7 August 1963 (BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham).

[63] Ibid, p. 98.

and Alun Richards.[64] Music, too, was heavily supported by the BBC in Wales; the BBC

Welsh National Orchestra was deemed a priority early on, and provided work for

musicians and a vehicle for talented Welsh composers like Daniel Jones, Alun

Hoddinott and William Mathias. And though, for obvious reasons, visual art was

somewhat more difficult to promote on radio, there was nevertheless a tradition of

discussion programmes on this topic. Indeed, Ormond himself wrote a radio talk on

Ceri Richards, *Rest and Unrest: The Art of Ceri Richards*, on a freelance basis for the

Welsh Home Service in 1954, and this is typical of the kind of arts appreciation

programme offered by the BBC in Wales at this time. It engages in the quintessentially

Reithian project of bringing art – in this case the work of a frequently difficult, non-

figurative modernist artist - to a wider public audience. Ormond's use of the layman's

idiom, to which he so frequently returned, proves useful in this respect: 'the artist', says

Ormond, 'feels the need to hammer out for himself a language that is more fitted than

the language of others to communicate what he wants to say.'[65] But further, the

programme also makes a clear attempt to interpret and explain Richards in more than

mere universal "artistic" terms. Consonant with BBC Wales's more specifically national

purpose, it attempts, somewhat vaguely perhaps, to claim Richards' work as broadly

"Welsh": 'Richards deals with visual rhetoric, something that can arouse, declaim,

excitedly explain or soothingly calm us. In this, perhaps, he shows something of his

Welsh roots'.[66] I will return shortly to the significance of Ormond's attempt to activate

as *Welsh* an artist whose work has historically – and certainly at the time of this

programme's transmission – been regarded as broadly "international" or "European".

For now it is necessary to note that while we might expect such an effort to be a

straightforward and logical aim for a national broadcasting institution, in reality the

situation was somewhat more complex.

Something of the tension latent in the effort to activate Welsh culture at BBC

Wales can be usefully brought to the surface via a comparison of two important figures

working in Cardiff in these years. Indeed Hywel Davies and Aneirin Talfan Davies,

though often referred to in the same breath in discussions of BBC Wales of this era, in

fact differed in subtle yet telling ways in their approach to Welsh culture. The ways in

which they posit the relationship between the Welsh nation and its public broadcasting

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[64] The work of such dramatists constitutes a rich seam of Welsh literary culture that would reward further detailed exploration.

[65] John Ormond, *Rest and Unrest: The Art of Ceri Richards* (BBC Welsh Home Service, 1954)

[66] Ibid.

service is revealing. Both men, it should be said, shared an unwavering commitment to Wales in their work for the BBC. Hywel Davies had joined in 1942 aged 23 and went on to become 'the most outstanding figure in Welsh broadcasting in the post-war years',[67] and had, before his early death in 1965, been poised to take over from Alun Oldfield-Davies as Controller Wales. Aneirin Talfan Davies was another seminal figure.[68] Though he trained professionally as a chemist, Talfan Davies joined the BBC in 1941 aged 32 after his London shop was destroyed in the Blitz. He had been active in Welsh cultural circles for some time before this, having funded and edited his own influential Welsh-language magazine, *Heddiw* (1937-42), and in both his professional and personal life Talfan Davies was a tireless promoter of Welsh culture. In particular he fostered a rapprochement between the two linguistic cultures of Wales in an effort to raise the nation's cultural status. Sarah Rhian Reynolds, in her intellectual biography of the man, refers to him as a 'cultural broker', someone whose 'work was permeated by a holistic vision' of Wales.[69] Indeed, it is perhaps Talfan Davies's unwavering commitment to soothing the *internal* cultural divisions of his nation - as opposed to its relationship with Britain - that signals something of the difference in emphasis between his own approach to national broadcasting and that of his colleague Hywel Davies. This can be illustrated with reference to a lecture the former delivered to a Liberal Party of Wales conference in 1962:

> Broadcasting [...] is a matter of co-operation with a community [...]. [I]t is safe to claim that more than any other institution [the BBC] [...] has been a local patron and supporter of the community in all its multifarious activities. It has done this only because it has recognised Wales as an entity. It has always been conscious that it is serving a nation with a language of its own, traditions of its own, and all these symbolised in national institutions.[70]

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[67] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 136.

[68] John Davies recalls the Welsh poet Gwilym R. Jones referring to the media in Wales as 'un ymerodraeth fawr Talfanaidd' ('one great Talfanite empire'). See Ibid, p. 137. Jones refers to the fact that Aneirin Talfan-Davies's brother Alun became became one of the heads of the independent Television Wales and West, while his son Geraint became Controller Wales in the 1990s. He would no doubt have been amused that Talfan Davies's grandson, Rhodri, is at the time of writing Director of BBC Wales.

[69] Sarah Rhian Reynolds, *Aneirin Talfan* Davies, p. 3. She argues that '[a]part from Hywel Davies, it is doubtful whether any individual had any more influence than [Talfan Davies] on the structure and output of the BBC during this period.' Ibid, p. 5.

[70] Aneurin Talfan Davies, quoted in Ibid, p. 132.

Here Talfan Davies posits Wales not as a mere peripheral or regional cultural phenomenon but as a "nation", an "entity" in independent possession of its own unique culture and its own active community. The BBC is thus the external agent, distanced perhaps but a useful tool nonetheless, which it is that *already extant* nation's hard-fought prerogative to put to use. Indeed the intention here is to defend the BBC by reminding his audience that the institution has been no stranger but a 'local patron and supporter' of the nation, one that should be critiqued and questioned, perhaps, but acknowledged and appreciated too. However, in a speech Hywel Davies delivered three years later at the BBC's Broadcasting House in London, the conception of the dynamic between nation and broadcaster is, perhaps unsurprisingly, somewhat different. Hywel Davies' objective in *The Role of the Regions in British Broadcasting*, in contrast to Talfan Davies's claims about the BBC's cultural attentiveness, is to remind that institution of its duty to its peripheral regions:

> I repeat, regional centres must be more than studios of convenience. They should bear the names of Broadcasting House and Television Centre with the same awareness and pride as their great counterparts in London. [...] A focal point, a centre, is better when it is near; and London, in this sense, can be too distant and alien a metropolis. This nearness, this ready availability, nurtures and develops the regional sense of identity.[71]

For Hywel Davies, this 'regional sense of identity' should be nurtured primarily for the wider good of the *British* nation: 'London can profit from the regions because it needs outposts and catchment areas to feed and refresh it. [...] Broadcasting is the most exciting opportunity to demonstrate that the whole is the sum of the parts.'[72] Clearly Hywel Davies was a BBC professional with a deep affinity for Wales; elsewhere in the lecture he speaks proudly of those Welsh dramatists and composers whose names are now 'familiar beyond the borders of Wales'. It is, moreover, essential to take into account the contexts in which these remarks were made. Both Davieses were BBC men to their professional core, and both are clearly seeking to defend their employer in wholly different capacities - indeed the audiences for these speeches alone signal something of the range of contexts in which BBC Wales has had to operate and the range of audiences to which it has to appeal. It would thus probably be a falsification to

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[71] Hywel Davies, *The Role of the Regions in British Broadcasting* (London: BBC, 1965), p. 7.
[72] Ibid, pp. 14-15.

draw too sharp a distinction between these two men.[73] But the difference in emphasis between these two conceptions of the dynamic between "centre" and "periphery" nevertheless seems to me a useful index of the conflicted context in which Ormond was producing films that, in their promotion of Welsh culture, had such a strong bearing on the idea of Wales and its relationship to Britain.

Ormond's films promoted Welsh culture for BBC audiences in both Wales and Britain, and in so doing, they became a part of the complex set of mechanisms through which Welsh culture is "activated", through which it is charged with its wider social meanings, values and significances. Yet, while Ormond was, as we shall see, given a degree of freedom to do this, he was nevertheless left with the question of the set of social meanings and values – in Lord's terms, the 'intellectual structure' – in which to activate them. Indeed, the embattled nature of Welsh political and cultural discourse in this era in no way offered a simple option, and, as Lord notes, this difficulty in developing a professional, coherent critical discourse on art was further exacerbated by the sheer lack of media through which to conduct it: 'in the absence of a specialist press, the discourse was conducted in a fragmentary way in exhibition catalogues, newspaper articles and correspondence, as well as on radio'.[74] Of course, television too became a crucial medium through which this discourse could develop, particularly form the early 1960s, but, as I will shortly explain, it was by no means the solution; the small screen too was only a small contribution to a debate that was fragmented both in terms of output and interpretive bias. Thus, in order to better understand in broad terms the ways in which Ormond's films did "activate" his artists, and to what ends, it is useful to adopt a more general analytical idiom.

Given the general cultural tumultuousness of the era in which these films were produced, it seems to me appropriate to adopt a terminology that arose partly out of that tumult. Indeed, the respective notions of "contributionism" and "protectionism", though broadly conceived, seem to me useful descriptions of the two centrally opposing cultural strategies at the heart of Welsh cultural politics from the immediate post-war

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[73] Though it is interesting that the veteran BBC producer Selwyn Roderick did so in a revealing interview with David Parry-Jones for the Wales Video Gallery. There Roderick noted that that Hywel Davies was comfortable with carrying himself in the "urbane", "mannerly" way that was 'the ethic in those days'. Roderick suggests Hywel Davies was deferential to his London "masters". Talfan Davies, on the other hand, "hated" going to London; his interests, according to Roderick, were 'entirely with Wales'. See *Selwyn Roderick*, Wales Video Gallery, 2002.

[74] Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Industrial Society* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 262.

period up until the late 1970s (though, arguably, also beyond this). The former term is that coined by cultural critic and political commentator Ned Thomas; the latter term is the term preferred by poet, translator and critic Tony Conran. Interestingly, both terms were conceived pejoratively, a fact which itself signals something of the decidedly unromantic political-ideological field in which culture in Wales was playing out at this time. Ned Thomas, for instance, is a commentator well aware of the political implications of culture. As he notes in 'Images of Ourselves', the essay in which he propounds the term contributionism in a Welsh context (like Peter Lord, he speaks in terms of one art-form in particular, but his remarks are applicable to culture in general): 'images in literature are never to be wholly separated from social structure [...] they are tremendously important within that structure'.[75] Thomas, from this position, warns against submitting to a strategy of cultural contributionism that attempts to find recognition for the minority culture within the dominant. He traces the contributionist impulse back to Matthew Arnold (not insignificantly, for my purposes, given the latter's influence on British cultural thought in the era in which I am interested, and particularly at the BBC) who, in an effort to bolster the status of culture as a concept in Britain in the late nineteenth century, in his series of lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) famously endorsed the "Celtic" temperament as a vital ingredient to the British cultural (and racial) soup.[76] Thomas notes that the notion was taken up in earnest by influential Welsh Liberal MPs like T.E. Ellis; indeed, the optimistic view of contributionism is one that views it as an opportunity to allow the forms and features of the minority culture to find wider recognition and to engage with broader trends. Yet Thomas, writing as a political nationalist in the aftermath of a failed referendum on devolution, is sceptical; he suggests that contributionism actually masks a more sinister agenda, and, given the deeply political implications of cultural production and appreciation, should instead be understood as the mask of a form of cultural assimilationism calculated to legitimize British (that is, for Thomas, English) political domination. And though conceived in the late nineteenth century, this is a notion, Thomas suggests, that clearly has its uses in quashing nationalist energies in the twentieth:

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[75] Ned Thomas, 'Images of Ourselves', in John Osmond, ed., *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1985), p. 307.

[76] Daniel G. Williams has elaborated on this cultural-ethnic dynamic and the power-relationship it conceals in his book *Ethnicity and Cultural Authority: from Arnold to Du Bois* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

> The trouble really arises when the natives of the periphery begin to see themselves in the romantically distorting mirror of the visitor, even to provide accounts of themselves which fit the distorted image, until the face grows to fit the mask.[77]

Thomas does not claim to find an easy solution to the problem; rather he seeks to describe the risks of contributionism as a warning to those who wish to build a cultural canon in Wales by this means. But in the late 1960s a solution had been offered in Welsh cultural circles, one that sought to define Welsh culture on its own terms and in a way that firmly resisted such assimilation into "British" culture. I discussed in my first chapter Meic Stephens' efforts to do this for Anglophone Welsh poetry. This is a form that, given its linguistic medium, is particularly vulnerable to assimilation of this kind; Stephens thus prescribed a definition of and approach to it that rooted it in an organic Welsh milieu.[78] Yet as Conran notes, the danger of such a strategy lies in the fact that, while ensuring an important degree of cultural distinctiveness, it equally runs the risk of becoming isolated from the rejuvenating creative (and, to be sure, financial) benefits that come with interaction with a dominant culture. He thus terms it a form of "protectionism". 'Though it can give a kick-start to a culture', says Conran, 'the lack of real competition quickly begins to undermine it by encouraging the acceptance of mediocrity and intellectual stagnation.'[79]

Broadly speaking, then, contributionism seeks to find a place for the minority culture in the sphere of the dominant culture in order both to achieve wider recognition and to revitalize it. Protectionism seeks ways to resist the cultural assimilation it views as inherent in the contributionist project, and to find forms of cultural production and dissemination that ensure its own particularity. There is, naturally, a range of different conceptions of the politics of the nation at work behind these opposing cultural strategies, as well as a range of gradations between the two. I will explore the implications of these with reference to individual films shortly. For now it suffices to say that, in the context of the work of BBC Wales, there were a range of tensions that played out between the "contributionist" requirement to serve the interests of an overarching British institution – with all the political-national implications that that entailed – and a "protectionist" commitment to the interests of Wales via the promotion

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[77] Thomas, 'Images of Ourselves', in Osmond, ed., *The National Question Again*, p. 311.
[78] Stephens, 'The Second Flowering', 3.
[79] Conran, '*Poetry Wales* and the Second Flowering', in Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English*, pp. 251-252.

and preservation of that nation's own cultural particularity. Indeed, part of the problem
for Ormond seems to have been one of balancing the interests of advocates of both these
positions, which, it should further be said, did not always fit into this neat dichotomy in
the ways we might expect. I want to use the remainder of this chapter to explore the
various ways in which these tensions played out by examining the individual films,
while at the same time bearing in mind the ways in which Ormond's own ekphrastic
approach further informed and influenced their meanings. To do this, it will be
necessary to divide the films into the two categories of Welsh visual art and Welsh
literature. The two forms developed quite separately in Wales. The development of the
visual arts were frequently dominated by trends generated elsewhere, whereas, differing
significantly, literary culture frequently drew upon a literary tradition of considerable
antiquity in the Welsh language. As Peter Lord notes, the result has been a 'mis-match
between the borrowed visual culture and the complex of understandings which inform
the established elements of national tradition through literature.'[80]

Visual Arts

The tradition of the visual arts is a key example of the haphazard way in which the
development of a specifically "national" culture has taken place in Wales, and the ways
in which Ormond's films draw upon and, implicitly, attempt to define a "Welsh" art
illuminates this. Indeed, though Peter Lord has, since the early 1990s, taken on the
gargantuan task of tracing the existence of a specifically Welsh visual tradition leading
back to the medieval period, he acknowledges that in the twentieth century this tradition
can be rationally conceived only via a conception of two often mutually exclusive
cultural narratives. Naturally, these narratives are most often divided along two distinct
conceptions of the Welsh nation: one that views Wales as a predominantly rural, and
one as a predominantly industrial society,[81] though he adds that this separation of the
narratives in no way precludes the fact that each of these possesses its own internal rifts
and divisions. Further, Lord notes that these internal divisions are most often
attributable to this small nation's close proximity with a materially, politically and,
importantly, culturally dominant neighbour: 'it would be obscurantist', says Lord, 'to
construct a historical tradition of visual culture in which the question of self-

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[80] Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, p. 8.
[81] These are accounted for in Lord's two important studies *The Visual Culture of Wales: Industrial Society*
(1998) and *The Visual Culture of Wales: Imaging the Nation* (2000).

identification in the immediate context of England was not central.'[82] (As I will go on to discuss, the same can be said for Wales's Anglophone literary tradition.) The question of cultural 'self-identification' can in this respect be understood in terms of a basic opposition between the two cultural strategies of cultural "activiation": "contributionism" and "protectionism". Lord rightly, I feel, attributes this lack of cultural cohesion to the problem – most acute in the early part of the twentieth century, but certainly persisting well into its second half – of the absence of ideologically autonomous cultural institutions. Indeed, aside from what was at that time the relatively recent establishment of the University of Wales (1893), in the early twentieth century the only fully "national" institution with the remit to exhibit and promote visual culture in Wales was the National Museum (established 1907). Yet, as Lord complains, by the time its building was officially opened in Cathays Park, Cardiff in 1927, the Museum had almost completely reneged on its responsibilities to do so:

> [T]he abject failure of its Art Department to fulfil [the aspirations of the art patriots of the 1880s] would be rooted in the ambiguity of their patriotism expressed in visual art in their vision of a tradition of contribution by Welsh artists to the English art culture. Those Anglocentric politics and culture critique have not changed and have gradually neutralised any residual national aspiration.[83]

Indeed, Lord presents the National Museum's Art Department as a body totally in thrall to the fashion of metropolitan cultural development, and one that thereby forgot that a large part of the history and society of Wales was at best peripheral to such developments. However, being as it was the only substantial proponent of the visual arts in Wales until after the Second World War, the policy of pegging the parameters of appreciation to those of what Lord terms an 'anglocentric European high art history'[84] became the dominant one in the Welsh art world. This was a conception that charted the greater heights of Western civilisation – from Renaissance art through Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Romanticism and Modernism – and one that largely excluded anything peripheral to that narrative.[85] The result was that, despite the efforts of some Welsh

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[82] Lord, *Imaging the* Nation, p. 9.

[83] Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, p. 32.

[84] Ibid, p. 33.

[85] The policy was further cemented by the 1951 and 1963 bequests of the Davies sisters of Llandinam, Gwendoline and Margaret, heirs to the Ocean Coal fortune. These gifted a substantial number of major works of European high art, in particular works of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masters. Lord

nationalist intellectuals (in particular the National Museum's curator of folk culture Iorwerth Peate) to establish a more "protectionist" visual tradition based upon their vision of an indigenous Welsh arts and crafts tradition, an interpretation of Welsh art that foregrounded the modern and the metropolitan prevailed.[86]

These, then, were the high-cultural assumptions around which cultural policy was devised in Wales well into the second half of the twentieth century, and this despite – or perhaps because of - the establishment of a Welsh Committee of the ACGB in 1946 (which in 1967 became the Welsh Arts Council). As Huw Jones notes, the influence of this organization upon the mainstream arts establishment in Wales cannot be overestimated; after 1946 it quickly became the 'main body responsible for public arts patronage', and thereafter 'set the framework for the visual arts in Wales.'[87] Yet, while we might expect the council to have adopted a form of "protectionism" in its promotion of a visual arts culture in Wales, it instead reified the values and assumptions of the post-war British democratic cultural agenda of which it was a direct product. This was one that saw little benefit in the promotion of a distinctly Welsh visual art, and instead, in the decades following its establishment, increasingly sought to 'legitimize and reproduce the values of the new British social democratic consensus.'[88] Thus, if Iorweth Peate's project was to develop a "protectionist" conception of indigenous Welsh "folk" visual arts tradition, the Welsh Arts Council can be understood as "contributionist" in purpose. It is, of course, important not to draw too simple a dichotomy between "contributionism" and "protectionism", for in the years following the formation of the Welsh Committee of the ACGB there was a considerable degree of manoeuvring between the two strategies. For instance, if David Bell, the outspoken Deputy Director of the Welsh Committee in the immediate post-war years, was "contributionist" in his approach, this was a contributionism that stressed the importance of finding a specifically *Welsh* contribution to the wider British and European high art tradition; that is, a Welsh contributionism that opposed merely erasing national-cultural borders in

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suggests that these bequests influenced the buying and hanging policies of the Museum enormously. Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, p. 33.

[86] Lord states that in the immediate post-Second World War period the debate over the visual arts in Wales began to take place in earnest at successive Eisteddfodau. Yet by the Caerphilly Eisteddfod of 1950, the advocates of the high art tradition, headed by David Bell, then Deputy Director of the Welsh Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain, managed to win a significant 'philosophical victory' over Peate and his world view. Lord, *Imaging the Nation*, pp. 392-393.

[87] Huw Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness: Art, Politics and National Identity in Wales 1940-1994* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Swansea University, 2007), p. 20.

[88] Ibid, p. 71.

favour of some metropolitan ideal (as the National Museum seemed at that time content to do). Indeed Bell was one of those, alongside John Piper and Carel Weight, who in the early 1950s formulated the notion of a 'Welsh School of Painting', something they termed a 'Welsh Environmentalism' based on the observation that many Welsh painters of the time – rural and industrial – were concerned with a 'love and compassion for humanity and a consciousness of the relations of men and women to nature, buildings and everyday life in Wales', in short, a 'concern with environment'.[89] Such a conception sought to construct a Welsh art that could simultaneously, in its absorption of more widespread European forms and ideas, contribute to a broader European high art tradition. This was clearly a notion at the nexus of the two competing forces of contribution and protection of the national culture, and it did, for a short time, prevail. Yet by the later 1950s such a concern with the particularity and locality of art was becoming highly unfashionable in high art circles, and, with a painful irony, it was some of those admired by Bell et al that railed against the idea of a "provincial" art.[90] Indeed in 1956 a disparate group of artists including Ernest Zobole, Eric Malthouse and David Tinker, inspired by post-war trends in international modernist aesthetics (trends that were themselves in part the product of very real internationalist developments of human displacement in the post-War era, embodied by the presence of artists such as the Polish Josef Herman and German Heinz Koppel in south Wales from the 1940s), gave themselves the decidedly neutral name, ''56 Group'. They set up exhibitions that, as Huw Jones argues, 'deliberately downplayed any sense of cultural specificity, preferring instead to frame their work around the then fashionable discourse of internationalism'.[91] Thus, by the end of the 1950s the idea of positing a distinctively national or local element within Wales's contribution to wider trends had become a minor consideration; indeed, if the Welsh Open Exhibition at the Eisteddfod, which had by the late 1950s become the central outlet of the Welsh art establishment, was any indication of the priorities dominating at that time, then the introduction to the exhibition's 1962 tenth anniversary catalogue spoke volumes:

> Much of the Welsh art [in 1953] was rooted in the landscape of Wales and the character of her people, particularly of the mining valleys of the South. [...] By

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[89] David Bell, John Piper and David Weight, 'Introduction to the catalogue of 1953 Open Exhibition at National Eisteddfod, Rhyl', quoted in Lord, *Industrial Society*, p. 262.
[90] Lord notes that the pejorative term "provincialism" became "widespread" at this time. Ibid, p. 266.
[91] Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 154.

today [...] Welsh artists have [...] been increasingly influenced by world-wide artistic experiment. Many of the pictures in the present exhibition are abstract; most show the international spirit that has widened the frontiers of painting and sculpture.[92]

Here the Assistant Director of the Welsh Committee of the ACGB Tom Cross looks back at ten years of the Welsh Open through the lens of evolutionary development, and seems to endorse the widening of creative horizons beyond the rooted particularity of earlier Welsh work. By the 1960s, then, the prioritization of internationalist aesthetics – which had been promoted from the outset of the National Museum - had prevailed. Welsh art now had a 'status and profile hitherto unknown', says Jones, but at the expense of a 'striking loss of national character.'[93]

Given the prevalence of this form of internationalism in Welsh art circles of the 1960s, it is perhaps surprising that Ormond attempts to posit a 'Welsh art' in his films at all. Yet his first documentary on the visual arts, *Horizons Hung in Air* (1966), on the Anglesey-born landscape painter Kyffin Williams, addresses its artist-subject in a way that provides a stark contrast to the Welsh Committee's policy of the time. Indeed, the film intriguingly fulfils its function by drawing on the hostility of those among the Welsh public that had been vociferously unconvinced by the trendy and, for some, incomprehensible modern forms feted at the Welsh Opens of this era.[94] The central aim of the film, as with all of Ormond's cultural documentaries, is to utilize the ekphrastic possibilities of the documentary form to provide a filmic exposition of an artist's unique vision, through an explication of their artistic technique along with biographical information.[95] In *Horizons Hung in Air*, the presentation of Williams's artistic individuality is achieved via an exposition of the artist's deeply felt aversion to fashionable metropolitan trends: 'Kyffin Williams's attachment to the Welsh mountains goes further than merely wanting to paint them', says Ormond (who himself narrates

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[92] Tom Cross, quoted in Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 159.

[93] Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 171.

[94] One anonymous letter to the *Express and Times Gazette* after the opening of the Twelfth Welsh Open at the Newtown Eisteddfod in 1965 complained that they were 'completely bewildered' by 'a collection of large canvases painted with no relation to form or beauty: crude attempts at "with-it" sculpture: amateurish attempts at metal work and panel beating: odds and ends of tin ware and wood assembled by unskilled hands, a degradation of art to the level of the nursery school. [...] [B]anal rubbish'. Quoted in Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 159.

[95] Williams himself makes a telling reference to Ormond as a kind of portrait artist in his autobiography, *A Wider Sky*. Describing the process of making *Horizons Hung in Air*, he notes that he had 'complete confidence in [Ormond's] judgement, I allowed him to use me much as a model allows a painter the freedom to interpret in whatever way he or she desires.' Kyffin Williams, *A Wider Sky* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1991), p. 222.

this film). 'Perhaps they represent to him a certain country Welsh disdain for urban

success'. Williams himself confirms his distaste for the "vulgarization" of the London

art world, and this distaste is borne out via the visual construction of London in the film.

Interestingly, this is a construction that is quite contrary to the dominant tropes

appearing elsewhere in the media at this time, images that art historians Bart Moore-

Gilbert and John Seed call the dominant "construct" of 'Swinging London' in the

1960s, with its images of 'material prosperity, cultural innovation and youthful

rebellion, […] King's Road boutiques, Mayfair art galleries and fashionable glitterati'.[96]

In contrast, the London constructed in *Horizons Hung in Air* is the nefarious hub of an

inimical modernity. The film's opening sequence seeks to establish the city's

bewildering superficiality; the viewer is immediately disorientated by an opening shot

in which two clashing directions of visual movement drive at each other within the

frame: heavy city traffic speeds towards us in a rapid zoom shot. We cut sharply to an

obliquely-framed shot of London traffic lights which seem to be failing in their signal to

'STOP': the sound of cars roars on; pedestrians bustle past. Next we cut to a shot that

seems to struggle confusedly to navigate its way across the city: a long zoom into the

iconic London Underground sign is intermittently obscured by the relentless traffic. The

unnerving confusion of this place is emphasised by fast cuts and abrupt, discordant

music. The camera pans sharply across clustered urban back gardens, and it soon

becomes clear that we are heading towards Kyffin Williams's place of residence, Bolton

Studios in Chelsea. The message here is that finding this place is no easy task in this

endless urban sprawl. Inside, though, is a haven of quiet, a place where we can find

politely refined conversation with a brilliant and articulate north Walian artist. Indeed,

Williams's world is presented as a agreeable contrast to the fast-paced life of London;

soon we are following the artist out on his walks in north-Walian mountains, looking

for inspiration. In these scenes the camerawork is smoother and more fluid, the

soundtrack less disorientating; extended pans follow the long ridges of the mountains,

low-angled stills capture the grandeur of their cloud-capped peaks. Yet a later return to

footage of London, in which Williams describes his intense dislike of the fashionable

London art market, again returns to a more erratic visual discourse; strange works of

modern sculptural art are framed obliquely, with a shaky, handheld camera shifting in

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[96] Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed, 'Introduction', in Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed, eds., *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1992]), p. 1. Moore-Gilbert and Seed note in particular a *Time* magazine special published in April 1966 that celebrated such images – the same month that *Horizons Hung in Air* was broadcast.

and out of focus, emphasising the distance – philosophical as well as geographical – of this world from the artist's true home in Wales.

The film would thus appear to channel a certain Welsh hostility to metropolitanism; contrasting the timelessness of the Welsh landscape with the fickle transience of the metropolis. Indeed, Williams's work became immensely popular in Wales, particularly among those for whom the landscapes he depicts constitute the geographical heart of the nation. As Lord notes, the artist went on to become 'the most extensively collected of all Welsh painters in the twentieth century', a success achieved in so small part due to the 'affirmation of the romantic myth of the landscape and y Werin Gymreig in [his] work.'[97] In this sense, Williams can be understood as an artist that performed the crucial function of visualising a politicized national landscape, of entering the symbolic contest of the Welsh environment in order, in Prys Gruffudd's terms, to 'harden the identity of that piece of land' in order to 'deny the claims of others upon it.'[98] Yet the logic of the film's effort to reify the tension at the heart of Williams's work - that is, the contrast between a transient, rootless urban life and a timeless, organic Welsh one - seems not to present a politicized artist but a romantically imaginative one. Indeed, *Horizons Hung in Air* filmically corroborates Williams's aversion to metropolitan trends only insofar as this impacts upon the individuality of his artistic vision. This is, in particular, a function of Ormond's partly artistic, partly institutional effort to ekphrastically mimic Williams's unique way of seeing the world. Indeed, Ormond's second film on Williams, *Land Against the Light* (1978), though broadcast some fourteen years after *Horizons Hung in Air*, follows the same interpretive and representative logic. This later film skilfully utilizes the far higher quality of cameras and film stock in use at the Welsh Film Unit by the late 1970s in its mode of ekphrastic exposition (the film is shot widescreen and in full colour), and attempts to mimic the rare eye condition whereby the pupils fail to dilate in bright light, which affected Williams's vision and informed much of his work. *Land Against the Light* films the north-Walian landscape against the flare of the sun, which achieves the startling effect of sun flare streaking across the screen.[99] Ormond later informed film historian David Berry of his intentions: 'When [Williams] set up his easel like as not he'd be painting in the sun and not with the usual flat effect. Accordingly, I nearly

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[97] Lord, *Imaging the Nation*, p. 402.
[98] Prys Gruffudd, 'Prospects of Wales: Contested Geographical Imaginations', in Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson, eds., *Nation, Identity and Social Theory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 150.
[99] The cameraman on this film was Russ Walker.

always shot my film against the sun.'[100] (The adverb "accordingly" here seems to me a telling indication of Ormond's chameleon-like interpretive technique.) Yet, despite the evident attempt to position Williams as a *Welsh* artist working in Wales, in both films it is the artist's unique vision that is foregrounded - as opposed to Wales itself. As in Caspar David Freidrich's classic image of sublime subjectivity, *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (*Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818), the films offer a vision and an exposition of the romantic artist's imaginative subjectivity in a way that places the question of place or of nation in the background. The artist is the ideal; the Welsh landscape is a consideration only insofar as it impinges on the uniqueness of the artist's vision. Indeed in an interview in *Horizons Hung in Air*, Williams partly endorses such a view himself: 'I don't think it's that I want to show where the people of Anglesey have lived', he says, 'but I cannot keep away from painting these farmhouses. It's like a vice in a way'.

This sense of Ormond's commitment to prioritizing the singularity of individual artistic visions over the particularity of a Welsh artistic practice is further confirmed in his second film on a visual artist. Indeed, where *Horizons Hung in Air* and *Land Against the Light* corroborate Williams's view by mimicking his wilful bemusement at the fashions of metropolitan modern art, *Piano with Many Strings: The Art of Ceri Richards* (1969) profiles Ceri Richards in a way that certainly does not shy away from that artist's often difficult and highly conceptual work. Rather, like Ormond's radio essay, *Rest and Unrest, Piano with Many Strings* considerately eases the lay viewer into the world of non-figurative modern art. The film opens with Richards's work on, perhaps, the more accessible end of the scale - his finely sketched portraits of his family - as if to convince the viewer that whatever Richards' tendency to experiment with form, at heart he possesses the true artist's ability, when he wishes, of straightforward draughtsmanship: 'when he chooses to', Ormond narrates, 'Ceri Richards can draw like an old master.' The film goes on to explain the developments in artistic practice that led to Richard's experimentation with non-figurative expression, particularly impressionism: 'there was a clear precedent for not depicting things and people precisely as you saw them. The conventions that had lasted for five hundred years were being broken.' But the celebration of Richards's cutting-edge experimentalism presents a problem for the interpretation of the artist's Welshness. Indeed, there is a considerable degree of

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[100] John Ormond, quoted in Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 296.

ambivalence at play in *Piano with Many Strings*. This is in one respect unsurprising, given that in the 1960s Richards had found considerable fame and recognition on the British and international stages; a CBE in 1960 was followed by major retrospectives in London's Whitechapel Gallery in the same year and the Venice Biennale in 1962-3,[101] as well as a Gold Medal for best foreign painter at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in Delhi in 1968. As critic Eric Rowan has noted, this was a success in part achieved through the presentation of Richards in *British* terms: 'Of all Welsh artists it is his name that occurs most frequently in the histories and catalogues of the period [...] representing Britain rather than Wales.'[102] Moreover, it was no coincidence that it was in this era that he was recognised by a Welsh art establishment with decidedly internationalist priorities; in 1961 Richards was awarded the Gold Medal in Fine Art at the Rhosllanerchrugog Eisteddfod, the year when self-confessed internationalist Roger Webster had taken over as Director of the Welsh Committee of the ACGB. Webster had provocatively lauded Richards as 'the only Welsh artist to successfully keep pace with international aesthetic trends.'[103] *Piano With Many Strings* can thus certainly be viewed as a film that celebrates Richards in these international terms while, moreover, presenting him as a key *Welsh* contribution to *Britain's* international artistic offerings. The film constituted one of three cultural documentaries (in addition to one history documentary, to be examined in the following chapter) that Ormond produced leading up to the Investiture of the Prince of Wales in July 1969. All of these films declaimed the fruits of Welsh history and culture to BBC2 network audiences in the weeks leading up to the ceremony.[104] As John S. Ellis suggests, such films were part of Britain's enrolment, 'like Prince Charles', on 'an intensive course in Welshness'.[105]

A useful comparison can be made with Ormond's radio essay for the Welsh Home Service, *Rest and Unrest*, which, as I noted earlier, attempts to elucidate the

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[101] A. D. F. Jenkins, 'Richards, Ceri Giraldus (1903–1971)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31602, accessed 14 Jan 2014].

[102] Eric Rowan, 'The Visual Arts', in Meic Stephens, ed., *The Arts in Wales 1950-1975* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1979), p. 56.

[103] Roger Webster, quoted in Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 145.

[104] *Piano With Many Strings* was broadcast on Sunday 29th June – two days before the Investiture ceremony. I will return to the other two cultural documentaries, *Bronze Mask* and *The Fragile Universe*, shortly, and to the politics of the Investiture in more detail in the following chapter.

[105] John S. Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911-1969* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 253.

notion of non-figurative art to a lay audience while simultaneously claiming the artist as one who often 'shows something of his Welsh roots'. The film is moreover comparable with Ormond's effort to particularize Richards' work in his lecture to the Richards's Memorial Exhibition at the National Museum of Wales in 1973.[106] There he made the claim that Richards' penchant for the symbols of the 'fertility of life' are perhaps 'unconsciously related' to the patterns of the La Tène period: 'it is here, with this kind of line [...] that I judge Ceri Richards to be at his most Celtic.'[107] *Piano With Many Strings* also posits Richards' roots in Wales; an extended sequence explores Richards' wartime *Tinplate* series (commissioned by the Ministry of Information to document industrial workers on the home front), undertaken at the Gowerton tinplate works where Richards' father had worked his entire life. This is followed by a striking sequence in which a montage of the artist's sketches and paintings of his father are accompanied by a sonorous recording of that deeply cultured man reading a Welsh-language poem - one of the few extended, un-translated instances of the Welsh language in Ormond's oeuvre. However, the film does not labour a link with Richards' father's commitment to Welsh-language Nonconformist culture; instead *Piano With Many Strings* undertakes the task of charting Richards' sharp trajectory out of, as Ormond elsewhere described it, that 'narrow, literal' culture, while simultaneously attempting to keep in view a certain Welsh dimension to the work. The second half of the film consists of a series of ekphrastic sequences that bring to the screen Richards' greatest achievements – his *Interior with Music* series and those paintings that explore Dylan Thomas's 'The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower' and impressionist composer Claude Debussy's *La cathédrale engloutie* (all, themselves, deeply ekphrastic works) - in a way that makes cursory reference to a Welshness while prioritising their position in the modernist tradition.[108] A key example is a sequence in which details of images from Richards' *Interior with Music* series are cut in time with a Beethoven piano concerto. It is Richards' sister Esther who provides the music on piano, and indeed a sketch of her at the piano is described by Ormond as one of the first "piano" pieces Richards drew. But any familiarised, particularised element is soon superseded by the praising of the artist's

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[106] Richards had died in 1971.

[107] John Ormond, 'Ceri Richards', in *Ceri Richards: Memorial Exhibition* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales/Welsh Arts Council, 1973), p. 9.

[108] Many national BBC television viewers would have been familiar with Debussy at this time – famed BBC film producer Ken Russell had produced a well-received film on Debussy for the BBC's prestigious culture programme *Monitor* in 1965. See 'Ken Russell', *BFI Screenonline* <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/467596/> [accessed 14 February 2014]/

higher artistic vision: 'the theme of the pianist was to take him in all sorts of directions from here'. Indeed, Ormond goes on to enthuse over the influence of Wassily Kandinsky's seminal quasi-synaesthetic, ekphrastic tract, 'On the Spiritual in Art' (1912), on the series.[109] Kandinsky is described as having made a 'remarkably accurate prediction of what was going to happen in *painting* from then on' (my emphasis); the implication, then, is that Richards has transcended the boundaries of "Welshness" and entered the idealised, abstracted tradition of international "painting". Thus, while the film does celebrate the fact that Richards hails from Wales, the film primarily posits the artist as a transnational visionary: 'Colour is a keyboard. On it Richards sets himself the task of playing, often, complex themes. At times he reduces them to a simplicity, only to restore to them again a complexity that is his own.'

Piano with Many Strings reifies a certain preference for "international" aesthetics among the Welsh art establishment of the 1960s, and indeed proudly projects such a preference onto a wider stage – exemplifying, perhaps, to British audiences what Wales could contribute to cutting-edge modern art. But by the early 1970s the unbridled economic growth that had infused British life of the 1960s with a spirit of disorientating abandon was coming to an end. The Welsh Arts Council – as the Welsh Committee of the ACGB had become in 1967 – now had to respond to a new dispensation. Huw Jones summarizes the situation in the early 1970s:

> For the past two decades, most contemporary Welsh artists had worked in accordance with the principles of Modernism. This stressed the importance of form over subject-matter and the autonomy of the artist from wider social concerns. However, the growing political division between left and right, and conflicts such as the miners' strikes, language activism, anti-nuclear protests and opposition to the Vietnam War and Apartheid in South Africa made this an increasingly untenable approach for the politicised artist in Wales.[110]

The result in Wales, says Jones, was the "proletarianisation"[111] of art, both in terms of subject-matter and the audiences that the Welsh Arts Council were attempting to reach. Indeed Roger Webster, the Director of the Welsh Committee who had prioritized the giddily modern forms of the 1960s, had in 1967 been replaced by Aneurin Thomas, a Director with a more egalitarian vision informed by the ideas of intellectuals of a re-

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[109] It is from this essay that Ormond finds his title for the film.
[110] Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 213.
[111] Ibid, p. 175.

energised British Left such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart.[112] These were thinkers whose critiques of the traditional hierarchies of art were at this time entering the mainstream of British arts policy with the help of a new Labour government in 1974; in particular, the new Minister for the Arts, Hugh Jenkins, who helped bring Williams and Hoggart to the Arts Council in the later 1970s.[113] Of course, Wales had been a crucible for artists with proletarian concerns for decades; painters such as Ernest Zobole, Glyn Morgan and Charles Burton had, since the 1940s, been vividly absorbing the scenes of industrial life into their work. The political climate in the 1970s brought the work of these artists back into vogue, as well as that of a new wave of Welsh painters such as Nicholas Evans and David Carpanini. But despite an abundance of home grown talent, it was, as Peter Lord notes, the 'sustained interest' in Polish émigré in south Wales Josef Herman that had 'raised the public profile of the artist's view of the life of Welsh industrial communities'.[114] Herman, a Polish Jew, had settled in the Swansea Valley mining village of Ystradgynlais in 1944 having managed to flee his native country before it was invaded. The small mining community would prove to be a revelation for him, and he lived and worked in the village until 1955. It would seem, therefore, that Ormond's film profiling Herman, *A Day Eleven Years Long* (1975), broadcast as a BBC1 Wales op-out, was an attempt to capitalize on the Welsh dimension of this popular artist's work in this new political climate.

Indeed, Herman was himself experiencing something of a revival at this time. He was the subject of a major retrospective at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow in 1975 (Herman had spent three years living in the heavily industrialised Gorbals area of Glasgow in the early 1940s), and in the same year published his memoirs, *Related Twilights*. And in the film's effort to foreground Herman's Welsh credentials, many of the ekphrastic sequences in *A Day Eleven Years Long* seek visually to augment passages from *Related Twilights* in a way that firmly anchors the artist's work in a Welsh locale. Ormond visualises Herman's vivid descriptions of the 'low hills like sleeping dogs', the 'copper-coloured sky' with long, sweeping pans of the valley surrounding the village,

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[112] See Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, pp. 184-185.

[113] Ibid, p. 176.

[114] Lord, *Industrial Society*, p. 237. Herman had been popular in Wales for many years. Kingsley Amis's 1955 novel *That Uncertain Feeling* tellingly parodies the artist's popularity among middle-class Welsh intellectuals of the 1950s. The novel's protagonist, John Lewis, notices on the wall of the Gruffydd-Williams's lavish home a 'sort of infernal-colliery painting from the brush, or perhaps the trowel, of a fashionable Czech artist who'd settled in one of the Valley towns.' Kingsley Amis, *That Uncertain Feeling* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1955]), p. 49.

and emphasises the epiphanic passage that Peter Lord notes became as 'familiar as his paintings':[115]

> Unexpectedly, as though from nowhere, a group of miners stepped onto the bridge. For a split second their heads appeared against the full body of the sun, as against a yellow disc – the whole image was not unlike an icon depicting the saints with their haloes. With the light around them, the silhouettes of the miners were almost black. With rapid steps they crossed the bridge and like frightened cats tore themselves away from one another, each going his own way. The magnificence of this scene overwhelmed me.[116]

Here the film visually mimics Herman's perspective on that important day; a low-angle shot looks up at a figure walking across a bridge (likely the very bridge that Herman describes), silhouetted by the disc of the sun behind; Herman's 'split second' memory is replicated by a series of sharply-cut still frames of the figure at the moment at which it crosses the sun behind. Thus, given its emphasis on this Welsh chapter in Herman's life, the film – as we might expect – is in no way a broad overview of the artist's life and work but rather an attempt to "activate" the artist as, perhaps, an honorary Welshman. But while Ormond's approach is evidently an effective means of positioning the artist in a *physical* Welsh context, *A Day Eleven Years Long* struggles to position Herman in a Welsh social or intellectual one. There is a disconnect between the film's effort to highlight Herman's close relationship with this south Welsh community and its endorsement of the uniqueness of Herman's vision. It notes, for instance, the way in which the miners soon took to calling the painter 'Jo Bach', and is keen to remind viewers that Herman 'cherishes the way he was accepted in Ystradgynlais', yet it becomes clear that Herman's work, whatever its popularity in Wales, is far from "Welsh" in any political sense. Interestingly, it has for this reason been a cause for criticism among some on the left; the Marxist art critic John Berger once suggested that Herman painted miners 'as if they were peasants instead of one of the most militant sections of the proletariat';[117] moreover Peter Lord compares Herman unfavourably with the Welsh artist Will Roberts, who 'did not iconize the miners in the same way as Herman but rather painted them and his other sitters with concern for their individual

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[115] Lord, *Industrial Society*, p. 237.

[116] Josef Herman, *Related Twilights: Notes from an Artist's Diary* (London: Robson, 1975), p. 91.

[117] John Berger, *Permanent Red: Essays in Seeing* (London: Methuen, 1960), pp. 90-94.

lives and for the particular place'.[118] In his defence, Herman never claimed to be creatively inspired by the particularity of the community in which he lived; rather he drew inspiration from the iconic simplicity of the miners' lives. Passages in *Related Twilights* are often written with a peculiarly detached, almost ethnographic eye ('[they] struck me not so much by their actuality as by their symbolism, by the idealism which they represented'[119]), and his paintings are usually closer to the iconic, anonymous, monumental forms of the African sculptures he loved to collect than the familiarised paintings of, for example, Welsh artists such as David Carpanini, Charles Burton or George Chapman. Thus the logic of the film's effort to bring Herman's unique vision to screen implicitly endorses a perspective that pushes to the background – even trivialises - the social significance of the village; Ormond suggests at one point that '[i]t was almost as if [...] Ystradgynlais had somehow been invented to heal the artist's wounds'. Curiously, the film even overlooks what could have been an opportunity to bring Welsh culture further into its frame of reference; Herman, in *Related Twilights,* writes of being stimulated to paint by the *Mabinogion* and Welsh male voice choirs,[120] yet the film makes no allusion to these. The film instead primarily hails Herman's artistic individuality, one that – not incidentally - is entirely appropriate to Ormond's own conception of the unique contribution each true artist makes to the 'organic mosaic'. Herman describes such individuality in terms of the "tracks" that are left across an artist's oeuvre that 'together [...] add to a definite attitude to life. [...] When I see such tracks in a painting, I smile,' says Herman. 'I recognise that it is mine, it doesn't belong to anybody else'. If *A Day Eleven Years Long* "activates" Herman in a Welsh context, then, it is within the broadly conceived "proletarian" one that had become *de rigeur* within a Welsh art establishment that was at this time, as Huw Jones notes, fostering a discourse on Welsh identity that 'defined the Welsh nation in terms of [...] class solidarity, collectivism and trade unionism' in a way that 'marginalised the politics of Welsh nationalism.'[121] This was thus part of the activation of a contributionist discourse, shaped in large part by a commitment to a *British* social democratic version of Labour party politics in the years before the more overt nationalisation of the Labour

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[118] Lord, *Industrial Society*, p. 243. Further, Jasmine Donahaye has compared Herman's paintings and writings on Wales with those on his Jewish heritage, noting that, 'not surprisingly' the latter 'suggests a sensitivity [...] that is absent from his descriptions of the Welsh environment.' Jasmine Donahaye, *Whose People? Wales, Israel, Palestine* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 147.

[119] Herman, *Related Twilights*, p. 91.

[120] Ibid, p. 97.

[121] Jones, *Exhibiting Welshness*, p. 224.

party in Wales in the Thatcher years. As I will show in the following chapter, these were nationalising forces that were gathering momentum at this time, and *A Day Eleven Years Long* can in this sense be viewed as an early effort to highlight the Welsh dimension of working class Britain. But it is ultimately an effort that is articulated within a discourse of the singularity of the romantic artist, one that was more easily absorbed into British left-wing cultural politics than to those peculiar to Wales.

If *A Day Eleven Years Long* posited a Welsh cultural heritage in accord with a wider British cultural narrative, Ormond's final film on Welsh visual art – and indeed the final full-length cultural documentary of his career - made no effort to contradict this. *Sutherland in Wales* (1977) profiles another artist who found a peculiarly detached artistic sustenance in Wales - indeed another artist whose detachment has been a source of complaint for some critics in Wales. Such critics judge Sutherland's work to be better understood as an extension of the English Romantic tradition than as an exploration of a Welsh social milieu; Lord notes that Sutherland's extensive work in the ancient land of Dyfed is 'devoid of the human culture of the place.'[122] To be sure, it is certainly difficult to argue that Sutherland's intensely imagined, elaborate and often surreal visual extrapolations of natural forms and scenes engage with a Welsh milieu in any social, political, or even historical sense. However it should be said that Sutherland, despite this imaginative detachment, did, off the canvas, seem to possess a conception of the particularity of Wales as somewhat more than an unpeopled area of natural beauty. In 1976 he generously gifted a large number of his works – some old, some specially made – to a gallery in his name, established with the assistance of the National Museum of Wales, at Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire. In his foreword to the book that accompanied the opening of the Graham Sutherland Gallery, the artist stated that he wished to 'make a gift [...] for the benefit of Pembrokeshire and the nation' with the view that it was 'high time that there should be some move towards decentralization'.[123] There had, indeed, been some move towards the "decentralization" of the arts from London around this time, moves that were in large part thanks to the on-going work of the Welsh Arts Council, which helped finance exhibition spaces such as Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Newport Museum and Gallery, and Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff in the early 1970s, and opened its own gallery, Oriel, in Cardiff in 1974. The organization had noted the importance of supporting gallery spaces in Wales with 'full professional facilities and

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[122] Lord, *Imaging the Nation*, p. 376.
[123] Graham Sutherland, *Sutherland in Wales* (London: Alistair McAlpine, 1976), p. 7.

fulltime staff' as a central priority in its 1976 *Annual Report*.[124] The "decentralization" that Sutherland speaks of was thus high on the agenda in Wales at that time, and his gift of a substantial number of drawings and paintings to a gallery in west Wales was a generous and significant contribution to this process. Though, interestingly, and likely due to the Welsh Arts Council's political leanings at that time, it was in fact not the Welsh Arts Council but the contributionist National Museum of Wales that gave financial support to the Graham Sutherland Gallery. And whatever these political differences, Ormond's film is an unabashed celebration of the space; it contains footage of the opening, as well as an extended sequence showcasing the new space and its contents.

With this sense of gratitude in mind, it is perhaps to be expected that the film makes almost nothing of the oddity of an artist firmly of the English romantic tradition gifting to an increasingly politicized Wales a series of works utterly unconcerned with matters of that nation, nor of the fact that he was doing so at a gallery space situated in one of the garrisons of the Landsker line.[125] The film's opening sequence does allude to the enduring existence of a Dyfed of magic and ancient legends – and indeed makes reference to the fact that the county of Pembrokeshire had recently (in 1974) reverted to its ancient name of Dyfed (itself part of the process of devolution occurring at a local administrative level in Wales at that time). 'In Welsh legend', notes the narrator (here the actor Meredith Edwards), 'Dyfed was a region of magic, enchantment and apparitions.' Slow dissolves between shots of the magnificent beauty of the Dyfed coastline, accompanied by a sprightly yet haunting Celtic melody, imply a sense of the ancient history of this landscape. Yet the film finds no tension between this revived sense of "Celtic" heritage and Sutherland's total lack of concern for it. Rather, *Sutherland in Wales* endorses a vision of a devolved Welsh culture that is unproblematically invigorated by Sutherland's curiously detached presence in south Pembrokeshire. From a vision of an ancient Welsh land, the film leaps into an interpretation of the singular obsession with natural form that constituted the basis of

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[124] Welsh Arts Council, *Annual Report 1976* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1976).

[125] The Landsker line was a demarcation of land drawn after the Normon conquest in Wales and originally garissoned by castles spanning from Amroth in the East to Roch in the West. Though its actual position (and significance) has shifted over the centuries, many still agree that it at least exists in imaginative form. As Brian John notes in his history of the area – published, appropriately, in the year Ormond's film on Sutherland was aired - 'Everyone in Pembrokeshire knows that the county is divided into two regions of approximately equal size'. (Brian John, *Pembrokeshire* (London: David and Charles, 1976), p. 152.) Recent proof of the persistence of this cultural divide is the publication of Tony Curtis's *Real South Pembrokeshire* (Bridgend: Seren, 2011).

Sutherland's neo-romantic vision: 'The shapes to be seen here, and the ways in which small details of nature are echoed and re-echoed at large in the landscape, have preoccupied the painter Graham Sutherland for more than forty years.' The film goes on to profile Sutherland's distanced vision in some detail. Like 'Landscape in Dyfed', the poem Ormond dedicated to Sutherland which, as I argued in Chapter One, offers the reader an explanation of the artist's epistemological vision through a form of observational poetic ekphrasis (that is, a form that both observes the artist at work and creatively mimics that work), the film also has this impulse at heart. It very effectively augments Sutherland's reading of a letter he had written in the 1940s explaining his affinity for the landscape, and indeed, as in *A Day Eleven Years Long*, is able to bring to the screen the precise locations that Sutherland refers to in those writings. Yet in mimicking the artist's unique perspective, the film presents an interpretation of the landscape not as the ancient land of Dyfed but one that is perhaps closer to a confirmation of south Pembrokeshire as the 'Little England beyond Wales' that political theorist Denis Balsom characterizes as 'British Wales'[126] – an area that, as Balsom notes, was to vote strongly against devolution in the referendum of 1979. Appropriately, then, the landscape in *Sutherland in Wales* belongs explicitly and solely to the English romantic artist: to return to Prys Gruffudd's terms, it does not "solidify" or "confirm" a *Welsh* space, but an imaginative one whose natural forms and features provide the artist with his "raw material", his "vocabulary": 'a new vision', says Sutherland in the film, 'must be grafted on reality'.

Anglophone Welsh Literature

If the films Ormond produced on the visual arts in Wales in the 1960s and 1970s activated artists in a way that broadly complemented the contributionist tendencies dominant within the Welsh arts establishment at that time, his films on Anglophone Welsh *literary* artists could not do so in quite the same way. Indeed, though the basic impulse toward a form of biographical ekphrasis is certainly the driving force behind these films, the set of cultural assumptions that lay beneath the burgeoning literary scene of the time were not those that could be comfortably absorbed into programmes aimed at BBC audiences – Welsh or British. Interestingly, and in a way that again

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[126] See Denis Balsom, 'The Three Wales Model', in John Osmond, ed., *The National Question Again: Welsh Political Identity in the 1980s* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1985), pp. 1-17.

speaks of the fractured nature of Welsh cultural politics at this time, this was in spite of the fact that the central stimulus for the developments in literature and those of the visual arts was the same: that is, the establishment of the Welsh Committee of the ACGB. In the realm of the visual arts, this had led to an unprecedented rise of activity in the production and exhibition of art that was, in line with the wider trends in the art world, usually of an internationalist variety. Yet in the realm of literature, the emphasis and intentions were quite different. The assistance the Welsh Arts Council awarded to writers and publishing houses after the mid-1960s helped cultivate a major revival of Anglophone literature after some fifteen years or more of virtual silence (Gwyn Jones's *Welsh Review* had folded in 1948, Keidrych Rhys's *Wales* in 1949), but this was a revival driven by intellectuals of a nationalist hue who were frequently hostile to the idea of contributing to what they viewed as an English national literary tradition.[127] There were, of course, exceptions and, as I argued in Chapter One, Ormond can be viewed as one of them; though he was one of a number of writers who benefited from the financial assistance of the ACGB in helping to establish an Anglophone Welsh publishing culture (particularly after the creation of the Welsh Arts Council proper in 1967), with financial assistance to publishing houses and to two magazines in particular, *Poetry Wales* and *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, Ormond's work on the whole resisted the nationalist impetus of this project. Indeed if Meic Stephens, the first literary director of the Welsh Arts Council, can, as I suggested in Chapter One, be understood as protectionist in his effort to bring Anglophone Welsh writers and poets 'back into the swing of Welsh life [...] instead of their festering in London'[128] and to advocate a thematics centred upon issues of solely Welsh concern, Ormond can be understood as a contributionist in his ambition to find recognition on a wider stage.[129] In Ormond's case, this was partly the product of his earlier creative development among the less nationalistic poets of the 'First Flowering'; poets who, in Tony Conran's terms, 'strove to capture the attention of the English poetry-reading public and the London market',[130] or, in Katie Gramich's somewhat kinder terms, were 'more catholic in their choice of

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[127] I explored in detail the socio-political circumstances that gave rise to this movement in my first chapter.

[128] Anthony Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness: Essays on the English Poets of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1982), p. 298.

[129] While his first collection of poetry, *Requiem and Celebration* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1969) was one of the first publications in Wales to receive Welsh Arts Council funding, his second, *Definition of a Waterfall* (1973) was published by Oxford University Press.

[130] Conran, *The Cost of Strangeness*, p. 296.

subject'[131] than their compatriots of the 'Second Flowering'. It was perhaps to be expected, then, that BBC Wales's televisual contribution to this literary revival of the late 1960s examined, on the whole, not the new nationalist intellectuals of that time, but the 'more catholic' poets of the earlier generation.

It should be said that of the four films on Welsh poets that Ormond produced in the "prestige" mode of documentary that I have been examining in this chapter, three were produced before the end of the 1960s – a time when this 'Second Flowering' of Anglophone Welsh literature had only very recently begun to emerge. At this time there were few poets of this revival who were sufficiently prolific to warrant the kind of examination in which BBC Wales would have been interested. But the ways in which these films attempt to re-activate Welsh poets of the earlier generation is significant when viewed in contrast with the explicitly national impetus of many of those active in the literary scene in Wales at that time. Ormond's first film on a poet, *Under a Bright Heaven: A Portrait of Vernon Watkins* (1966), is a key example. Watkins, by the 1960s, was a 'Faber poet' of considerable standing – James A. Davies suggests that when he died in 1967 Watkins was one of those being considered to succeed John Masefield as poet laureate.[132] Indeed, Watkins's sudden death on a tennis court in Seattle just over a year after the filming of *Under a Bright Heaven* gives the film a sadly clairvoyant poignancy, particularly those biographical scenes in which Watkins plays cricket in the garden with his children: 'his fragility of manner is deceptive', says Ormond, narrating, as Watkins bowls overarm to his son. 'His friends know him to be about as fragile in fact as a concrete wall.' Poignant, indeed, when viewed today. But the duality emphasised in these scenes - between the delicate sophistication of the intellect and the virility of the man – is a deliberate one, constructed in order to establish a sense of the deeper dichotomies that drive Watkins' art: those between physicality and the imagination, between the banal vicissitudes of everyday reality and the magnificent truths accessible via the poetic mind. To this end the film echoes the visual logic of Ormond's first film on Kyffin Williams, *Horizons Hung in Air*, produced, in fact, in the same year.

An early sequence in *Under a Bright Heaven* symbolises these deep tensions via a visual contrast between the hurried monotony of Watkins's day-job as a bank clerk

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[131] Katie Gramich, 'Both in and Out of the Game: Welsh Writers and the British Dimension', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 255.

[132] James A. Davies, 'Dylan Thomas and his Welsh Contemporaries', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 144.

and the imaginative profundity of his labour as a poet. Watkins reads his 'Rewards of the Fountain', a poem that expresses a defiance in the face of life's material rewards ('Let the world offer what it will,/ Its bargains I refuse. Those it rewards are greedy still./ I serve a stricter muse.'[133]), while a close-up of a pair of hands flickers rapidly through a wad of banknotes; next, the hands hastily arrange a pile of strewn coins. But these fast-paced images then segue into an entirely different setting; Watkins sitting at his desk at home, pondering a pile of manuscripts, and the quiet intensity of the scene is conveyed through the careful manipulation of *mise-en-scène*. Watkins is shot against a pitch-black backdrop, and is dimly lit from the front in a way that illuminates in ghostly silhouette only the leaves of his drafts and one side of his face with its shock of white hair. The effect is startling, and can be understood as the defining image of the film's portrait of Watkins as a transcendental romantic artist, a poet whose "strength", as 'Rewards of the Fountain' insists, is found outside the vicissitudes of the present, in the 'sepulchre/ Where time is overthrown.' The film thus establishes an interpretation of Watkins's work that is close to one that poet and critic Kathleen Raine offered in an essay in a 1964 issue of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, an essay that Ormond is quite likely to have read. There Raine usefully picks up on Watkins's vision of the permanence of the romantic artist; an unfashionable view at that time, but one to which Watkins (and Raine) held steadfastly:

> At a time when it is so widely assumed that no more is needed in poetry than the description of something perceived by the senses or some emotion felt by the poet […], it is necessary to point out that a characteristic of Watkins's poetry is the presence of some organising idea which can only be apprehended poetically, some true cosmic or metaphysical apprehension.[134]

The film further bears this out visually through an emphasis on Watkins's creative relationship with the landscape in which he lives. Like Ormond's films on Kyffin Williams and Graham Sutherland, the result is a curiously ambivalent interpretive logic which foregrounds the beauty of the Welsh landscape visually, while ideologically pushing it to the background. Lengthy sections of the film attempt visually to accompany Watkins' readings of poems such as 'The Feather' and 'Music of Colours – White Blossom'. The latter poem in particular is accompanied by spectacular images

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[133] Vernon Watkins, 'Rewards of the Fountain', *Affinities* (London: Faber, 1962), p. 15.
[134] Kathleen Raine, 'Vernon Watkins: Poet of Tradition', *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 14: 33 (1964), 31.

that visualise its imaginative topography; shots of the 'Blinding white' of snow on the Gower cliffs that make the waves seem "grey" and "dull", and of 'Buds in April, on the waiting branch,/ Starrily opening'[135] are indeed enhanced rather than diminished by the monochrome film stock. Yet as with many of the poems that draw on images from the Welsh landscape - and even those that draw on Welsh and Celtic mythology (these were one of the poet's major preoccupations, yet the film, significantly, does not address this aspect of his work) - such landscapes are posited as mere transient surface manifestations of a truth that is universal, infinite, final: as Watkins himself said elsewhere, 'I marvel at the beauty of the landscape, but I never think of it as a theme for poetry until I read metaphysical symbols behind what I see.'[136] This view Ormond corroborates in the film's narration: 'The coastline of Gower is like a whetstone on which Watkins sharpens the blade of his ideas.' Wales is thus merely the artist's accidental place of birth, so to speak, and is of little real consequence to his transcendental vision.

This is the interpretive logic the film confirms in its very trajectory: from a profile of the material reality of Watkins's home and work life, through the imaginative relationship he possesses with the Gower coastline, the film rises to a stellar crescendo. A reading of 'Bread and the Stars', Watkins' exalted exploration of the metaphysical reality beneath and beyond all natural phenomena, is augmented ekphrastically by an ambitious (and not a little high-flown) sequence in which grand images of the cosmos are accompanied by the Venus movement from Holtz's *The Planets*. Interestingly, in a lecture at Gregynog Hall delivered shortly after the film was broadcast, Watkins famously rooted his own work in the linguistic – even biological – texture of Wales, proudly stating that 'I am a Welsh poet writing in English. [...] I believe that my verse is characteristically Welsh [...] because rhythm and cadence are born in the blood.'[137] *Under a Bright Heaven* is not a film that attempts to expound such an interpretation; rather it emphasises the universal, timeless aspects of Watkins' own explanation of his work. It ends with poet speaking candidly in close-up to the camera:

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[135] Vernon Watkins, 'Music of Colours – White Blossom', *The Lady with the Unicorn* (London: Faber, 1948), p. 11.
[136] Vernon Watkins, quoted in Davies, 'Dylan Thomas and his Welsh Contemporaries', in Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English*, p. 146.
[137] Vernon Watkins, quoted in Gwen Watkins and Ruth Pryor, eds., *I that Was Born in Wales: A New Selection from the Poems of Vernon Watkins* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 15.

What one wants of a poem is that it should be ancient and fresh at the same time.
A poem should create the illusion – if it is an illusion – that it has always
existed, and that it was only waiting for the poet to write it down.

Although this activation of Welsh literary culture into a universalist idiom was
somewhat out of key with the often nationalist aims of the new Anglophone Welsh
literary culture, it was not, as I discussed earlier, an approach unknown to the visual arts
establishment in Wales at this time. And given that Ormond's next documentary on a
Welsh literary figure was another of those aired on the British network in the weeks
leading up to the Investiture of the Prince of Wales, it is perhaps to be expected that it
would adopt a universalist interpretative idiom that posed no threat to the image of a
culturally unified Britain required by that event. Indeed, *A Bronze Mask: A Film in
Elegy for Dylan Thomas* (1969)[138] uses as its central motif the presence of the bronze
death mask of Thomas that had recently taken pride of place in the art collection of the
National Museum of Wales.[139] Yet, far from the celebration of skilled physical
craftsmanship that Ormond offered in his 1947 *Picture Post* article, 'A Bronze for the
Academy' (see Chapter One), this film is rather a celebration of the exalted cultural
tradition into which the bronze mask symbolises Thomas's arrival. To be sure, the film
is best viewed as an accompaniment to the exhibit itself, attempting as it does to
confirm Thomas's place within this repository of the fruits of Western civilisation. It
achieves this via a form of filmic curation, juxtaposing recordings of Thomas reading
some of his own best-known poems with footage of the great works and exhibits on
display elsewhere in the museum. The lovers with 'their arms/ Round the griefs of the
ages' in Thomas's 'In My Craft or Sullen Art' are symbolised by Auguste Rodin's

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[138] It should be stated that *A Bronze Mask* was not the only film Ormond produced on his friend Dylan
Thomas. He produced four films on the poet during his career at BBC Wales – *A Bronze Mask*, in addition
to *Return Journey* (1964), *I Sing to you Strangers* (1982) and an episode in the series *Poems in their Place*
(1982). *Return Journey* is a televisual dramatization of Thomas's famous radio broadcast, in which the
poet returns to his hometown in search of his younger self. It was aired on 27 October 1964, the fiftieth
anniversary of Thomas's birth. *I Sing to you Strangers* was produced in celebration of the placing of
Jonah Jones's memorial stone to the poet at Westminster Abbey in 1982 (Ormond had been
instrumental in the organization of the event). The film was aired 10 November 1983. It consists of
interviews with Thomas's friends and family – Daniel Jones, Alfred Janes, Glyn Jones, Caitlin and
Aeronwy Thomas, among others who, Ormond claimed in a letter to Ron Berry, 'withheld their help
from the biographies'. See Letter to Ron Berry, 28 Janurary 1982 (Richard Burton Archives, Swansea,
WWE/1/10). I will return to *Poems in Their Place* later in this chapter. Though all these films are
interesting contributions to the representation of Dylan Thomas on television, and are certainly worthy
of further consideration, the do not take the form of "prestige" documentary with which I am primarily
interested here.
[139] The American sculptor and friend of Thomas, David Slivka, had gifted one of his bronze masks to the
museum in 1964.

sculpture *The Kiss*, for example; 'The Hand That Signed the Paper's cynical commentary on the universal futility of war is accompanied with footage of the museum's collection of Roman war paraphernalia; elsewhere Thomas's work is discussed with visual reference to the museum's Renoirs and Monets. August company, then, and indeed, the film's aim is to corroborate Thomas's place among them.

A Bronze Mask is almost a "best of" Dylan Thomas, a show-reel of his great works on all the grand human themes: war ('The Hand That Signed the Paper'), religion ('There Was a Saviour'), the innocence of childhood ('Fern Hill'), death ('And Death Shall Have no Dominion'). Interestingly, however, while the museum is certainly presented as a repository of greatness, the film in no way evokes it as a place inaccessible to the public. There are scenes, for instance, that advertise, in the true Welsh liberal spirit that beget the establishment of the museum, the egalitarian openness of Wales's National Museum to people of all walks of life, with schoolchildren chattering through the hallways, poking inappropriately at statues, and even two men discussing the exhibitions using sign language. But while the film proudly announces in its closing credits that the bronze mask 'stands in the National Museum of Wales', it nevertheless canonises Thomas in a way that firmly ignores virtually all semblance of his Welsh origins. Though the museum's outer doors in Park Place are open to all, the grandeur of the exhibits within is not open to interpretation. The film instead firmly posits the tradition of civilisation expounded in Sir Kenneth Clark's blockbuster series *Civilisation* (1969), which ended, in fact, just a few weeks before Ormond's film was aired. This is a canon whose best works, in the Arnoldian sense, fully transcend place and time. As *A Bronze Mask* announces in its opening sequence,

> [a]gelessness has its place in all true works of art. Step from today in under the dome of a museum, and you step, in a sense, into a limbo of time. Here, countless past moments, past yesterdays, come down to today and are one with it.

The film seems in part an effort to capitalise on the enormous success of Clark's *Civilisation* by presenting Thomas as a worthy contributor to its version of the Western canon. This was an effort in literary hagiography that may have seemed surprising to some; Thomas, after all, is a poet whose reputation often precedes his work in a way that renders him, in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton's words, a 'dangerously slippery

figure' in the canons of English literature.[140] Indeed Thomas is frequently – and was especially at the time this film aired - a figure rejected on all fronts: from those within the English tradition as a 'demagogic Welsh masturbator',[141] and from the Welsh and Anglophone Welsh traditions as a 'mongrel Welshman who welshed on his birthright for a mess of BBC pottage', belonging, at best, 'to the English'.[142] *A Bronze Mask* is thus a film that seeks to transcend all of these positions, positing a stately Thomas whose rightful place in the canon of Western culture stands loftily above such petty differences.

Ormond's third film showcasing a Welsh artist in line with the Investiture season, *The Fragile Universe: A Portrait of Alun Lewis* (1969), portrayed a figure somewhat less "slippery" and controversial than Thomas. Indeed, Lewis was a brilliant young poet, short story writer and man of letters whose suspicious death near the front line against the Japanese Army in Burma in March 1944 brought an immediate (and entirely justified) outpouring of tributes, elegies and obituaries from literary luminaries in Wales and England – most notably, for my purposes, in the magazine *Wales* in Summer 1944, which contained an elegy for Lewis by a young John Ormond. And though, as many of his critics have asserted, Lewis was in possession of no less divided sensibilities and conflicted allegiances than his South Walian contemporary Thomas,[143] Lewis was a writer whose talents, though arguably unfulfilled, have been recognised from all quarters of Wales's fractured literary-critical landscape. For a protectionist Anglophone Welsh intelligentsia he possessed all the best qualities of the South Walian bard of the people – Lewis was of good Welsh Valleys stock and yet sensitive to Wales's historical and linguistic identity. In a 1974 edition of *Poetry Wales*, nationalist poet Harri Webb described Lewis as a 'lost leader' who 'undoubtedly belonged by inheritance and personality' to south Wales.[144] This was a perception confirmed by stories of Lewis's solidarity with the lower ranks of his battalion, the South Welsh Borderers (Lewis, an educated ex-schoolmaster, was a second lieutenant), and further by remarks in his letters home that he 'regret[ted] his lack of Welsh very deeply' and

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[140] John Goodby and Chris Wigginton, 'Introduction', in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton, eds., *New Casebooks: Dylan Thomas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 7.

[141] Robert Graves, quoted in Goodby and Wigginton, *New Casebooks*, p. 4.

[142] Saunders Lewis, 'Is There an Anglo-Welsh Literature?' (Caerdydd, 1939), p. 5.

[143] See for example Dai Smith, 'The Case of Alun Lewis: A Divided Sensibility', *Llafur*, 3: 2 (1981), 14-26; John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991 [1984]); and Alan Vaughn Jones, *Modalities of Cultural Identity in the Writings of idris Davies and Alun Lewis* (Aberystyth: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2010).

[144] Harri Webb, 'Alun Lewis: The Lost Leader', *Poetry Wales*, 10: 3 (1974), 119.

that he would determine when he returned home to learn the language and to 'always tackle [his] writing through Welsh life and ways of thought'.[145] Yet simultaneously, as a sensitive observer of the universal significances of those quiet, unheralded, deeply human moments of war, Lewis also slotted neatly into the wider British literary canon, achieving a 'cultural eminence' that, as critic Alan Vaughn Jones has persuasively argued in a recent thesis,

> had less to do with his vision of Wales than with his function as a writer who satisfied the craving for a 'war poet' during the 1939-45 conflict. In Welsh and English cultural contexts [...] he was regarded [...] as an authentic literary spokesman for the British soldier, and an embodiment of the "noble" qualities of such men – patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice.[146]

Given the unifying national function of the 1969 Investiture, it would appear to have been this latter facet of Lewis's literary personality that encouraged Ormond to showcase him in a film broadcast to national BBC2 audiences in the weeks leading up to the ceremony.

This is not to suggest that the film brands Lewis in any simplistic sense as the archetypal noble British soldier-poet. *The Fragile Universe* successfully paints a portrait of an emotionally complex and sensitive character through interviews with his mother Gwladys (with whom, in her own words, he had a 'very special and close relationship'[147]), his widow Gweno, his friends and fellow-soldiers, as well as through interspersed scenes in which an actor (Henley Thomas),[148] dressed in army uniform and shot in gloomy light, reads Lewis's poems and letters and very adequately conveys a sense of this brooding, tormented figure. Some of the more evocative comments in the film come from an interview with Lord Chalfont (Alun Gwynne Jones), who served alongside Lewis in the sixth battalion.[149] 'There was about him this strange quality of depth, which in those days, in that particular atmosphere, was a rare quality.' Yet while Lewis was 'intensely vulnerable' to the life of the soldier, the film claims he was no less acceptably courageous than the other men. Rather he was driven, as is implied through

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[145] Alun Lewis, 'Letter 35, 23 November 1943', *In the Green Tree* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006 [1948]), p. 57.

[146] Vaughn Jones, *Modalities of Cultural Identity*, p. 4.

[147] Gwladys Lewis, quoted in John Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p. 237.

[148] The actor is Henley Thomas, who had found success on television earlier in a BBC adaptation of Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* (1939). Thomas played the role of Huw Morgan.

[149] Lord Chalfont would likely have been well known to the British public in the late 1960s, having been the outspoken figurehead of Harold Wilson's Labour Government's attempt to divest Britain of the Falkland Islands.

further remarks from Chalfont, by the supposedly exceptional, deeper sensitivities of the poet: 'almost everything frightened him, and it was that that made him determined to behave in [an] outwardly courageous way.' Indeed, the structural emphasis of *The Fragile Universe*, as its title implies, is on the extent to which Lewis's poetic sensibilities, the 'cast of his disposition as a writer', as the narrator (Rene Cutforth) states, afforded him a deeper insight into the nature of his experiences of war; a more profound understanding of the worlds he was encountering in India and Burma ('Where others had seen the outward symbols and ceremonies of Buddhism, he had glimpsed the very heart of the Buddhist faith', states Cutforth) that led to a deliquescence of the 'fragile universe of [his] self' and towards a subjectivity that was at once dispersed and unified, and wholly appropriate to the visionary war poet.

However, where Dai Smith, for instance, interprets Lewis's attraction to this peculiarly dispersed sense of self as a symptom of Lewis's deeper national-historical disjointedness - one that resulted in the intense anomic malaise that eventually 'exhausted him'[150] but might, under different circumstances, have benefited Wales - *The Fragile Universe* posits Lewis's writing in India and Burma as symptomatic of a profoundly Romantic, perhaps Keatsian, self-effacement, from which flowed his consummate war poetry and prose. That this was a necessarily unproblematic portrait of an honourable Welsh war poet at a time of British national consolidation is strongly confirmed by the film's glossing over of the undoubtedly controversial circumstances of Lewis's death early in the morning of 5 March 1944. The single bullet wound in Lewis's right temple had in official reports been explained as the consequence of freak accident with his loaded revolver, with the Battalion Roll of Honour listing Lewis under the heading 'Died from Battle Accidents'.[151] Of course, this was highly suspicious given Lewis's well-known propensity for depressive moods, particularly in the morning,[152] and indeed Pikoulis notes that among the Borderers it was 'universally assumed that Alun had killed himself.'[153] It is significant, then, that Lord Chalfont, one of Lewis's closest friends within the sixth battalion at the time, offers a mere outline of the events that unfolded on that morning, concluding the film with the sense of

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[150] Dai Smith, 'The Case of Alun Lewis', *Llafur*, 27.

[151] Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p. 234.

[152] Lewis once wrote that 'Unhappiness swells to the proportions of nightmare at that time and it is hard to overcome it enough to get up and shave and wash and be active'. Quoted in Pikoulis, ibid, p. 232.

[153] Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p. 235.

confusion that surrounded his death immediately after the event: '[a] message [came] through from the company to say that there had been some firing during the night, and that lieutenant Lewis had been shot'. The film offers no further clarification on the matter, leaving Lewis's death wide open to the interpretation that he had died a noble death in battle. That the film presents a portrait of a British war poet is further suggested when placed in contrast with Ormond's own elegy to Lewis, published in *Wales* soon after the latter's death:

> Through many requiems, and gentle summers
> and autumns, when the seeds
> of secret love burn and are lost in Wales, his grave will wait for snow
> that in our winter valleys covers the tilted fields
> where as a boy he learned to be a poet.[154] (Section III, lines 1-6)

Though in earlier sections the elegy does, in Ormond's typically lauding idiom, offer both a requiem and celebration of the unique yet *universally* life-affirming vision of a poet who 'holds in mind, perpetually, the struggle between thorn and flower', and who has 'seen the living enmity/ within the stone',[155] in a rare poetic gesture the speaker shifts in this final section almost towards that of the communal bard mourning the loss of an important *national* voice now buried in a distant land.[156] Here Wales is "our[s]", a communal land where life is lived and shared through all seasons, and where Lewis lies in spirit if not body. In contrast, *A Fragile Heaven* seems intent upon contributing Lewis to a wider *British* conception of the war poet.

The final film to discuss at length in this chapter concerns a poet who, given some of his pronouncements on the subject of Welsh nationhood, might be seen as a somewhat more difficult artist to promote to a British audience than the war poet Alun Lewis. Yet *R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet* (1972), broadcast to a national BBC2 audience on Easter Sunday, 1972, is a film quite clearly produced with a British audience in mind. In fact Thomas was, by 1972, not unfamiliar with the BBC's gestures in his direction. The poet had been a presence on the airwaves long before this, having

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[154] John Ormond, 'Selections From An Elegy for Alun Lewis', *Wales*, 3: 4 (1944), 6.
[155] The theme of universally balanced contrasts is, as I noted in my first chapter, one of Ormond's favourites. He frequently cited the Greek philosopher Heraclitus's remarks on the universal duality of life. Ormond clearly admired Lewis's sense of the unity of contrast; the final moments of *A Fragile Universe* quotes the latter's 'Shadows': 'He chooses best who does not choose/ Time and all its lies;/ Who makes the end and the beginning One/ Within himself grows wise'.
[156] Lewis was buried in a military cemetery in Burma on the afternoon of his death. See Pikoulis, *Alun Lewis: A Life*, p. 233.

written lectures in both Welsh and English for radio, besides his well-known radio verse drama, *The Minister* (1953).[157] Indeed, Roland Mathias has suggested that it was the coverage received by Thomas's 1952 volume *An Acre of Land* on the BBC's prestigious culture programme *The Critics* (broadcast on the Third Programme) that, twenty years earlier, brought the poet into the English literary spotlight. The three critics on that programme deemed it 'the best volume of poetry they had read in 1952',[158] and the result was the almost immediate selling out of all Thomas's work in print,[159] followed by the commissioning of *The Minister* and shortly afterwards the publication of a selected collection, *Song at the Year's Turning* (1955), introduced by the doyen of English poetry at that time, John Betjeman.

Given Thomas's considerable renown by this time, then, it seems appropriate that Ormond should produce a film profile of him at BBC Wales; and appropriate, too, that this profile should not dwell on some of Thomas's more trenchant and partisan views on Welsh nationhood. To be sure, 1972 probably seemed an appropriate time to profile the less lacerating side of the priest-poet. Readers had by this time been waiting four years for a new collection from Thomas, and it was this year's *H'm* that is often referred to as the one that marked the poet's shift into the poetry of 'spiritual search'[160] in his later years. Thomas had, a few years prior (1967) moved to a post as vicar of Aberdaron, that 'romantic sea-lashed spot on the remote tip of the Llyn peninsula', and it was here that, as Tony Brown and M. Wynn Thomas note, 'Thomas seems to have largely abandoned political poetry [...] and dedicated himself, under the influence of the ancient rocks of the region, to meditation on the eternal.'[161] Indeed, *H'm* contains little of the biting cynicism ('Holding our caps out/ Beside a framed view/ We never painted, counting/ The few casual cowries/ With which we are fobbed off'[162]) or visceral

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[157] Thomas was also the subject of a short *Monitor* segment in the 1960s; indeed Ormond's film borrows a short black and white clip from this.

[158] Roland Mathias, 'Literature in English', in Meic Stephens, ed., *The Arts in Wales 1950-75* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, 1979), p. 214. Mathias notes that Thomas's featuring on the programme was the result of 'one of those accidents with which literary history is sprinkled'. One of the presenters of *The Critics*, Alan Pryce-Jones, hailed from a Newtown family, and 'happened to come across' Thomas's work after the poet self-published a book with the Montgomeryshire Printing Company. See Mathias, ibid, p. 214.

[159] See John Betjeman, 'Introduction', in R.S. Thomas, *Song at the Year's Turning* (London, Rupert-Hart Davis, 1969 [1955]), p. 11.

[160] Tony Brown and M. Wynn Thomas, 'The Problems of Belonging', in M. Wynn Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 175.

[161] Ibid, p. 175.

[162] R.S. Thomas, 'Traeth Maelgwn', in *Collected Poems 1945-1990* (London: Pheonix, 2000), p. 191.

frustration ('Where can I go, then, from the smell/ Of decay, from the putrefying of a dead/ Nation?'[163]) of 1968's *Not That He Bought Flowers*.

Yet this is not to say that by this time Thomas had, by any stretch of the imagination, abandoned his commitment to Welsh nationhood. If his poetry was finding its emphases in the spiritual, his public appearances were no less outspoken on national matters than earlier in life. There is an illuminating comparison to be made, for instance, between the representation of Thomas in Ormond's film, and that of Thomas's own remarkable autobiographical lecture, *Y Llwybrau Gynt* (translated by Sandra Anstey as 'The Paths Gone By'), delivered in Welsh on BBC radio in the same year *R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet* was aired. *Y Llwybrau Gynt* charts the development of a self-described 'proper little bourgeois, brought up delicately'[164] into the prophetic spokesman of an ethno-linguistic national culture. Indeed in Brown and Thomas's memorable phrase, it was the lifelong effort to gain imaginative access to that culture that 'hurt R.S. Thomas into verse',[165] and it is this effort, and particularly the centrality of the Welsh language to it, that the poet describes in that lecture: 'I set about learning Welsh to get back to the real Wales of my imagination.'[166] Indeed this was a concern at the core of Thomas's imaginative vision, and one to which he would continue to return as a public figure in Wales from the mid-1970s.[167] His fascinating lecture at the 1976 National Eisteddfod at Cardigan, 'Abercuawg', further elaborates on the ideas established in *Y Llwybrau Gynt*, particularly the necessity to strive for an *imagined* nation, however putatively idealistic or unreal. Such remarks constitute a stark contrast with the activation of the poet in, for example, Betjeman's introduction to the impressively successful *Song at the Year's Turning*.[168] Even a cursory reading of this reveals the sense in which Betjeman sought to frame Thomas's work in a way that placed his commitment to Wales and the Welsh language firmly in the background to his more crucial spiritual vision: the blandly perfunctory way Betjaman describes Thomas's Welsh background is in marked contrast with the florid description of his spiritual imagination.[169]

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[163] R.S. Thomas, 'Reservoirs', in *Collected Poems*, p. 194.

[164] R.S. Thomas, 'Y Llwybrau Gynt' (The Paths Gone By)', trans by Sandra Anstey, in Sandra Anstey, ed., *R.S. Thomas: Selected Prose* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1983), p. 138.

[165] Brown and Thomas, 'The Problems of Belonging', in Thomas, ed., *Welsh Writing in English*, p. 166.

[166] Thomas, 'Y Llwybrau Gynt', in Anstey, ed., *Selected Prose*, p. 138.

[167] See Ned Thomas, 'Introduction', in Anstey, ed., *Selected Prose*, p. 15.

[168] The collection reached its seventh imprint in 1969.

[169] See in particular Ibid, p. 12.

Given Thomas's prominence among an English literary readership and his simultaneous stature as a figure within the Welsh nationalist movement in the 1970s, it is fair to say that Ormond's film - produced at BBC Wales for a British national audience – was at the interface between what Ned Thomas had recognised as 'disparate "English" and "Welsh" perspectives' on R.S. Thomas that '[drew] on different aspects of his work'.[170] Yet despite the nationalistic furies that were driving much of Thomas's thinking at this time, *R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet* is not a film that dwells on the Welsh dimension of his life and work. Indeed, the film's interpretative emphasis seems to me aptly symbolised in its opening sequence, in which the poet-priest is seen outside his church at the end of a service, bidding farewell to his congregation; he converses with them in Welsh, yet his words are drowned out by Ormond's introductory remarks: 'R.S. Thomas [...] is vicar of Aberdaron in Caernarfornshire...'. Critic Sam Adams confirms this in his brief but perceptive introduction to the transcript of the film, printed in a special issue of *Poetry Wales* in the same year: '[the film] does not touch on the poet's known attitudes to Wales and the Welsh language and his contempt for the shoddy culture of the Twentieth Century. Nor does it lead us along the well-trodden path to Iago Prytherch's door.'[171]

Indeed, while *Poetry Wales* readers may well have "known" about Thomas's attitudes at this time, those BBC2 viewers who did not would certainly not have learned much about these from the film. To Ormond's credit, the film does elicit some tantalizingly candid remarks from the poet, particularly on the perceived contradiction between Thomas's spiritual and artistic vocations. One notable instance is Thomas's cool response to Ormond's astonished probing. 'You are saying that the notion of Christ's Resurrection is a metaphor?' asks Ormond, to which Thomas replies

> We are not so hag-ridden today by heresy hunters as they were in the early centuries of the church. There's no doubt that we commit a lot more important heresies probably than by saying that the Resurrection and Incarnation are metaphors. My work as a poet has to deal with the presentation of imaginative truth. Christianity also seems to me to be a presentation of imaginative truth. So that there is [...] no necessary conflict between these two things at all.

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[170] Thomas, 'Introduction', in Anstey, ed., *Selected Prose*, p. 15.
[171] Sam Adams, introduction to transcript of John Ormond, 'R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet', *Poetry Wales*, 7:4 (1972), 48.

The film indeed affords Thomas the time to explain his complex, self-confessedly "Coleridgean" conception of the imaginative relationship between language and 'ultimate reality'. It is sensitive, too, to the centrality of the (working) pastoral landscapes of Wales to that conception, and though occasionally bordering on the 'Lord Privy Seal' effect in its visual strategy (Thomas's readings of poems such as 'Kneeling', 'The Moor' and 'The River' are accompanied by footage of, respectively, a church interior, the expansive Welsh moors, and Thomas surveying a small brook), the film's carefully considered visual vocabulary, its measured pacing of both in-frame movement and the diachronic shot, and the efficacious order in which Thomas's remarks are punctuated by readings of his poems, all successfully complement Thomas's measured, deceptively simplistic verse.

Significantly, in his lecture 'Abercuawg', Thomas lauds the medium of film as one able to capture something of the eternal that resides within nature, its ability to 'show flowers and the leaves quivering in the breeze, and not still to the point of lifelessness as on a postcard.'[172] It was this sense of the glimpses of eternality available in carefully contemplated visible life that he strove to capture in his own reflections on the Welsh pastoral; take the lines in 'The Moor', for instance, in which God 'makes himself felt,/ [...] In movement of the wind over grass', and 'air crumbled/ And broke on me generously as bread.' Ormond's film very adequately gestures in the direction of such spiritual musings. But as successful as the film is at this level, *R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet* is at all times charged with the absence of any discussion of the centrality of the nation, and particularly the Welsh language, to Thomas's vision. Besides the opening sequence, only one other scene contains any hint of the Welsh language; this is one in which shots of the church exterior are accompanied by the sound of a Welsh-language hymn; yet, tellingly, the Psalm that follows (Psalm 90) is read by Thomas in English. As its title implies, then, the film primarily concerns itself with the tension between spirituality and the romantic imagination, and in doing so amputates the question of the *national* imagination that, as Thomas's remarks on Abercuawg show, was fundamental to the poet's vision:

> [Man] will never see Abercuawg. But through striving to see it, through longing for it, through refusing to accept that it belongs to the past and has fallen into

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[172] R.S. Thomas, 'Abercuawg', trans. by Sandra Anstey, in Anstey, ed., *Selected Prose*, p. 161.

oblivion; through refusing to accept some second-hand substitute, he will succeed in preserving it as an eternal possibility.[173]

R.S. Thomas's remarks here on the importance of striving toward a common imaginative space through which the national community, whatever its social or institutional limitations, is able to "preserve" itself, seems to me an apt place to conclude this chapter on documentaries that were deliberately produced to perform the function of activating in the public sphere the cultural legacy of the Welsh nation. In fact Ormond produced a number of other such films that I do not have the space to examine here in further detail. I have chosen in this chapter to focus on those films I feel are most representative of Ormond's ekphrastic approach to "prestige" documentary filmmaking, but other examples of Ormond's programmes on creative artists include the series *Private View*, aired in 1970, which consisted of direct-to-camera interviews with a range of British cultural figures including John Grierson, Robert Graves and Leslie Norris. Another is *Fortissimo Jones*, a documentary about the Swansea-born composer Daniel Jones, produced in time for the latter's sixty-fifth birthday in 1977. This too predominantly adopted the interview format rather than the "prestige" documentary films examined here. A later series, however, *Poems in Their Place* (1982), consisted of seven short films that juxtaposed readings of the work of poets such as Dylan Thomas, A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats with footage of the places in which they were written. This series was thus perhaps closer to Ormond's earlier work in its ambitious efforts, in Angus Wilson's words, to 'produce something original of its own, a work of art' alongside its attempt to posit culture within a specific locale. That the series was produced on what was very evidently a tiny budget and within a mere ten-minute weekly slot (meagre in comparison to Ormond's earlier documentaries, which frequently extended past the forty-minute mark) is testament to the new set of priorities that was shaping British broadcasting by the 1980s.

Indeed, part of what I have attempted in this chapter has been to explore the extent to which these British socio-economic and cultural forces strongly exerted themselves upon the "activation" of Welsh culture within the context of Welsh broadcasting. I believe that Ormond's cultural documentaries should be understood as, in large part, examples of the particular brand of British cultural policy that dominated the field of broadcasting in the post-war period, policy that was still strongly

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[173] Ibid, p. 164.

undergirded by the Arnoldian-Reithian impulse to inform and educate the public on matters of high culture. Of course, this was an impulse that was itself under severe pressure in this era, as evidenced in the late 1970s by Lord Annan's Government Report on Broadcasting. This was a policy document that sought to distance itself from the earlier Pilkington Report's implicit paternalism, and perhaps relished its demise:

> the most striking change in broadcasting was brought about by the change during this period in the culture of our country. The ideals of middle class culture, so felicitously expressed by Matthew Arnold a century ago, which had created a continuum of taste and opinion [...], found it ever more difficult to accommodate the new expressions of life in the sixties.[174]

While such remarks may appear here to signal a shift towards a more democratic, egalitarian approach to the construction of the idea of "culture" in British broadcasting policy, what it actually heralded, as the developments that have taken place since then have shown, was an enormous shift towards what Raymond Williams has called a form of cultural "commercialism"[175] in line with the neo-liberalist thinking emerging in all areas of British life at this time – an erosion not only of elitist cultural hierarchies but also the perception of cultural value itself. In this sense, Ormond's ambitions to produce carefully crafted creative artefacts - ekphrastic film-poems, as it were - can be understood as part of the effort to resist such trends, as evidenced also in programmes such as the BBC's *Monitor* and *Civilization*, and in ITV's *Tempo*. These too were part of a general resistance to what were perceived as the dehumanizing, relativizing effects of the phenomenon we now call postmodernism - a resistance to the process through which, as Fredric Jameson describes, 'the older language of the "work" - the work of art, the masterwork – [is] displaced by the rather different language of the "text" [...], a language from which that achievement of organic or monumental form is strategically excluded'.[176] Ormond's "prestige" documentaries can certainly be viewed in both form and content as a perhaps somewhat ironic effort to consolidate "organic",

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[174] *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (London: HMSO, 1977), p. 14.

[175] In fact, Williams had (typically) foreseen these developments much earlier; it was in 1961 that he delivered the lecture 'Communications and Community', in which he outlines his interpretation of the new "commercialism". See Raymond Williams, 'Communications and Community', in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 27.

[176] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logical of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 77.

"monumental" cultural forms in the very medium contributing to their demise. In this, they certainly embody the tensions and anxieties of British culture at that time.

But while, for the sake of historical clarity, the British cultural dimension of films produced under the umbrella of the British Broadcasting Corporation has necessarily to be emphasised, these films also deserve to be understood in terms of their place in the narrative of Welsh cultural history. As I have attempted to explain in my readings of the films in this chapter, I feel that they are best understood as both contributions to and embodiments of the complex range of social and cultural tensions at play in the Welsh public sphere in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed the field of Welsh culture was, perhaps more than any other, a deeply partisan area of public thought at this time, and the evident lack of a single, stable interpretative structure into which Welsh culture could be activated resulted in a severe cultural fracture. Ormond's cultural documentaries at BBC Wales were an important part of the effort to repair this fracture, and though they can be interpreted as having attempted to do so in a contributionist, universalizing interpretative idiom, this is not to say they should necessarily be viewed solely as products of the predominance of "British" cultural trends in Wales at that time. Rather they deserve themselves to be "activated" in the present as the fascinating instances in Welsh cultural history that they are, as evidence of a peculiarly divided but nevertheless evolving Welsh cultural tradition at that pivotal time in the history of the nation.

Chapter Five: Historiography

[T]he production line of broad-based programmes on the history of Wales should not be seen as the Duty of Television being done but rather a signal that the nature of historical experience and of its method of enquiry has begun to enter the general consciousness of Wales. I would like to think that the presence of the Past in our daily lives has been underscored by the efforts of all those who had made films on our history in this decade.[1]

Dai Smith, 'In the Presence of the Past'

When we attempt to answer the question 'What is history?' our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question what view we take of the society in which we live.[2]

E.H. Carr, *What is History?*

Dai Smith, in the passage above, writes with reference to the 1980s, a decade of considerable successes in Welsh television documentary with the production of two widely acclaimed series on Welsh history (HTV and Channel 4's joint project *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1985)[3] and BBC Wales's *Wales! Wales?* (1984).[4]) It was also the decade in which Ormond's output as a producer-director was in sharp decline as he approached retirement, but I believe Smith's remarks also ring true of those decades in which Ormond was most productive. Of particular significance to my study is Smith's suggestion that the history we see on the television screen is no mere superficial regurgitation of the true work of historical enquiry that goes on unheeded in the academy, but that, allied to the academic work on which it is based, television history has a deeper, more profoundly *social*, significance than such a formulation would imply. Such programmes should ideally contribute to the development of the 'general consciousness' of the nation, and are, as such, complexly related to it. Indeed,

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[1] Dai Smith, 'In the Presence of the Past', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 38.

[2] E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1961]), p. 8.

[3] Presented by Gwyn Alf Williams and Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, directed by Colin Thomas.

[4] Presented by Dai Smith and directed by Selwyn Roderick. This was also the decade that saw major developments in Welsh broadcasting more generally, with the advent of a dedicated Welsh-language television channel, S4C, after much political wrangling (see Elain Price, *Hanes Sefydlu S4C: Nid Sianel Gyffredin Mohoni* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, Forthcoming)), and the rise of Welsh radio (in Welsh and in English: BBC Radio Cymru had begun broadcasting in 1977, and BBC Radio Wales in 1978).

such remarks align with one of the arguments I have been building throughout this thesis; namely that the work Ormond was producing at BBC Wales in the 1960s and 1970s was no mere passive reflection of what was happening within Wales's borders - its high culture, for instance, or, as I will discuss in the following chapter, its socio-ethnic make-up. They were in fact active, constitutive elements within the general development of those concepts within the Welsh public sphere. Smith's remarks are moreover illuminated when read alongside those of the historian Edward Hallett Carr, written almost thirty years earlier. Carr's brilliantly perceptive words no doubt informed the historiographical perspective that Smith evokes when he suggests that we live 'in the presence of the past'; as Carr notes, our very conception of history is inscribed in – and in turn written by – our own society and our own 'position in time'.[5] It is with these observations in mind that I want to examine the documentaries Ormond produced that engage with Welsh history. As I will shortly suggest, the years of his creative prime were those in which the very conception of Welsh history was changing rapidly in tandem with Welsh society itself. Ormond's films engage with these changes in ways that, if examined properly, can enhance our understanding of both. It is necessary, first, however, to examine in more detail the nature, the significance, and indeed the *history* of the history documentary as a televisual form.

Until quite recently, discussion surrounding the presence of history on television has chiefly taken place between the two centrally interested parties: media practitioners and historians. Yet, while the modern era of acclaimed high-budget history series has seen both producers and historians benefit in equal measure from something of a mutual understanding, their relationship has not always been harmonious. As critic Dirk Eitzen wrote in the mid-1990s, long after heavyweight historians had found success on television, but before they had begun to convince their colleagues that the endeavour was worthwhile,

> [a]cademic historians naturally tend to evaluate historical documentaries
> according to how well they do what academic historians are supposed to do. Their
> verdict, when analysing extant historical documentaries, is almost always that
> they do not do that very well.[6]

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[5] Carr, *What is History?*, p. 8.
[6] Dirk Eitzen, 'Against the Ivory Tower: An Apologia for "Popular" Historical Documentaries', in Alan Rosenthal and John Corner, eds., *New Challenges for Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 410. The article was first published in the journal *Film-Historia*, 5: 1 (1995).

This is a position that Simon Schama - a historian who, early in the new millennium, certainly profited from the use of history on television - ironizes in his own (perhaps predictable) defence of the medium:[7]

> the subtlety of history is too elusive, too fine and slippery to be caught in television's big, hammy fist; [...] try as it might, television can't help but simplify the complications; personalise the abstract; sentimentalise the ideological and just forget about the deep structures.[8]

This is an argument that persists. In a review of the recent BBC Wales series fronted by Huw Edwards, *The Story of Wales* (2012), for instance, Welsh historian Gethin Matthews complained of the series' tendency to fall foul of the 'common weakness[es] of television documentaries',[9] noting that 'a television documentary presented by an authoritative voice needs to play it straight and direct – A leads to B, leads to C and so on. [...] Fuzziness replaces clarity.'[10] These are, of course, legitimate concerns. There is no doubt that television's treatment of history grossly simplifies what are invariably complex, contested issues. Yet, by the early 2000s – in part inspired by what critics Ann Gray and Erin Bell have called a "renaissance"[11] in history programming occurred, a boom in which history broke 'out of the zone it had been confined to on BBC 2 in the 1990s and found its way into virtually every nook and cranny of [...] television',[12] resulting in the enhancement of the careers (and, no doubt, pay-packets) of many academic historians. In consequence, media producers and the academy began discussing the issue in earnest once more, and indeed came to something of an understanding. One academic conference in particular signalled this shift. Organised by the Institute of Historical Research in 2002, 'History and the Media' invited those from the history academy and from the media to engage in a dialogue on the relationship between their respective fields. The result was a book, *History and the Media* (2004), edited by David Cannadine, whose title signalled the primary concerns of its

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[7] Schama wrote and presented the high-profile BBC history series *A History of Britain* in 2000.

[8] Simon Schama, 'Television and the Trouble with History', in David Cannadine, ed., *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 20. Schama's chivalrous defence of television history may be related to the massive success of his own BBC television series, *A History of Britain* (BBC (2000-2002)).

[9] Gethin Matthews, 'Living with our History', *Agenda*, 46 (2012), 72.

[10] Ibid, 71-72.

[11] Ann Gray and Erin Bell, *History on Television* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

[12] Kevin Williams, 'Flattened Visions from Timeless Machines: History in the Mass Media', *Media History*, 13:2 (2007), 127.

contributors. The consensus that was reached is encapsulated in a motif that litters the pages of the book; namely, that the endeavour of the television historian, whatever his necessary simplifications of the topic at hand (and it was overwhelmingly "he" – of the twelve contributors to the book, one is female) is justified so long as he nobly 'provide[s] a bridge',[13] 'bridg[es] the gulf'[14] between the academy and the general population. As historian-cum-presenter[15] Tristram Hunt clarifies in his contribution to *History and the Media*, '[t]elevision history is doing its job if it engages general attention and manages to encourage students into the lecture hall or readers into the bookshop'.[16]

Yet what such a book ensures, with its total lack of commentary from outside the realms of history or the media, is that the evaluation and understanding of this peculiar cultural phenomenon, the 'history documentary', remains locked in these terms. Yes, television history is a simplified, even vulgarized, version of the "real thing", but it is justified in this provided it adheres to the facts and courteously guides citizens toward the guardians of "true" historical understanding. The historian gets his paycheck, the producer gets his viewing figures, and the public service remit is fulfilled. The problem, however, is that such an evaluative framework overlooks many of the deeper complexities of the role that television history performs within given societies. One way to bring these issues into focus is to look more closely at the reasons *why* television takes, in Schama's words, the 'big, hammy fist' to history that it does. These technological and stylistic features are what media theorist Gary R. Edgerton draws attention to in his description of what he calls television's "presentism". Edgerton notes that television necessarily functions within a certain set of formal requirements which impact upon the ways in which history can reasonably be treated in the medium. Television, until very recently, with the advent of the Internet and "on demand" viewing, has predominantly been broadcast live to audiences of, frequently, millions. In this sense television is quintessentially a medium of the present, a medium of "immediacy"; in order to attract and retain the enormous audiences demanded by

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[13] This formulation is used by both Taylor Downing in 'Bringing the Past to the Small Screen', in David Cannadine, ed., *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 16 and Max Hastings, 'Hacks and Scholars', in David Cannadine, ed., *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 115.

[14] Tristram Hunt, 'How Does Television Enhance History?', in David Cannadine, ed., *History and the Media* (Bastingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 96.

[15] And, more recently, cum-Labour politician and Shadow Secretary of State for Education.

[16] Ibid, p. 95.

advertising and/or the justification of a licence fee, it has to respond to a correspondingly enormous number of social pressures. In particular, it has to appeal to the immediate tastes, cultural assumptions, and ideological requirements of the society to which it broadcasts. Television's treatment of history is, then, as historians like Schama and Matthews would agree, necessarily 'less committed to rendering a factually accurate description as its highest priority than to animating the past for millions by accentuating those matters that are most relevant and engaging to audiences in the present.'[17] Yet where Schama and Matthews find in this a fundamental flaw, Edgerton notes that this should rather invite us to examine 'how and why a remembered version is being constructed at a particular time [...] than whether a specific rendition of the past is historically correct and reliable above all else.'[18]

Indeed, history on television, contingent as it is upon the pressures and requirements of the present can, in this sense, be viewed as a good illustration of E.H. Carr's central thesis in *What is History?* Carr's provocative question was posed in 1961 in order to trigger a debate about the nature of historical enquiry at a time of radical social and cultural change, and the series of lectures that was later published as *What is History?*, delivered at Cambridge University under the name of the great liberal historian, George Macaulay Trevelyan, was in large part a critique of the methodological assumptions upon which historians like Trevelyan had rested since the nineteenth century. Carr revealed these assumptions to be the complacent product of a nineteenth-century liberal order that emphasised economic and technological progress over social critique. In defiance of this, Carr stressed the importance of examining the ideological assumptions that condition all historical enquiry, no matter how ostensibly "factual" its evidence: 'The belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy',[19] he argued, and through this emphasis on the fundamental contingency of all historical enquiry, Carr came to the conclusion to which I referred at the start of this chapter; namely that history invariably 'reflects our own position in time'.[20] *What is History?*

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[17] Gary R. Edgerton, 'Introduction: Television as Historian: A Different Kind of History Altogether', in Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 4.

[18] Ibid, p. 6.

[19] Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 12-16.

[20] One of the major implications of this assertion is that historical enquiry and interpretation, shaped as it is by the complex historical forces of the present, itself becomes the object of historical enquiry; insofar as history books and, indeed, television programmes embody the assumptions and requirements

therefore signalled the emergence of a newly reflexive approach to history, an approach now commonly referred to as "historiography". This was an approach of particular use to historians and intellectuals of the Left, who were now able to demonstrate, as Carr did, the ways in which dominant historical grand narratives are not, as was once thought, neutral observations of the past, but in fact the embodiment of identifiable sets of political assumptions. Historian Keith Jenkins suggests that such a critical conception of history should encourage us to view the endeavour not simply as learning 'something that is always already there in some natural or obvious way and to which you innocently, objectively and disinterestedly respond', but as, in his terms, a 'field of force'.[21] History is, by this account,

> a series of ways of organising the past by and for interested parties which always comes from somewhere and for some purpose and which, in their direction, would like to carry you with them. This field is a 'field of force' because in it these directions are contested (have to be fought for). It is a field that variously includes and excludes, which centres and marginalises views of the past in ways and in degrees that refract the powers of those forwarding them.[22]

One significant product of this realisation was the formation, in the 1970s, of new associations of historians with explicit ideological agendas, such as the History Workshop movement and, in Wales, the Welsh Labour History Society. These sought primarily to combat dominant historical narratives by revealing them to be precisely these – narratives - and by re-writing them from the perspective of those that had traditionally been marginalised and excluded by them, in particular the working class. As Raphael Samuel, one of the founders of the History Workshop movement, clarified in his later work, *Theatres of Memory* (1994), these organisations were interested not only in the kinds of history being written and taught, but, simultaneously, in the related issue of the means through which these dominant histories were becoming hegemonic and the effects they were having upon society. Historiographical enquiry, then, should focus on all those areas in which discourses relating to the past play out, the 'ensemble

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of the present, they now become "primary" as well as "secondary" historical evidence. I will return to the significance of this shortly.

[21] Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 71.

[22] Ibid, p. 71.

of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed.'[23]

Given that, by the 1970s, television was one of the few means of mass communication in western society, one which was rapidly becoming the most visible medium through which 'ideas of history are embedded', and which so obviously, in its treatment of history, manifested the pressures of the political present, it was unsurprising that intellectuals of this bent began to turn their attention to it. One short but important monograph published in 1978, Colin McArthur's *Television and History*, adopted the Marxist-Althusserian critical approach that had been pioneered in the influential journal *Screen* throughout the 1970s; as a result it (somewhat predictably) found that 'the dominant practices in British historiography and in British television production [...] are highly congenial to the maintenance of the socio-economic status quo'.[24] But, of more pertinence to my study, a special issue of the *History Workshop Journal* in 1981 on 'History and Television', while similarly viewing television as the medium which 'exerts the most pervasive influence on our images of the past',[25] advocated a somewhat more eclectic approach to television's use of history in comparison with McArthur's singular emphasis on class. In line with Samuel's concern with the presence of history, not only in the maintenance of political hegemonies, but also more generally as a 'social form of knowledge', the contributors to the issue suggest critics should be sensitive to the ways in which historical narratives on television

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[23] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 8.

[24] Colin McArthur, *Television and History* (London: BFI, 1978), p. 15.

[25] Susan Barrowclough and Raphael Samuel, 'History and Television: Editorial Introduction', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 172. Indeed, despite Barrowclough and Samuel's urge to critics in 1981, critics did not take up their suggestions until much later. This began to take place from the mid-1990s, when film critics in the United States began to examine the representations of history in cinema; Robert A. Rosenstone's *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Vivian Sobchack's edited *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (London: Routledge, 1997) are two important examples. But in Britain, the groundwork undertaken by McArthur and those writing for *History Workshop Journal* in 1981 was not taken up in earnest until after the "renaissance" of television history described by Ann Gray and Erin Bell; as they note, 'debate about television history has not developed greatly since the 1970s, and has remained couched in terms of the medium's ability to do 'proper' history'. Ann Gray and Erin Bell, 'Televising History: The Past(s) on the Small Screen', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10: 1 (2007), 5. The opening of the floodgates has, however, released a spate of interest since the early 2000s; special issues of academic journals such as the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (10: 1 (2007)), *Media History* (13: 2-3 (2007)) and *View: Journal of European Televison History and Culture* (2: 3 (2013)) are testament to the predominance and pertinence of the phenomenon in contemporary society.

reinforce and nourish our more generalised apprehension of past-present relationships and confirm or qualify our common-sense view of what constitutes history. [They should] explore, both empirically and theoretically, larger contingent areas such as ways of seeing, the aesthetics of representation, modes of perception, the psychology of memory and the formation of class and *national mythologies*.[26] (Emphasis added)

As they suggest, this entails a flexible approach to the disparate effects of televisual discourse; a discourse that, although less intellectually and argumentatively rigorous than academic history, is nevertheless profoundly influential in its social effects. Indeed, the corresponding implication of this view is that television, in its treatment and dissemination of history to the population, performs a role that has been historically crucial to the maintenance of human societies.

Of course, as I have been emphasising throughout this thesis, and as Barrowclough and Samuel suggest above in their reference to the formation of 'national mythologies', the 'imagined community' in which television acts out its role as, in the terms of some prominent media theorists, "bard",[27] "chronicler"[28] or 'large-scale cultural ritual'[29] in modern times, is, principally, *national*.[30] Furthermore, while it is possible to interpret the social role of history on television as the modern manifestation of a basic, primordial social mechanism, it is also possible to view it as a central tool of the modern liberal nation state (or, indeed, sub-state nation). It is no accident that the most influential historians in nineteenth- and early-twentieth century British society were political liberals who believed it to be of primary importance that their work should reach the widest audience possible. As liberal educationalist Matthew Arnold knew, educating the populace on issues that could be framed as being of common concern – the "best" culture and the history of the nation – was central to the process of social mollification that was the requirement of industrial development and economic growth dependent upon a flexible, educated labour force. As David Cannadine notes, this view was shared by prominent historians such as G.M. Trevelyan:

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[26] Ibid, 175.

[27] John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London: Methuen, 1978).

[28] Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, 'Political Ceremony and Instant History', in Anthony Smith, ed., *Television: An International History*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 104.

[29] Edgerton, 'Introduction', in Edgerton and Rollins, eds., *Television Histories*, p. 8.

[30] It was this implicitly ritualistic, "bardic" dimension of broadcasting that one Welsh independent television company sought to highlight in their name: 'Teliesyn'. See Dafydd Sills-Jones's *Prosiect Teliesyn*, http://www.teliesyn.co.uk/ and Dafydd Sills-Jones, *History Documentary on UK Terrestrial Television, 1982-2002* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Aberystwyth University, 2009).

> Like his great-uncle [the revered Whig historian Lord Macaulay] and his father [Liberal politician and writer Sir George Otto Trevelyan] [...] Trevelyan believed that the prime purpose of history lay in its didactic public function. History should be written, and history should be read, "to instruct, enlarge and cultivate the human mind" in the responsibilities of good citizenship. Accounts of past events, past controversies, and past conflicts, enabled men and women to cultivate a "more intelligent patriotism".[31]

As I will discuss shortly, this view was further shared by the Welsh liberal modernizers of the late nineteenth century. Given the dominance of such an ideology in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, it was something of an historical inevitability that the BBC, an institution that has been such a central agent in the construction of a British 'imagined community', should adopt the mantle of national educator in historical matters too.[32] It was thus with this liberal educational imperative at its core that the BBC pursued history as a major theme after the inauguration of television. As Robert Dillon confirms in his useful history of the form on television, the BBC saw its purpose in the broad Reithian sense as being one of 'serv[ing] as a beacon of enrichment for all its viewers and listeners by maintaining, promoting and presenting a discernible national identity at home and overseas'.[33] Dillon interprets the exponential rise of factual history programmes on British television in the years after 1946 as being a continuation of this.[34] Carr's thesis that all historical enquiry 'reflects our own position in time', then, would appear to hold true taking into consideration the rise of this form of educational history broadcasting in Britain. Indeed, a closer look at the thematics of such programmes as they developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century further confirms this sense of the political expediency of history; as Dillon notes, history on British television has consistently reacted to the requirements and developments of British historical circumstances. Early programming of the late 1940s such as *Germany Under Control* (1946) and *The Heart of an Empire* (1946), for

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[31] David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 183-4.

[32] Indeed Trevelyan himself saw the potential of broadcasting in this respect, and was a regular contributor to the BBC for many years. As Cannadine notes, 'by such broadcasts his position as the national historian and public educator was only further enhanced.' Trevelyan's older brother had also been pivotal in the early years of the BBC; he had sat on the 1923 Sykes Committee that set in stone the BBC's public service remit. Ibid, pp. 25-26.

[33] Robert Dillon, *History on British Television: Constructing Nation, Nationality and Collective Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 36.

[34] This rose from 38 programmes between 1946 and 1949, to 765 in the decade 1950-1959, on to 2772 in the following decade and over 4000 in the 1970s. Ibid, p. 70. This was, moreover, the rise in solely factual programmes; these numbers do not take into account the pervasiveness of history in, for instance, costume dramas and literary adaptations.

instance, 'offer[ed] reassurance that a bitter enemy has been tamed and that London is still functioning as the capital city of the world'.[35] Moreover, Dillon suggests the sharp rise in history programming in the 1970s can be attributed to wider socio-cultural anxieties: 'factual history programmes of the 1970s contain an ongoing search for reassurance regarding Britain's then shaky present and uncertain future'; in many programmes 'the past became an anchor for the drifting present.'[36] Indeed on this score, the appearance of Simon Schama's *A History of Britain* so soon after the referenda on the devolution of British state power is no accident. And bringing the focus back to broadcasting in Wales, academics undertaking recent work on contemporary Welsh television come to similar conclusions. Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams's work on the BBC Wales 'historical reality television' series *Coal House* (2007) and *Coal House at War* (2008), in which members of the public are invited to spend time living in a simulated historical environments, find that the series' peculiar format

> respond[s] to the televisual ecology and wider cultural trends, including the growth of genealogy as a leisure pursuit, the changing nature of museums and other historical venues as interactive sites of heritage 'experience' and performance, and a focus upon specifically social history that informs many such developments.[37]

Moreover, a remark from a director of the recent blockbuster BBC Wales series *The Story of Wales* (2012) provides a telling discursive marker of the global economic imperatives of contemporary Welsh society and its impact upon that society's examination of the past. The director in question describes the production company's (Green Bay Media) efforts in representing Wales as 'engaged, […] up and at it, […]

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[35] Ibid, p. 36.

[36] Ibid, p. 62. Asa Briggs agrees; he notes that the decade began with a new series, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, which, although dramatic in format, broadcast on New Year's Day 1970 signalled a decade in which '[history's] broadcast appeal increased'. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V:* Competition, p. 937. Indeed, it had been on the increase for some time with the success of history lectures delivered straight to screen by respected historian AJP Taylor, followed by major BBC productions such as *The Great War* (1964) and *Civilization* (1969). Drama, too, continued these themes – the enormously successful *The Onedin Line* spanned this decade (1971-1980) and contributed to, in Briggs's terms 'the appeal to history' in the 1970s. Ibid, p. 946. Incidentally it was Alun Richards, one of Ormond's close literary friends, who served as principal scriptwriter to the series.

[37] Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams, 'The Appeal of the Past in Historical Reality Television: *Coal House at War* and its Audiences', *Media History*, 17: 1 (2011), 80.

internationally connected, […] changing, […] on the move. That's been our big theme, that's how we sold this series originally.'[38]

It is clear, then, that if we are to understand the kinds of history programmes Ormond was producing, their form, their particular interpretations of Welsh history and, further, their contribution to the Welsh public sphere, it is important to keep in sharp focus the historical forces and ideological pressures that were impacting upon them. As I have been emphasising throughout this thesis, these were forces and pressures that were in large part the product of Wales's *stateless* status. I will thus be keeping in view the ways in which Ormond's historical films stem from BBC Wales's efforts to utilize history in order to differentiate Wales from wider British national grand narratives. Indeed, his films can in this sense be viewed as media parallels of the utilization of history in the heritage movement in Wales, something that Bella Dicks explores in her book *Heritage, Place and Community* (2000). Dicks notes that heritage is particularly 'germane to the self-assertion of marginalised or peripheralised 'imagined communities'', particularly in stateless 'nation[s]-in-waiting' such as Wales: '[h]istory', Dicks argues, 'is a central arena within which claims about the meaning of "Welshness" can be publicly aired, debated and contested.'[39] To be sure, BBC Wales had been utilizing its position as a national broadcaster to produce programmes on matters of Welsh history since before the Second World War, though the major precedents for Ormond's history programmes were heard on radio in Wales after this time, with series such as *The Making of Modern Wales (1815-1914)* (1955) and, across two series broadcast during the winters of 1958-60, *Wales Through the Ages*.[40] Programmes such as these were significant attempts to educate audiences on matters of Welsh history at a time when popular history books of this sort were less than abundant. Yet, as I want to go on to explain presently, BBC Wales's efforts to construct a Welsh-centric history to contest the histories of Britain dominating at that time was no simple task. For, in doing so, the institution had simultaneously to balance Wales's own internal historical

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[38] Anonymous, quoted in Steve Blandford and Ruth McElroy, 'Memory, Television and the Making of the BBC's 'The Story of Wales', *View: Journal of European Television, History and Culture*, 2: 3 (2013), 125.

[39] Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 79.

[40] *Wales Through the Ages* was a particular success. Each episode in the series invited a specialist to offer their take on the period or theme in question. Topics were chosen by an advisory board consisting of eminent Welsh historians and cultural critics Thomas Parry, Glyn Roberts and David Williams. It also set the precedent for the successful and influential Welsh history books that stemmed from broadcasting in the 1970s and 1980s (more on which shortly); *Wales Through the Ages* (1959-1960), edited by A.J. Roderick, spanned two volumes and contained the transcripts of every episode in the series.

contradictions and fractures: the competing ways in which it understood its own past. To borrow Keith Jenkins' terms, BBC Wales was operating within a historical 'field of force', particularly between the 1950s and the 1980s; indeed, it was during these years that the Welsh historiographical 'field of force' was it its most turbulent. It is thus useful to draw a parallel here with the related aims of Wales's National Museum, which, as historian of that institution Rhiannon Mason notes, is similarly 'expected to play specific national roles within a wider nationally charged public sphere.' She continues:

> It may be challenged in terms of what it is perceived to be saying or not saying about the nation and will be used by all sorts of different parties as a kind of 'staging ground' [...] for wider debates and conversations about national identities, national cultures and national histories. [...] Indeed, the challenge for the museum is to balance the conflicting pressures they produce.[41]

I believe that a closer examination of Ormond's films reveals very similar forces at work. It is necessary, first, to acquire a better understanding of some of these conflicting pressures in Wales.

Welsh Historiography

To examine the contested nature of Welsh historiography in the twentieth century, in particular the developments that were taking place while Ormond was active, we must begin with the new interpretations of Welsh history that emerged out of the ascendancy of Liberal politics in Wales in the late nineteenth century. This ascendancy was, of course, the product of an earlier set of historical circumstances; an increasingly wealthy and educated Welsh Nonconformist bourgeoisie that had found a political voice in Liberalism and had waged an "assault", in R. Merfyn Jones's words, 'on the citadels of landed wealth and Anglican religion'[42] that was inimical to its spiritual and political worldview. Liberalism provided the political model, but, as Jones notes, this was not enough to satisfy a bourgeoisie that, Welsh-speaking and deeply Nonconformist as it was, felt a sense of national individuality and, as a consequence, entitlement:

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[41] Rhiannon Mason, *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 31.

[42] R. Merfyn Jones, 'Beyond Identity? The Reconstruction of the Welsh', *Journal of British Studies*, 31: 4 (1992), 334.

> The program of Welsh Liberalism was constructed around an orthodox enough litany of Liberal demands: disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales, land and educational reform, and temperance. By themselves these were unremarkable in the context of British liberal thinking, but they came to represent a specifically Welsh political program that led to a modest but nevertheless significant recognition of Wales as a distinct country that required at least some particularist Welsh remedies.[43]

One representative offshoot of this Liberal-inspired nationalism was *Cymru Fydd*, 'Young Wales', a movement advocating Welsh Home Rule and a place for Wales on the imperial world stage. While Cymru Fydd was short-lived,[44] the nationalist momentum that generated it scored many major successes: the Welsh Sunday Act (1881) and the (eventual) disestablishment of the Church (1920), as well as the famous landslide general election of 1906, in which every Parliamentary seat in Wales was Liberal. New national institutions came to fruition: the University of Wales (1893), the National Library of Wales (1907), the National Museum (1907), and the Welsh Department of the Board of Education (1907). It was, of course, no accident that these were educational institutions that could help to promote a singularly Welsh historical consciousness; as historian Huw Pryce notes, Welsh Liberal intellectuals knew that only a focus on the Welsh past could give 'legitimacy to claims that modern Wales was a nation reborn'.[45] They therefore set out on a project of rewriting a history for themselves, and allied this with an educational drive to combat the English histories that, as Pryce notes, at that time 'dominated the history taught in Welsh schools'.[46] In these years Welsh Liberals strenuously promoted the history of the Welsh in books and periodicals, the most notable examples being O.M. Edwards's books *Hanes Cymru* and *Wales* (1895 and 1901, alongside his many periodicals of the 1890s), John Rhys and David Brynmor-Jones's *The Welsh People* (1900), Owen Rhoscomyl's (Robert Scourfield Mills) *Flame-bearers of Welsh History* (1905) and J.E. Lloyd's *History of Wales* (1911). These were the histories that were, as historian Gwyn Alf Williams went

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[43] Ibid, 336.

[44] As the *New Companion to the Literature of Wales* notes, the movement was always fractured by a strongly Liberal contingent that was 'indifferent to the cause of Wales except in religious terms', and the movement suffered irreparable damage after a fateful meeting in Newport in 1896. See 'Cymru Fydd', in Meic Stephens, ed., *The New Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 137.

[45] Huw Pryce, *J.E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation's Past* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 91.

[46] Ibid, p. 7.

on to explain in the 1980s, 'to shape the outlook of whole sectors of Welsh life'[47] in the

twentieth century. And, confirming Carr's assertion that historical narratives are

invariably shaped by the requirements of the present, they were histories that were

acceptable to a Liberal-nationalist Wales. As Pryce asserts, the Victorian understanding

of Liberal democratic nationhood was based upon the post-Darwinian evolutionary

principle that 'the explanation of phenomena – be they nations, languages or biological

species – lay in their origins and subsequent development over time, coupled with

historicist notions, derived ultimately from [German Enlightenment philosopher Johann

Gottfried] Herder, that each nation possessed a unique individuality.'[48] Indeed, with

most of these Welsh Liberal historians hailing from agricultural families embedded in

rural, deeply Nonconformist Welsh communities, the 'unique individuality' they

constructed was predicated upon what they saw as the best of that world. This was a

mythology that was embodied in the myth of the *gwerin*, which G.A. Williams archly

explains as

> a cultivated, educated, often self-educated, responsible, self-disciplined,
> respectable but on the whole genially poor or perhaps small-propertied people,
> straddling groups perceived as classes in other, less fortunate societies. Welsh-
> speaking, Nonconformist, imbued with the more social virtues of Dissent, bred on
> the Bible and good practice, it was open to the more spiritual forms of a wider
> culture and was dedicated to spiritual self-improvement.[49]

Yet, as admirable as the *gwerin* might have been on its own terms, it was not an

historical mythology that could easily accommodate change. The new industrial society

that was developing with such rapidity and confidence in the south Wales valleys,

sucking the life out of rural Wales, was, to many who held allegiance to the idea of a

gwerin, basically anathema.[50] In contrast to the agricultural *gwerin's* spirituality,

temperance, and ancient tongue, the urbanised working class south was boisterous,

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[47] Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?: A History of the Welsh* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1985]), p. 232.
[48] Pryce, *J.E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History*, p. 93.
[49] Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 237.
[50] There was, as some historians have noted, a degree of irony in this fact that this Liberal Welsh revival was so heavily predicated on the economic successes of the south Walean industrial society to which it was so often averse. As Williams notes, 'It is against this massive growth of an industrial Wales of British and imperial character that every other Welsh phenomenon must be set. What has come to be thought of as 'traditional', Nonconformist, radical Welsh-speaking Wales in particular, that Wales which created so many of the characteristic Welsh institutions, notably the educational, was in some basic senses a by-product of this industrialisation, without which its success would have been impossible.' Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 180. Similarly, Dai Smith views it as an 'inescapable paradox', that the 'very economic vitality which gave substance to Welsh political confidence was undercutting the social basis on which this notion of Welsh unity was dependent.' Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, p. 53.

anglicised, increasingly godless and frequently drunk. It was, moreover, on the rise. In 1851, 135,000 males were employed in agriculture; by 1901, this figure was 92,000; in contrast, mining in 1851 employed 65,000, and by 1921 the figure was 278,000.[51] This explosion in working class life was accompanied by a rise in working class politics that, throughout the course of twentieth century, changed the political colour of Wales. In 1922, just sixteen years after the Liberal landslide of 1906, Labour held half of Wales's constituencies; by 1966 it held 32 of the 36 seats.

Twentieth-century Wales, then, was, in one Dai Smith's oft-repeated words, "plural", not "singular",[52] and its two main elements were, for a long time, totally irreconcilable. But despite the vociferous existence of a working class society in south Wales, and, particularly, of a literature centred upon the communities that constituted it, it nevertheless took until the second half of the twentieth century for this society to counter what can best be called a Liberal hegemony in Welsh history books. As Bella Dicks notes, 'the hold on the canonical version of Welshness established by the folk traditions made it difficult for this alternative, proletarian tradition to lay claim to Welsh national identity.'[53] In fact, it was not until the British-wide economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for new changes in social and cultural life that these working class histories began to be written in earnest. A central factor, as Kenneth O. Morgan notes, was the expansion of university education in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s, of which one major benefactor was the University of Wales. Indeed, despite calls to de-federalize the institution in the 1960s, the university remained intact and by the 1970s comprised seven institutions of higher education. This provided the basis for a major re-examination of Wales and its history:

> Expansion meant progress, and the university was ever more thriving [...] [What] flourished mightily in the sixties and seventies, was a sense of Welshness and a serious concern with Welsh issues. It was noticeable that the history of Wales, for example, attracted a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and lay interest, and that departments teaching it flourished everywhere.[54]

Therefore, as Morgan notes, with these being the years in which Labour was at the height of its power and influence in Wales - and, it should be added, in which working

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[51] Jones, 'Beyond Identity?', 347.
[52] Smith, *Wales! Wales?*, p. 1.
[53] Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community*, p. 88.
[54] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, pp. 359- 362.

class historiography was finding purchase in history departments across the world[55] - 'those teaching the history of Wales [...] tended to be Labour.'[56] The result was a new generation of historians dedicated to the history of industrial south Wales. 'The father of [them] all',[57] according to Gwyn Alf Williams, was David Williams, whose seminal book *The Rebecca Riots* (1955) set the direction; Glanmor Williams followed, founding the extant *Welsh History Review* journal in 1960 and compiling the important collection of essays *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working Class Tradition* in 1966.[58] These were all admirable efforts, and importantly tempered the balance of Wales's hitherto, in G.A. Williams's terms, "skewed"[59] historical understanding of itself. But it is important to note that they were not solely the product of a swelling political and historical consciousness. Indeed, as the rise of Liberal history in the early twentieth century was not only the product of an ascendant Liberal Wales, but simultaneously a reaction to the new socio-political challenge posed by the industrial south – a 'rescue [enterprise] directed at a minority rural Wales in a permanent crisis of depopulation,'[60] – so too was the surge of interest in Welsh working class history something of a salvage operation.[61] As Morgan notes, Wales's economy was undergoing a new phase of radical shifts in the 1960s and 1970s, spelled out in part by the decline of traditional occupations: in 1960 there were still 106,000 miners in Wales, in 1970, 70,000, and by 1979, just 30,000.[62] Welsh people had put the 'bad times firmly behind them'[63] by embracing the welfare state and a restructured economy, but had in the process inaugurated a new crisis of

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[55] As the authors of *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (1980), admit in the foreword to the second edition of the book, 'Our generation of historians was riding a wave of social and labour history across Europe and America' Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998 [1980]), p. xxi.

[56] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 362. This was due also to the rise in working class students: the Kelsall Report of 1957 found that 40 per cent of students at the University of Wales were children of working class parents. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 357.

[57] Quoted in John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 2007 [1993]), p. 636.

[58] This book made it abundantly clear that it had the rural Liberal historiographical tradition in its sights: 'One of the most potent and enduring myths of Welsh historiography is that the Welsh radical political tradition derives mainly from the rural areas. The virile and fecund political consciousness of the industrial valleys has, with a few honourable exceptions, had far less than its due.' Glanmor Williams, ed., *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working-Class Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), p. 7.

[59] Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 234.

[60] Ibid, p. 234.

[61] This was aptly symbolised in the efforts that went into the building of the South Wales Miners' Library - more on which later.

[62] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 317.

[63] Ibid, p. 310.

identity. Thus the efforts of working class historians of the 1960s and 1970s can be understood, like those of the Liberal historians that came before them, as in part an 'attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past',[64] a defence mechanism of sorts that is employed, as Eric Hobsbawm suggests, when 'a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which "old" traditions had been designed'.[65] In an era in which all of the traditional markers of Welsh working class life were being lost or forgotten, Labour Wales needed an historical narrative that it could carry totemically into an uncertain global-economic future. It too confirmed Carr's thesis.

Welsh History on Television: The Early 1960s

As I have been emphasizing throughout this thesis, the decades between the end of the Second World War and those immediately following the referendum of 1979 had been immensely tempestuous in all areas of Welsh life; these internal battles for historiographical dominance were just one facet of this. It is the manifestation of these internal battles on television that I want further to explore in the pages that follow. Ormond's historical films, produced between 1960 and 1979, span the period in which these historiographical debates were at their most turbulent. I will therefore be examining them with the conviction that, to paraphrase Carr, the ways in which these films answered the question 'what is Welsh history?' not only reflected their own position in the history of Wales, but also further contributed discursively to that history. In this sense I will be confirming the useful observation that documentary theorist Bill Nichols makes in his book *Representing Reality*:

> Documentary realism [...] presents a pointedly historical dimension. It is a form of visual historiography. Its combination of representations of the world and representations about the world, of evidence and argument, give it the ambivalent status that the word "history" also enjoys: history is at once the living trajectory of social events as they occur and the written discourse that speaks about these events.[66]

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[64] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1983]), p. 1.

[65] Ibid, pp. 4-5.

[66] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 177.

Given that I am arguing that these films are, as well as being about Welsh history, also situated firmly within it, it seems appropriate to examine them in chronological order. This will allow me to explore the ways in which the historical themes addressed in the films were shaped by the historical and historiographical developments taking place in Wales.

The first, broadcast in 1961, is *Once There Was a Time*, a curious film that is part observational study, part poetic evocation of life in the Rhondda valleys. As I have noted, by 1961 the culture and community of the south Wales valleys was, in tandem with the economic base on which it was predicated, in sharp decline; indeed the 1960s was the decade in which Welsh coalmining collapsed almost entirely. If the number of major working pits in the Rhondda was any indication of the state of affairs – and it was – it is worth acknowledging that in 1958 there were twelve in operation, and by 1969 just one. And while these shifts in employment did not (yet) result in the serious unemployment that would be seen in the 1970s and 1980s – in fact, with many workers being drawn into the burgeoning light manufacturing, service, and steel industries, the sixties in Wales was a time of 'relative affluence' – this affluence was, in John Davies's words, the 'result of development, some distance away, in newer industrial areas, where the values of Welsh working class culture were not paramount.'[67] The boisterous, turbulent, radical communities of the south Wales valleys were undeniably atrophying. Aneurin Bevan, the great socialist son of the valleys, had died in 1960, an event that tolled the end of an era; streets that were once 'stuffed with people [in a] never-ending civic parade'[68] were by this time showing 'a more tranquil, anodyne appearance.'[69] Filmed on the cusp of these enormous socio-economic shifts, then, when the remnants of a once vibrant culture were visibly fading, *Once There Was a Time* attempts to capture that Rhondda for posterity. It should thus be understood as in part a product of the emergent tendency toward working-class historiography noted earlier, sharing as it does the impulse, in John Davies's words, to 'safeguard evidence of the history of the labour movement' that would prove so influential in Welsh History departments in the 1970s.[70] It concerns itself with the familiar visual iconography of the valleys: the

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[67] John Davies, 'Wales in the Nineteen-sixties', *Llafur*, 4:4 (1988), 81.

[68] Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, p. 5.

[69] Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 347.

[70] Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 637. This impulse was, of course, not peculiar to Wales; these efforts to, in Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon's words, 'document "authentic" working class culture before it disappeared' were shared by 'ethnographers and social and cultural historians'[70] across Britain and,

chapel, the pub, the spotlessly respectable front parlours, the workmen's library,[71] and the steep streets of endlessly terraced houses that all led to one place: the pithead frame. There is, further, a particular emphasis on learning; the film is shaped around a series of discussions between two impressively erudite working-class veterans, William Thomas, an atheist Marxist, and Teify Jones (M.M.), a Christian scholar. The two sit on a bench and converse eloquently (though occasionally a little too deliberately and a little too desultorily) on a range of topics: Shakespeare, Hume, the Bible, the Great War, time itself.

The film is thus in large part a celebration of the fiercely intellectual life of south Wales; the south Wales of self-taught erudition, of lovingly-built workmen's institutes and libraries, and of miners' scholarships to Oxford and London. There are heavy overtones here of the vision of the valleys propounded in Paul Dickson's film for the 1951 Festival of Britain, *David*, which, as I noted in an earlier chapter, featured miner-poet D.R. Griffiths as its learned protagonist reflecting upon the admirable qualities of south Wales life. However, while there are certainly elements of that film's idealized notion of the cultivated worker constructed in the service of a "contributionist" vision of Wales's place within the British fatherland, *Once There Was a Time* at least attempts to capture something of the complexly dialectic spirit of working class life in south Wales.[72] Indeed, though quietly observational in tone and mood, the film touches upon an historical fault line that reaches back to the disputes over workers' education in the 1900s. This was, as historian Richard Lewis notes in his book on the subject, the split between the Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges, each of which represented two quite separate traditions. 'The one collaborated with the state system of education, and the other stressed its independence of the state and the class interests it represented.'[73] This was, further, a fault line that was itself the product of far deeper political frictions within the south Wales coalfield, and that stretched beyond into the rural Liberal heartlands. For the children of greenly rural

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indeed, most societies that were experiencing these changes. Jordan and Weedon, *Cultural Politics*, p. 125. But, as I want to go on to demonstrate, these were efforts that took on a particular significance in Wales.

[71] The institute used in the film is the Maindy and Eastern in Ton Pentre, though it is clearly intended to stand in as synecdoche for any number of institutes across the coalfield.

[72] In this sense, the film can perhaps be viewed as a precursor to the dialectic structure of Colin Thomas's *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, which sees two opposing minds – Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Gwyn Alf Williams – thrash out aspects of Welsh history.

[73] Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p. xiv.

Wales, the coal-dusted valleys posed a basic existential-political problem. Welsh

Liberal thinkers such as Tom Jones saw the answer in civilised Liberal education; his

journal *Welsh Outlook* (1914-1933), for instance, – sponsored by the industrialist David

Davies, heir to the Ocean Coal fortune - supported, in Dai Smith's words, 'moderate

trade-unionism against belligerent employers and insisted on the value of the Workers'

Educational Association and of the university settlement movement in the fight against

the spread of rank-and-file agitation and Marxist pedagogues.'[74] Yet these Marxist

pedagogues had already found success after the student strike at Ruskin College,

Oxford, in 1909 – orchestrated by the young agitator Noah Ablett – resulted in the

formation of the Plebs' League and the Central Labour College. For the students of this

tradition, university-based workers' education was 'a ruling-class ploy designed to curb

the aspirations of the labour movement: something designed to protect property

relations and the existing social order.'[75] *Once There Was a Time* portrays a sense of

these competing intellectual forces through the figures of its two protagonists. Teify

endorses the Liberal view: 'isn't education and culture the main goal in life?', whereas

William is sceptical of learning for its own sake, viewing the Liberal education reforms

of the late nineteenth century as a product of employers 'looking for clerks and people

to count the other people's pay [...] not for my benefit but for their own'. He proudly

recalls arranging classes on industrial history, walking down from Blaencwm to

Treherbert 'carrying coal in a fishsack to light the fire in the room we had'.

But while the film certainly celebrates this culture of political difference and

learned debate, its purpose is not to find a synthesis through dialectic, or keep the fire of

such debates alive into the 1960s. Rather it seeks to enshrine the men's dialogue and the

wider south Welsh culture it represents as an admirable but now passing socio-cultural

phenomenon. Indeed, William and Teify are seen entering the workmen's institute, and

continue their conversation there, but appear to be the only men still using it for this

purpose. Their rambling discussions on communism, socialism and philosophical

rationalism are fondly but nevertheless firmly undermined when juxtaposed with

footage of men indulging in more frivolous pursuits: playing cards and dominos,

drinking pints.[76] A short dramatized scene sees a member choosing a book from the

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[74] Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales*, p. 61.

[75] Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, p. xv.

[76] As Hywel Francis has noted, the workmen's institute's role as an educational establishment was in sharp decline by the late 1950s, undermined by municipal libraries, and the changing habits and lifestyles that accompanied the new, better remunerated forms of employment - in particular what

institute library, and among the wide-ranging material available - Neville Chamberlain, *The Struggle for Peace*; Edward Hallett Abend, *Japan Unmasked* and Lancelot Hogben, *Science for the Citizen* are three of the books shot in close-up – he chooses a work of romance. The librarian disapproves: 'the old boys years ago, they wouldn't look at such rubbish as this!' 'Well, Bryn, those other ones are too high for me.' This is the pattern of the film as a whole, a vision of a once vigorous culture now aged and ailing: the streets are empty, as are the chapel pews, leaving the elderly choir to sing to themselves. Faces once young in photographs on a parlour mantelpiece are now old and weary. True to Ormond's poeticism, then, the film is as much a "requiem" as a "celebration", a paean and elegy to what 'once there was'.[77] In this sense the film taps the same vein of melancholic historical-poetic energy that ex-miner and poet Robert Morgan discovers in his own poem reflecting on the South Wales Miners' Library:

> Their history is now a spiritual concession
> Recorded in new books on the same shelves
> That once bordered their besmirched lives.
> The aged ones, who remain, recite
> Their stories on park benches
> At the feet of prosperity [...].[78]

Indeed Morgan's poem even draws upon the leitmotif of Ormond's film, the 'aged ones' on the bench, though *Once There Was a Time* ends with a firmer sense of finality; Ormond's bench, at his film's close, is empty. Yet, while the film certainly elegizes the final days of this particular socio-cultural community, it far from signals the final days of a wider *national* community. Rather, I would suggest that it is from this elegiac poeticism that the film derives its strength as a contribution to the national public sphere. Indeed, *Once There Was a Time* aims at this sense of the elegiac not only in content but also in its formal construction, its sense of the "prestige", of the "personal" documentary form I outlined in an earlier chapter. Far from the expositional, expert-led factual history documentaries developed on television in the later 1960s and 1970s – programmes of the "applied" form that shun formal creativity in the service of

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Francis calls the 'recreational revolution'. Hywel Francis, 'The Origins of the South Wales Miners' Library', *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), 190.

[77] Michael J. Collins is one critic who has identified the strong elegiac strain in Ormond's poetry. See his essay 'The Elegiac Tradition in Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Poetry', *Anglo-Welsh Review*, 26:3 (1976), 46-57.

[78] Robert Morgan, 'Miners' Library', in *On the Banks of the Cynon* (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 1975), pp. 8-9.

argumentative coherence - *Once There Was a Time* is self-consciously associational and fluid in form, and utilizes the loose thematic structure, the juxtaposition of sound and image, of poetry. These are formal qualities that Norman Swallow, the great advocate of creative television in the early days of the medium (and indeed an admirer of Ormond), writing in the BBC's *The Listener* magazine in 1976, interestingly suggests are the ideal qualities of history-telling:

> [Television] is a poor communicator of ideas, but a splendid transmitter of history's sense of place and time and mood. Its cameras can go almost anywhere; to any historical site, any evocative landscape, any museum, any fine example of art or architecture. By the combination of the available visual images and an imaginative sound-track it can, arguably, convey a truer sense of the past than any book, any lecture, or any public exhibition.[79]

Swallow, then, unlike those historians that disparage television's limited capacity for historical argument, is mindful here of the powerfully symbolic function that television is able to fulfil. Indeed, *Once There Was a Time* is perfect illustration of Swallow's point: it clearly aims at association over explanation, mood over argument: it builds its 'sense of place and time and mood' through the careful accumulation of sounds and images. There is no omniscient narrator, only the voices of our two protagonists interspersed with disconcertingly mysterious musical arrangements. The camerawork follows no expositional logic, but rather acts as ghostly observer of this now culturally emaciated community, quietly surveying the scene with undulating pans down the mountainside and dolly shots that glide through the streets – indeed the conceit is that we stumble upon the two interlocutors as if by accident. While this formal fluidity is, in one sense, an indication of the creative freedom that producers like Ormond enjoyed in these early days of television, it is in another an important enabler of its function as a documentary in the context of a shifting Welsh public sphere. Indeed I would suggest the film is part of an effort to bring that shift into effect, aiming as it does at the role of elegist, of bard or chronicler of a passing historical moment. Tellingly, this is something that historians Dai Smith and Hywel Francis touch upon in their own important contribution to Welsh labour history, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (1998 [1980]). In the preface to the second edition of their book,

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[79] Norman Swallow, 'History by Television', *The Listener*, 2448 (1976), 296. Sadly, this was an approach to television production that was, as I will later discuss, seen far less by the time Swallow was writing here.

they confess that 'writing at that cusp time' they often felt as if they 'were delivering public history as national elegy.'[80] Indeed, if we acknowledge the suggestion of historiographers since Carr that histories are always at least in part a reflection of the interests of the parties that write them, it is possible to conclude that this is exactly what Smith and Francis were engaged in: a process of historicizing a past community in order to inscribe that community into fresh national consciousness. *Once There Was a Time* of course observes a *present* community in decline (and perhaps somewhat prematurely, given that there were still 106,000 miners in Wales in 1960), but it is through its heavy emphasis on the past – encapsulated in a title that reaches towards the parlance of storybook nostalgia – that it engages in this process of national historical re-examination. It evokes a *present* of the past in order for the nation to live, in Dai Smith's terms, in the *presence* of the past. It is revealing, moreover, that this was not something that BBC Wales had attempted in the years while industrial south Wales was still a fully active, living community. As John Davies notes, there had been a 'resistance to the portrayal of history of the industrial areas', particularly in the 1930s, when those areas were highly politically turbulent. 'There was a belief that pre-industrial Welsh history was a less dangerous subject.'[81]. Ormond's film can perhaps be viewed as part of an effort to position the more disquieting elements of industrial south Wales into a safely irretrievable, yet aesthetically pleasing, past. But whether we view the film as a tendentious effort on behalf of an establishment institution to consign the Welsh industrial experience safely into history, or as a magnanimous effort to "balance" or, in Aneurin Talfan Davies's terms, "bridge" two competing historiographical traditions,[82] it is certain that the film was entering what Keith Jenkins calls the historical 'field of force' in Wales. Broadcast on St David's Day, 1961, *Once There Was a Time* is clearly an attempt to bring the urban industrial working class experience into the Welsh historiographical frame – perhaps in part to redress the historical balance after Ormond's acclaimed and certainly more bucolic *Borrowed Pasture* of the previous year, and is an early contribution to an historiographical trend that would see far more attention paid to the Welsh industrial experience in the decades to follow.[83]

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[80] Francis and Smith, *The* Fed, p. xxiii.

[81] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 90.

[82] See Sarah Rhian Reynolds, *Aneirin Talfan Davies: Producing a Nation* (Unpublished PhD thesis: Swansea, 2001).

[83] The film also anticipated the four-part BBC Wales series documenting the Rhondda that was to grace Welsh screens in 1965, Gethyn Stoodley Thomas's *The Long Street*.

Robert Graham, the television critic for the *Western Mail*, asserted on the Saturday after the broadcast of *Once There Was a Time* that he 'deplored the choice of the Rhondda as St David's material'.[84] Perhaps he would have preferred a programme more in keeping with a pastoral, *gwerin* vision of Wales.[85] If so, he was in luck. After allowing Ormond to produce a greyly industrial film elegy that so clearly romanticized south Wales, the BBC, early in the following year, sent him and a fellow producer, Nan Davies, together with a small film crew, across the Atlantic to the Welsh colony, *y Wladfa*, in Patagonia, Argentina.[86] The history of *Y Wladfa*, which began with the landing of the *Mimosa* on Patagonian soil in 1865, was by its centenary year a topic at the heart of the Welsh *gwerin* historical narrative, and its representation on television at this time offers us an illuminating insight into these competing Welsh historical discourses. As Prys Morgan suggests, the Patagonian enterprise was a prime manifestation of the *gwerin* spirit in the nineteenth century,[87] and it is therefore unsurprising that the event was resuscitated at a time of cultural crisis in the 1960s. Like the decline in industrial society that had galvanized a historiographical movement in Labour Wales, there was simultaneously a decline in agricultural life that was energizing the Welsh language and political-nationalist movement. As John Davies notes, the mechanization of agriculture was at this time '[causing] the agricultural worker, by far the largest single labour force in Wales a century earlier, to become virtually extinct.'[88] With the economic base on which the *gwerin* was based thus

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[84] Robert Graham, 'Television', *Western Mail*, 4 March 1961, p. 8.

[85] Graham certainly preferred *Borrowed Pasture*, deeming that film a 'triumph'. Robert Graham, 'Radio and Television', *Western Mail*, 21 May 1960, p. 8. Indeed, it is telling that Graham, reporting on the press release for *The Desert and the Dream*, deemed the idea of a film on Patagonia to be 'first class', and was clearly enthused by the idea that it should 'give people outside Wales an opportunity to see something of this fascinating colony.' Robert Graham, 'Television', *Western Mail*, 20 December 1962, p. 6. Yet after seeing the film he judged it 'interesting' but 'disappointing'. Robert Graham, 'Television', *Western Mail*, 22 December 1962, p. 8.

[86] The Broadcasting Council for Wales proudly reported the trip in two successive reports: in 1962 after the footage was recorded, and in 1963 after it had been broadcast. As the latter report states: 'From Patagonia to Perth, from Bardi to Berlin, from California to New York – and all over Wales; this is an indication of the compass of features and talks programmes during the past year.' Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1962-63*, p. 10. Nan Davies is a notable figure in the history of BBC Wales. She began working at the Corporation in the 1930s and became the Welsh Region's first female producer. She was one of only four female employees to reach a position of such standing at the BBC in Wales in the first sixty years of its existence. Indeed, a further sign of the gender bias that pervaded broadcasting at this time is that she is one of only two women to have a role of any prominence in Ormond's entire filmic oeuvre (the other is Gwen Watkins, wife of poet Vernon Watkins, who appears in *Under a Bright Heaven*.) She retired in 1969. See Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*.

[87] Prys Morgan, 'Keeping the Legends Alive', in Tony Curtis, eds., *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1986), p. 36.

[88] Davies, 'Wales in the Nineteen-sixties', 81.

irretrievably changed, Welsh historians of this creed turned back to the past to this classic story of cultural perseverance and resilience in order to find a cultural platform for the maintenance of an identity in the present. R. Bryn Williams's major history of the movement, titled *Y Wladfa*, was published in 1962; the same year that Saunders Lewis delivered a lecture that became seminal for the language movement in Wales, 'Tynged yr Iaith', '*The Fate of the Language*'. It is significant that in his lecture Lewis holds up Patagonia as an example of the importance of constructing a useable past at a time of national crisis – or rather, in line with the apocalyptic tone of the lecture, as an illustration of Wales's *failure* to construct such a past. Lewis deems the colony an 'heroic experiment', and argues that '[t]o this day our want of national consciousness and our lack of the pride of nationhood prevent us from understanding the significance and heroism of the Patagonian venture.'[89]

BBC Wales's interest in Patagonia at this time should thus be understood not only as preparation for the centenary of the landing in 1965, but as a product of this tendency towards national historical re-evaluation in 1960s Wales. The programmes that resulted - the English-language *The Desert and the Dream* (*TDATD*), written and produced by Ormond, a Welsh-language four-part series *Y Gymru Bell* (*YGB*), directed by Ormond but written and presented by Nan Davies, both broadcast in 1962, and a later 1965 edition of *YGB*, utilizing much of the same material as the earlier series but condensed into a fifty-minute programme - were efforts to revive this distant memory in the minds of Welsh audiences. It is important to note, moreover, that Ormond's film was simultaneously an effort to translate this memory into the English language for a monoglot Welsh audience; this too was deemed an important project for nationalists of this era of persistent national-linguistic tension. I have discussed elsewhere Aneirin Talfan Davies's repeated efforts as, in Sarah Rhian Reynolds' terms, a 'cultural broker', to utilize BBC Wales in the service of 'bridg[ing] the gap between the two linguistic communities in order to consolidate the minority culture.'[90] This emergent national strategy was further evidenced in Keidrych Rhys's cultural nationalist journal *Wales* (in its third incarnation) in 1959, when a potted history of the colony was published in English (at a time when very few such histories were available),[91] and by R. Bryn

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[89] Saunders Lewis, 'The Fate of the Language', in Alun R. Jones, and Gwyn Thomas, eds., *Presenting Saunders Lewis* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), p. 135.

[90] Sarah Rhian Reynolds, *Aneirin Talfan Davies: Producing a Nation* (PhD Thesis, Swansea, 2001), p. 13.

[91] George Pendle, 'The Welsh in Patagonia', *Wales*, 6:37 (1959), 13-22. Significantly, Pendle acknowledges the need for a factual written (and thus more "useable") history at a time when the

Williams a few years after his important book *Y Wladfa*; indeed Williams' concise version of that history, *Gwladfa Patagonia: The Welsh Colony in Patagonia 1865-1965* (1965) was, in a clear attempt to bring the two linguistic communities together under one national umbrella, printed bilingually on opposing pages.[92] Yet, despite these efforts, a persistent historiographical opposition marred the decades following this revival of interest. As Glyn Williams, R. Bryn Williams's son and fellow historian of the colony, wrote in 1991, 'Welsh speakers are far more familiar with this part of the nation's history than are those Welsh people who do not speak the language.'[93] Williams suggests that this is a product of linguistic difference: '[n]ot only has most of what has been written about the settlement been published in Welsh but the ideological content of what passes as the history of Wales in Welsh and English is [...] often quite different.' This is certainly the case with Ormond's two productions on the topic.

YGB and *TDATD*, despite being produced simultaneously and utilizing much of the same footage, address their shared topic very differently. They can, therefore, be viewed as an instance in which these two Welsh historiographical discourses visibly splinter. Far from the distanced, cinematic approach we have seen Ormond adopt in much of his work, *YGB* – both the 1962 series and the 1965 programme - aim at a more systematic and structured study of the colony, albeit in an informal manner.[94] Indeed, interviews with Welsh-speaking Patagonians dominate the films (there is, surprisingly, no shortage of interviewees, although most of the contributors are of middle age and above), and this gives *YGB* a prevailing tone of familiarity. As John Corner suggests in his useful chapter on the documentary interview, 'The Interview as Social Encounter', the adoption of such a tone is no accident, but a deliberate and effective representational strategy. Corner observes that television in the 1950s and 1960s saw a gradual shift away from stilted 'cinema-based styles of exposition' towards a more populist form of 'people's television', in which

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nation had relied on oral histories that, 'passed down from one generation of eloquent patriots to another, have diminished in accuracy in the re-telling.' (13.)

[92] R. Bryn Williams, *Gwladfa Patagonia: The Welsh Colony in Patagonia 1865-1965* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965) Williams's effort to encourage a rapprochement between the two cultures went as far as to 'keep as close as possible to the original' in his English translation 'in order to help those who are learning Welsh as a second language.' (p. 5.)

[93] Glyn Williams, *The Welsh in Patagonia: The State and the Ethnic Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. ix.

[94] The titles of the episodes in the original series offer something of the scope of *Y Gymru Bell*'s interests, which range from history to social enquiry: '1: Y Dyddiau Cynnar (The Early Days)'; '2: Wrth Droed yr Andes' (At the Foot of the Andes)'; '3: Y Wladfa Heddiw (The Colony Today)'; '4: Pwyso a Mesur (Weighing and Measuring)'.

earlier registers of authoritative, public-service commentary [...] [were] mixed with fresh attempts at exploiting the domestic, personalised and sociable dimensions of the new medium in such a way as to provide documentary with egalitarian accents.[95]

The intention, then, was to develop a 'more informal relationship' between the viewer and the representations on screen, to construct a 'bridge [...] between viewer's world and subject's world' in order to promote 'not only knowledge and vicarious social adventure but also a form of social relationship.'[96] But while the purpose of this strategy on British television in the 1950s and 1960s was to construct a form of televisual address more in keeping with the democratic political trends of the era, as well as, of course, to manufacture the air of shared social values required by the new age of consumerism, its purpose in *YGB* is to forge an active link between two threatened linguistic and socio-cultural communities in order to strengthen the status of both. Indeed, while the series does partly serve the purpose of informing a Welsh viewership of the history of the colony – and the interviews allow for an interesting focus on the particularity of individual recollection over the distancing formalities of historical generalizations - its emphasis is rather on constructing an image of a linguistic community in the *present*, and on inviting the viewer into vicarious conversation with that community. The opening scene of the series, for instance, is an encounter between the presenter, Nan Davies, and two Patagonian gauchos on horseback. There is a light-hearted tone to the scene that would be unconscionable in Ormond's determinedly lofty, detached poetic idiom; Davies – standing in for the viewer - greets her acquaintance who, after carefully tying up his horse, informs her in Welsh that 'my car is in the garage' - thus in part pointing up the romantically constructed nature of the myth of the exotic Welsh-speaking gaucho gallantly riding the plains of the Argentine, but also emphasising the fact that we are in conversation with an *active* linguistic community. (There is a further chummy informality to the way the gaucho introduces Davies to his friend for, supposedly, the first time.)

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[95] John Corner, 'The Interview as Social Encounter', in Paddy Scannell, ed., *Broadcast Talk* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 31. I will explore these shifts towards a more populist 'people's television' in Chapter Six.
[96] Ibid, pp. 36-40. This was thus close to the strategy of oral history that was gathering interest in academic circles at this time. I will expand upon the ways in which this entered televisual discourse later in this chapter.

Indeed, it is illuminating to compare *YGB*'s persistent emphasis on the on-going activities of *y Wladfa* with *TDATD*'s somewhat gloomy emphasis on cultural decline. Ormond's film is another prime example of his "personal" approach to documentary, and is thus far from the socialising, familiarising aesthetic strategy of *YGB*. A useful comparison can be made with Ormond's poem on the subject, 'Instruction to Settlers', as both the poem and the film are predicated on the same logic of disappointment and lost hope, and complement each other in interesting ways. 'Instructions to Settlers' is presented as a single, monolithic stanza, free of the colourful verbal embellishments we see elsewhere in Ormond's oeuvre – a solitary stone in a dry Patagonian-Welsh graveyard, perhaps. The film ironizes the settlers' misplaced hope by transposing the journey onto that of the Exodus[97] - 'who needed to be a farmer when they were going to the land of milk and honey?' - and Ormond's poem shares its cynicism: Patagonia was a 'mistaken Canaan', no bountiful paradise but a coarse and inhospitable land where 'nothing but thorn thrives', and where 'springs bitter with brine' leave a bad taste in the mouth. Unlike the poem, the film does applaud the settlers' successes, drawing attention to the irrigation canals dug to irrigate the dry plains, and the farming co-operatives that later saved the colony from economic catastrophe. But where *YGB* emphasises the active, continuing efforts to sustain the economic and cultural feasibility of the colony, *TDATD* poeticizes it in a way that consigns it to the past. This can be illustrated with reference to the strikingly different ways in which each film addresses the same social issues. *TDATD*'s use of footage of a sermon at a Welsh chapel being delivered in Spanish, for instance, is used as evidence of the steady invasion of the Spanish language into Patagonian life, while *YGB* uses the same footage to suggest that its use is rare in Welsh chapels, claiming that Spanish preachers are only used when their Welsh equivalent is unavailable. A further telling distinction is between the ways in which each addresses the system of gavelkind in Argentina at that time – a system of land tenure which required any piece of land, upon the death of its owner, to be split equally between his children. *TDATD* uses bleak footage of barren expanses of land separated by barbed wire to make the point that gavelkind was 'beginning to loosen the hold of

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[97] This is likely a reflection on the fact that Abraham Matthews, a Congregational minister who was one of those who sailed on the *Mimosa* in 1865 (later dubbed the 'bishop of *y Wladfa*'), likened the settlers to the Isrealites in the desert in his first sermon delivered in Patagonia. See Geraldine Lublin, 'Matthews , Abraham (1832–1899)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2009 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/98447 [accessed 13 Sept 2013].

the Welsh settlers on the land. Every death means a division – of land, and of the original dream.' *YGB*, however, stresses the way the Welsh inhabitants were seeking solutions to the problem; one interviewee claims that it is 'not too late' to solve the land problems, and indeed, the 1965 edition of the programme elaborates upon this, pointing to some farmers' decision to invest in fruit farming as more economical use of their smaller plots. While *YGB* does address the real social problems that threaten the colony, its emphasis is on the pragmatics of sustaining the colony's social formation, culture, and language.

All this is not to say that *TDATD* seeks to diminish the relevance of the Patagonian colony in the Welsh national memory. The film certainly serves the purpose of chronicling a difficult time in Welsh history and translating it into a mythology for the purposes of the Welsh present. Like *YGB*, *TDATD* presents the colony as a symptom of national persecution and hardship, noting that the first emigrants had been 'victimised for their religion and political beliefs'. In fact, where Nan Davies in *YGB* recites the history in measured tones, *TDATD* sustains an affected, melodramatic dramatization of the situation, which, for the purposes of 'popular memory' is arguably an equally potent representational strategy. But it is a strategy that ultimately asks us to understand the Welsh colony as a chapter in a history book. As Ormond's poem states, Wales's claim to that barren land was a 'brief union'; the film ends solemnly, with plaintive Spanish guitar overlaying footage of a solitary gaucho roasting meat on a small fire – a man who, heeding the advice of the poem, has 'Possess[ed]/ The wilderness with [himself].' The final shot of *TDATD* too mimics an image from the poem: 'At noon cross-winds foregather/To suck and subdivide/The dust and the white sand'. Yet *YGB* ends on a note of optimism; an elderly Welsh-Patagonian suggests that the first settlers 'planted a seed that will come to fruition again', and the film closes with a shot that follows a truck speeding down a desert road; the image, along with cheerier Spanish guitar music that accompanies the image, implies that life in the colony goes on.[98]

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[98] The 1965 version of *YGB* rather ends on a more melancholy note – perhaps, three years after the initial trip, the footage seemed not to fit the reality. Nevertheless the film follows the same broad pattern I have outlined here.

The Investiture

Once There Was a Time and the films that were produced out of Ormond's trip to Patagonia thus seem to me to confirm BBC Wales's efforts to address the two persistent but traditionally conflicting strands of Welsh historiography. Yet despite such efforts to balance these perspectives - and, if not to bring them closer together, at least to place them on the same screen - the underlying forces that were fuelling this ideological schism were, throughout the 1960s, in fact pushing them further apart. Indeed, the massive economic shifts that were in part driving this resurgence of interest in Welsh historiography were the very same shifts that ensured its two factions would not yet meet. Wales was becoming unprecedentedly affluent in these years,[99] but this was an affluence predicated on massive changes in occupation and lifestyle; an economy traditionally reliant upon agriculture and extraction was, by the early 1970s, heavily dependent upon light manufacturing and white-collar work.[100] These economic changes, allied to the cultural tumult of the 1960s, were placing considerable pressure upon well-established communities and social identities, and as Martin Johnes notes, though this was affecting people across the whole of Britain at this time, in Wales the 'national element added a different dimension and vocabulary to the problem.'[101] The 1960s in Wales marked a new era in Welsh cultural, linguistic and political nationalism, with a radical new language movement underway after 1962 and Plaid Cymru winning its first seat in a 1966 by-election at Carmarthen. But this was, simultaneously, a time when a firmly British Labour party was at the height of its powers in Wales. The nation was thus not only, as usual, questioning its relationship with itself, but also, more than ever, its relationship with the rest of Britain. It was clear to the British political elite that, in this 'heady atmosphere',[102] as historian John S. Ellis puts it, Britain was in need of what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Granger have termed an 'invented tradition' through which the nation could be 'imagined and unified.'[103] Thus in 1958, when these sociocultural and national shifts were beginning to be felt strongly, a Conservative government headed by Harold Macmillan arranged for a 'Festival of Wales' to take

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[99] John Davies notes that earnings between 1955 and 1970 rose by 140 per cent, while retail prices rose by just 70 per cent. Davies, 'Wales in the nineteen-sixties', 78.
[100] The number of agricultural workers in Wales more than halved between 1931 and 1971, from 92,000 to 45,000. Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 155. And the number of miners was slashed even more violently: from 106,000 in 1960 to 60,000 in 1970. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 317.
[101] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 155.
[102] Ellis, *Investiture*, p. 15.
[103] Ibid, p. 15.

place in the freshly minted Welsh capital of Cardiff. In the same summer of 1958, the

city hosted the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, and on the final day of the

competition it was announced, via tape recording, that Charles, the nine-year-old son of

Queen Elizabeth II, would, when 'grown up',[104] be invested as Prince of Wales. On 1

July 1969, his investiture was carried out at Caernarfon Castle. Thus, as Ellis notes,

while it is often supposed that the 1969 Investiture was conceived by a Labour

government 'specifically to thwart the resurgence of nationalism in Wales',[105] the idea

was actually formulated by the Conservative government of the late 1950s. This is not

to say, however, that the Labour administration that came to office in 1964 did not

pursue the scheme with the utmost relish. Indeed, for a Labour government keen to

appease a restive Welsh nation in the 1960s, and particularly to validate the new Welsh

Office, successive Welsh Secretaries of State in the late 1960s took it upon themselves

to do 'the serious political work of shaping the public perception of the ceremony and

its affiliated events.'[106] As Ellis argues in his important 2008 book on the two Welsh

royal investitures of the twentieth century, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National*

Identity in Wales 1911-1969 (2008),

> The 1969 Investiture was to be far more than a mere afternoon of pageantry. Both
> [Cledwyn] Hughes and [George] Thomas envisioned and employed the investiture
> as a means of demonstrating the value of the Welsh Office, of projecting and even
> implementing Labour's Welsh policy, and of re-establishing Labour's credentials
> as the 'Party of Wales'.[107]

Of course, this did not stop different parties and interested groups from seeking to frame

the investiture in their own terms and to their own ends; as Ellis notes, '[t]here was a

recognition that the meaning of the ceremony was not inherent but would be constructed

through a discourse between the organizers, the media and the public.'[108] Naturally

BBC Wales, as a national broadcasting institution, was caught up in this process of

definition. Indeed, if, as Ellis suggests, Britain, in the months leading up to the

ceremony, was 'like Prince Charles [...] enrolled on an intensive course in

Welshness',[109] the BBC Wales film unit, headed by Ormond, was one of the senior

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[104] Queen Elizabeth II, quoted in Anthony Holden, *Charles: A Biography* (London: Bantam, 1998), p. 49.
[105] Ellis, *Investiture*, p. 145.
[106] Ibid, p. 153.
[107] Ibid, p. 163.
[108] Ibid, p. 12.
[109] Ibid, p. 253.

tutors. I examined in the previous chapter the cultural documentaries that Ormond produced for the BBC2 network during these months, documentaries that seek to promote Welsh artists and writers to a wider British audience; here I want to focus on the history documentary that was broadcast on the morning of the investiture, *The Ancient Kingdoms: A View of Wales*.[110]

The film, though broadly chronological in structure – moving swiftly from the prehistoric era through medieval Wales and on to agricultural, industrial and modern Wales - formally draws heavily on the kind of 'poetic documentary' to which Ormond aspired in many of his films of the 1960s, those which Norman Swallow advocated as an ideal form for historical representation, 'a splendid transmitter of history's sense of place and time and mood'. Visually, it is fluid and peripatetic, with constantly moving shots that cut and dissolve freely between viewpoints of locations across Wales, and it utilizes a lyrical narration, spoken by Meredith Edwards, alongside an evocative music track scored by the Swansea composer Daniel Jones. Of particular interest in terms of its proximity to the investiture project, though, is its clear attempt to transcend the deep rifts in Welsh historiography. *The Ancient Kingdoms* offers up a cohesive 'view of Wales' for a British viewership, and does this by accommodating the historically divisive facets of the nation - in particular its two dominant socio-economic formations - agriculture and the extractive industries - and integrating them into a seamless socio-economic narrative that obviates the potential for conflict: shots of the Rhondda valley are qualified with a narrated soundtrack that convinces viewers of the coalfield's historical link with an older Wales: 'Here in the heyday of the Rhondda's boom, farm labourers of the last century klondyked by the thousand in search of higher wages'. Indeed, for *The Ancient Kingdoms*, these two worlds do not exist alongside as they did in, for instance, the World War II propaganda film scripted by Dylan Thomas, *Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain* (1942) - which, as I noted in an earlier chapter, fuses the agricultural and the industrial into an unproblematically unified national vision. But while *The Ancient Kingdoms* differs from *Wales: Green Mountain, Black Mountain* in this structural sense, it certainly adopts the earlier film's "contributionist" politics. A major emphasis is placed upon Wales's exports to the wider British nation, from the 'great slabs' of rock from the Preseli Hills that ended up in Stonehenge, to south Wales becoming 'the greatest steel and tin-plate centre in Britain. We produce a quarter of

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[110] The programme was first broadcast on National BBC1 at 22.50 on Wednesday 28 June 1969, but was repeated at 10am on National BBC1 on the morning of the investiture.

Britain's steel.' Indeed, this use of the collective first person is significant in terms of the film's "contributionist" voice. For while *The Ancient Kingdoms* does allow space for an ethnic or regional Welsh identity – the narrator switches between first person singular, plural and possessive pronouns, and even claims that he '[speaks] for most Welshmen'– it does so in the service of a British viewership; the film's clear purpose is to inform a wider inclusive British nation of some of the distinct characteristics of its Western peninsula.

It is instructive to examine this issue of the film's national "voice" in further detail. Indeed, what is interesting about the film is that it does not, as in Ormond's other films - and though it speaks explicitly in the first person - credit a writer. Rather, Ormond is credited only as producer, despite the film borrowing from two of his own poems, one his translation of the *englynion* 'The Hall of Cynddylan', attributed to the ninth-century poet Llywarch Hen, and another his own 'Landscape Without Figures'. I believe the ways in which the film incorporates these poems can tell us much about its national positioning. It is surely significant that *The Ancient Kingdoms*, in its sequence about medieval Wales, politely evades the question of the perennial battles between Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; Ormond's translation of 'The Hall of Cynddylan' - a moving poem written down in the ninth century to commemorate the bloody battles between the kingdoms Powys and Wessex, but drawing on the anguish of a battle between Powys and Mercia some two centuries earlier[111] - is transposed onto the film's discussion of Deheubarth's battles with Norman invaders at Dinefwr in the eleventh century. The film thus finds, in the Normans, a common enemy with the English, thereby evading the question of English-Welsh hostility. There is, moreover, no mention of the circumstances surrounding the first English Prince of Wales, Edward II, after his father Edward I's conquest of Llewellyn ap Gruffydd's brief unification of the Welsh kingdoms.

Of course, the film's taking of liberties with historical material is perhaps apt given its own televisually "bardic" function at a time of British national insecurity; in this sense the film shares a purpose with that of the heroic poets themselves, who, in one critic's terms, 'legitimize[d] the rule of the dynasty then in power and [glorified] it through celebration of the deeds of its heroic ancestors.'[112] The difference here, of course, is that the 'dynasty' in question in *The Ancient Kingdoms* seems to be Britain,

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[111] Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 62.
[112] Patrick K. Ford, *The Poetry of Llywarch Hen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 4.

rather than Wales. Moreover the poetic distance between Ormond's own poem written in reflection of 'The Hall of Cynddylan', 'Landscape Without Figures', and the latter's incorporation into the narrated soundtrack of *The Ancient Kingdoms*, further reinforces this sense of this "bardic" function of the film (and, additionally, informs us of the extent to which Ormond was able to adapt his poetic inclinations to the BBC's requirements). Indeed, in contrast with what is a frequently a quite deliberately evocative film, what is immediately striking about 'Landscape Without Figures' is its uncompromising bathos. Placed immediately after 'The Hall of Cynddylan' in Ormond's first collection, *Requiem and Celebration* (1969), the poem sets out in part to debunk the former's solemn mythologizing in a way that confirms Ormond's preoccupation with the redemptive but firmly humanist qualities of great art. Indeed the title 'Landscape Without Figures' alone is, in its bland literality, a comment on the highly wrought emotionalism of the original poem, and it carries on in this vein: 'There'd been some battle or other/ Fought in a bog, no doubt; as unromantic/ And merciless as ever.' The poem thus stubbornly refuses to exalt such ancient battles with romantic phrasings, preferring, rather, to (perhaps somewhat glibly) humanize them with informal, idiomatic language and bleak imagery. 'Landscape Without Figures' goes on to become a reflection upon the sentimentalization of a lost, rural Welsh way of life; the speaker comes across a farmhouse in 'the evening wasteland of Wales [...] with old stones tumbling/ The roof fallen-in'.

Yet while the poem acknowledges the potentially mythical – and implicitly nationalist - resonance of a poem like 'The Hall of Cynddylan' in a desolate Welsh present – 'Cynddylan's hall, the roof is charred and dark/ Because the Englishry wreaked havoc on/ The pastureland' - it seeks to neutralize any potential it might have in the political present. Indeed, the poem does not exalt the poets of old in a fit of nationalist fervour in order to find a new application for old antagonisms in an emaciated Welsh countryside - a place 'once lived-on, and now no longer lived-in' – but instead reflects upon what it sees as the only possible response to the situation: a quietly bathetic sympathy, as embodied in the poem's final, tenderly subtle but certainly not inflammatory image: 'It might be said/ The elder blossoms each year in token celebration.' 'Landscape Without Figures' is thus a poem that is able to laud Llywarch Hen's 'fine phrases', but consigns them to the page rather than find application for them in the political present. *The Ancient Kingdoms*, however, incorporates and modifies lines of the poem in a way that presents and augments them – and the subject at hand -

in a quite different light. Daniel Jones's evocative score utilizes a plangent medieval melody, while the camera dissolves slowly between shots of rural desolation, and this utilization of 'vertical montage' works to achieve a quite different poetic meaning. The film's claim that its narrator 'can't help but mourn a whole way of life that is passing' plumbs a deeper structure of feeling about the nature of the massive social change that was taking place in rural Wales, adding a more loudly political inflection that is far more subdued, if present at all, in the poem. The film thus seeks to accommodate a structure of feeling that was, in 1960s Wales, a strong point of contention among many in Wales.

Yet, *The Ancient Kingdoms* does not do this to inflame national tensions, but rather to bolster its own historical logic; a logic of progress that ascends towards a vision of an optimistic Wales that is a vital and integral part of a wider British polity. Indeed, the ways in which *The Ancient Kingdoms* contributes to the shaping of the public understanding of Wales's place in Britain in this sense confirms John S. Ellis's assertions as to the intended meaning of the investiture as a whole. It also says something about the proximity of the BBC to British state interests:

> It is true that certain aspects of the investiture involved depictions of the essential and unchanging nature of the Welsh and the Welsh past, but the timelessness of such images was paired with representations of a dynamic nation, in the midst of transformation in the present and looking forward to the promise of the future.[113]

This is the precise logic that the film follows; moving from desolate scenes of rural Wales and, later, the Rhondda, *The Ancient Kingdoms* provides a vibrant vision in line with Labour's new economic plan, spelled out in its 1967 White Paper 'Wales: the Way Ahead', that 'prescribed a mixed dosage of diversifying industry, retraining the labour force, easing off the traditional heavy industry of coal while buttressing the newer [...] heavy industry of steel.'[114] The film ostentatiously aestheticizes the steel industry in this optimistic Labour idiom, providing awed low-angle shots of the high-rising new steelworks at Port Talbot that are accompanied by a joyously majestic music track. The action shots of the interior of the works contain further, admittedly spectacular, images of an industry boiling with activity; steam billows from furnaces and white-hot molten

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[113] Ellis, *Investiture*, p. 12.
[114] Ibid, p. 164.

metal spits and bubbles like Jackson Pollock's paint.[115] The film thus promotes a vision of a culturally distinct Welsh nation, but one whose existence is confined to a constitutive element within a Labour-validated British polity.

It concludes, ultimately, with recourse to the ideal analogy of this safely symbiotic relationship: footage of the Wales-England match at the 1969 Five Nations competition; though the narrator is gracious enough not to mention the score: 30-9 to Wales. This was, in fact, the game that inaugurated a new 'golden era' in Welsh rugby, during which Wales won three grand slams and six triple crowns within ten years, and it is significant that the film foretells the new significance that rugby was to take in the era of televised sport. As Martin Johnes notes, the 1970s would be the decade in which rugby, 'an important part of male popular culture in south Wales since the late nineteenth century, [would embrace] a much broader social and geographical spectrum,' and would go on in these years to become a 'genuinely national game'.[116] Indeed, the film does not show itself to be above wheeling out the classic "Celtic" stereotypes that would go on to dominate British coverage of the sport,[117] appealing as it does to a Welsh-Celtic mysticism when it notes that the Welsh players had become 'new folk heroes' and "poets" while a medieval harpsichord is played over footage of Welsh skill on the field. But while certainly facile, such representations were not insignificant; Johnes notes that '[s]uch alleged [Celtic] national characteristics may have been grounded in a distinctly limited reality but they formed part of a very real patriotism.'[118] Of course, this was a patriotism confined to sporting and cultural pride; as the film informs British viewers (and reminds the Welsh), 'the things that satisfy our pride in being Welsh lie very often outside the story of power.'

Thus *The Ancient Kingdoms*, broadcast on the BBC network to the whole of Britain at 10 a.m. on the morning of the investiture - immediately before the coverage of the ceremony began at 10.30am – seems to me to provide the television ancillary to the

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[115] Dai Smith makes an apt point about television's optimistic vision of the Welsh steel industry in the 1960s in his documentary series *Wales! Wales?* (1984). There he notes that, in the 1960s, 'television correspondents would come [to the steelworks at Port Talbot] to be framed in the future landscape of a heavy industrial base – the old days of depression and unemployment finished.' Unfortunately, the optimism was short-lived; in the ten years after 1973 the number of people employed by the British Steel Corporation in Wales dropped from 65, 981 to 19,199. Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 657.

[116] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 282.

[117] Martin Johnes notes that 'British coverage [of] Welsh rugby in general, drew heavily on certain national stereotypes [...]. The Welsh XVs were described as 'magical', 'poetic', 'rhythmic', 'shrewd' and 'fighters'.' Martin Johnes, *A History of Sport in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 84.

[118] Ibid, p. 84.

British state's definition of this contentious event. It is a film that I believe performs a form of politics that Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz suggest all televised ceremonies evoke: a 'ceremonial politics' that, like the investiture itself, 'expresses the yearning for togetherness, for fusion.'[119] *The Ancient Kingdoms* complements perfectly the national politics of a ceremony that, in Ellis's terms, 'asserted and celebrated the image of a unified and indivisible Welsh nation, in turn unified and indivisible with the larger British state of which it was a part.'[120] Of course, this is not to say that the film – or indeed the Investiture itself – was in any sense wholly successful in this. It is important to note that Wales was, despite the efforts of the BBC, sharply divided over the issue. These were divisions that cut across the BBC itself; there were producers working at BBC Wales at that time, such as the highly-respected Selwyn Roderick, who refused outright to work on the Investiture programming,[121] moreover, with credit to the BBC, it did also address some of the conflicts of opinion; its documentary series *24 Hours* caused a stir after it broadcast an episode that, it was alleged, was biased in favour of those who opposed the ceremony.[122] Thus, in the light of this, alongside much of the British media's concentration upon the deep divisions scarring the Welsh nation at that time, Ellis argues that the 1969 Investiture's attempt to heal some of those divisions ultimately failed:

> [it] highlighted the fault lines and fissures of Welsh and British national identity. The debate over the [investiture] reflected an antagonism between supporters and opponents where the presence of the 'Other' blocked each side from fully realising their identities as Welsh people.[123]

Indeed, it is probable that to many of the viewers who had seen the news that two Welsh nationalist militants (the 'Free Wales Army') had succeeded in blowing themselves up on the morning of the Investiture, *The Ancient Kingdoms* would have seemed somewhat idealistic in its vision of a cohesive Welsh nation at ease with its English neighbour.

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[119] Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. viii.

[120] Ellis, *Investiture*, p. 320.

[121] In an interview in 2002, Roderick recalls that officials at the BBC were "colder" to him after his refusal. (*Wales Video Gallery*, 'Selwyn Roderick' (2002)).

[122] The Welsh Office were unimpressed, and Ellis notes that some supporters deemed the programme 'anti-Investiture propaganda'. Ellis, *Investiture*, p. 296.

[123] Ibid, p. 321.

The 1970s

Despite the efforts of programmes such as *The Ancient Kingdoms* to project an image of a harmoniously unified Wales in the service of the idea of a strong Britain, then, Wales at the beginning of the 1970s was still a nation deeply divided. This division was the product of far deeper cultural, ideological and linguistic rifts than could be bridged by a single exercise in regal pomp and ceremony. Welsh nationalist pressure groups such as Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg had been energized by the mood of the 1960s and scored major successes that brought political nationalism back onto the mainstream agenda in Wales. This slowly but surely translated into political progress for Plaid Cymru, with the party first securing a seat in 1966 and then doubling its vote by 1970.[124] Yet these political successes had begun to hit the ideological wall that divided the nation; Plaid's voting base was confined to the rural, Welsh-speaking communities of the west and north,[125] communities that saw few similarities between themselves and a distastefully materialist and monoglot south. As one Welsh intellectual wrote in 1971:

> As the educated Welsh-speaker looks at the new affluent working-class of south Wales he is bound to see people who have lost a culture and gained only a higher standard of living, people made particularly vulnerable to commercially fostered pseudo-values by their own rootlessness.[126]

Of course, these "pseudo-values" were a matter of perspective; another way of viewing the situation was to see the English-speakers of the south Wales conurbations simply finding nourishment in another socio-political soil; they were, in Martin Johnes's words, 'rooted in the popularity of the British media, the memory of the war, the safety net of the welfare state and nationalised industries and a popular pride in royalty'.[127] Some Welsh nationalist intellectuals recognised this, but saw it as their duty to enrich that majority with a cultural and historical education that could provide, perhaps, better sustenance. Ned Thomas's *The Welsh Extremist*, for instance, argued that the 'relationship between the two language groups [was] crucial to any political situation'. His study, published in English, was partly an attempt to foster a better understanding

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[124] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 239.

[125] As Johnes notes, in the 1970 general election Plaid Cymru lost twenty-five of its thirty-six deposits. Its vote in Rhondda West dropped from 39.9 per cent in the 1967 by-election to 14.1 per cent in 1970. Ibid, pp. 238-239

[126] Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist*, p. 113.

[127] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 203.

between the two by informing the English-speaking population of the legacy of the

Welsh past. This seems to me the impulse behind Ormond's next historical

documentary effort, the bucolic history series covering the Welsh past from prehistoric

times to the early industrial era, *The Land Remembers* (*TLR*).

Interestingly, *TLR* seems to have evolved into the large production that it

became from a far more modest and, it is likely, less nationalistic initial idea. In a

column written for the *Western Mail* in the year in which the second series was aired,

Ormond explained that, while visiting a cromlech he needed to shoot for a film he was

making some years earlier,[128] he had been inspired to write a poem about the

experience; this would become the poem 'Ancient Monuments'. The column explains

that, in the process of writing the poem, Ormond needed to expand his vocabulary of

such standing stones ('once you've said slab and pillar and rock there aren't many

words for stone around'[129]) and so called upon his friend Wynn Williams, a geologist

(to whom he later dedicated his poem 'Letter to a Geologist'), to inquire about such

words. This led Ormond to pursue an amateur interest in Neolithic history, and, after

reading a book found in Cardiff Central Library, Alexander Thom's *Megalithic Sites in

Britain* (1967) (as well as, it is likely, viewing a 1970 episode in the BBC documentary

series *Chronicle* that profiled Thom and his controversial ideas[130]), he decided to

embark on a television programme about these ancient sites in Wales.

What is interesting is that the use of archaeological history in the early episodes

of *TLR* is, in its politics, quite far from Ormond's own, and the distance between

Ormond's own poetic use of ancient Welsh history and the use of this in *TLR* reveals

something of the historiographical emphasis of the series as a whole. As I discussed in

an earlier chapter, Ormond frequently made use of archaeological terms and tropes in

his poetry as, I suggest, a means of tapping into a universalist historicism that evades

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[128] Though he doesn't name it in the column, this was probably *A Bronze Mask* (1969).

[129] John Ormond, 'Personal Column', *Western Mail*, 4 March 1974, p. 9.

[130] Alexander Thom was an esteemed engineer who worked in a range of fields and, after retirement
from Professorship in Engineering Science at Oxford in 1961 pursued an interest in megalithic stone
circles. His conclusions, which entered popular consciousness in the book Ormond found in Cardiff
Central Library (Alexander Thom, *Megalithic Sites in Great Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967)) and in a
BBC documentary presented by Magnus Magnusson, *Chronicle: Cracking the Stone Age Code* (BBC,
1970), caused a storm in archaeological circles and, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National
Biography*, 'remain contentious'. S. S. Wilson, 'Thom, Alexander (1894-1985)', *Oxford Dictionary of
National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004). Thom suggested that the builders of these ancient tombs and
circles were not improvising but in fact adhering to and experimenting with strict geometrical rules
millennia before they were formulized by the Greek mathematicians. Thom actually appears in episode
two of the first series of *The Land Remembers*, and explains his theory to Gwyn Williams at Moel Ty
Uchaf, near Corwen in Denbighshire.

the fraught cultural and national politics of the Wales of his era. His poem 'Ancient Monuments' (which is, in fact, dedicated to Alexander Thom) is a case in point. For Ormond these monuments convey in themselves no meaning, no message, but merely a stolid, impassive presence, '[a]loof lean markers, erect in mud'.[131] There is no potential for trans-historical ethno-national allegiance with a prehistoric (Celtic?) ancestry; rather Ormond, consistent with his concern with the honour of skilled craftsmanship, merely remarks approvingly on the workmanship, 'how those men/ Handled them'. Indeed, the presence of these monuments in the Welsh countryside does not even lead Ormond to revel in or idealize the beauty of their surroundings –for the speaker the countryside is mostly a hindrance through which one must 'slog on/ Through bog bracken, bramble'. There are no ideal *gwerin* figures here, only 'A bent figure, in a hamlet/ Of three houses and a barn'. In the end the monuments merely demarcate the edge of what we know, and the only sense of familiarity with them is one of shared bewilderment: '[w]hat they awaited we, too, still await'. This is far from the historical perspective offered in *TLR*.

Indeed, if the title of this series and its historiographical scope (the series ends, revealingly, at the beginning of the industrial era) are, together, not enough to give some indication as to where the series' priorities lie, then the political leanings of its presenter, Gwyn Williams, should. This is not the outspoken Marxist Gwyn *Alf* Williams of *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* and *When Was Wales?* fame, but Gwyn Williams, Trefenter, literary translator and poet. Though born in Port Talbot in 1904 to a mother from that town, Williams was not caught up in the proletarian radicalism of south Wales of the 1920s and 1930s. His father was from Trefenter, in rural mid-Wales, the place where, as he admits in the first episode of *TLR*, he felt he 'had [his] roots'. After studying at Aberystwyth he headed to Oxford, where he attended meetings of the Dafydd ap Gwilym Society and discovered the politics of an emerging Plaid Cymru, and he held closely to his national consciousness throughout his life despite a peripatetic career that spanned universities across the Near East. Indeed, it was during his work as a teacher of English Literature at universities in Cairo, Alexandria, Benghazi and Istanbul that he wrote translations of Welsh poetry, as well as his own poems in English, both of which were a clear indication of his nationalist political

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[131] John Ormond, 'Ancient Monuments', in *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), pp. 89-91.

priorities. The self-written introduction to his *Collected Poems* (1987) begins with the bold declaration that '[t]he writing of poetry is always a social function.'[132]

Williams felt the salvation of the Welsh nation lay in its cultural and historical heritage, and his own poems are preoccupied with an awareness of a connection with an organic Welsh past, and further with the potential of that past to inform and enrich an alienated and materialist present. Far from Ormond's vision of a distant, basically unknowable ancient past in 'Ancient Monuments', Williams's poem 'Places in Our Spirit' for example insists that 'these things on the mountain and coastland/ are in our blood, are our bones, our backbone,/ are our claim to being a person, belonging to a nation.'[133] Williams's verse radio play *Foundation Stock* (broadcast, not coincidentally, on the Wales opt-out service for Radio 4 two days after the first series of *TLR* ended) carried this vision of an organic connection with an ethno-national past into a form of national didacticism. The play consists of a conversation between two men, one the average, workaday john with a vague but somewhat sceptical interest in historical matters, the other a more educated man of Williams's bent, more assured in his historical knowledge and convinced of his duty to convince the less-informed interlocutor of the value of Welsh history and mythology. Their discourse, which spans Welsh history, is, of course, conducted for the benefit of the average, layman listenership, and indeed invites it to invest imaginatively in the discussion at hand, even, tellingly (and perhaps somewhat patronizingly), appealing to its imagination in the parlance of television and its viewership: 'Think your armchair's on the rim of a glacier./ *Fade* with closed eyes to receding ice [...] *Cut* now/ to our first hunters' (emphasis added).[134] Of course, the divisive implication of this thinly veiled didacticism is that Welsh post-industrial modernity becomes the problem against which Williams's brand of organic national historicism is posing its arguments. The urban conurbations of south Wales, in this historical narrative, are rendered a 'sprawling hazed/ cancer on our green acres'.[135] This, too, I want to suggest, is the logic of the *The Land Remembers*. Like *Foundation Stock*, it is driven by an impulse to inform a Welsh viewership – in the English language – of the rich cultural and historical heritage of the nation in the hope

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[132] Gwyn Williams, *Collected Poems: 1936-1986* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1987), p. xiii.

[133] Williams, 'Places in Our Spirit', in *Collected Poems*, p. 100.

[134] Williams, *Foundation Stock*, in *Collected Poems*, p. 169.

[135] Ibid, p. 174. Even the modern man's defense of the urban Welsh is phrased in a sickly, grotesque idiom: 'Hold on! Some people might say things aren't so bad./ [Doesn't] the drabbest valley house [...] give/ a roof over the blue-marked head, over the plump body/ perfumed for bingo or the bowling-alley'.

of fostering a more cohesive national consciousness. This is, of course, the primary

function of this form of history documentary; that is, to sustain a national-historical

consciousness. But *TLR* shares the verse play's historical omissions, as well as its latent

disdain for industrial (and post-industrial) south Welsh life.

I believe this ideological bias can best be illustrated by examining the ways in

which *TLR* presents Wales *visually*. It is possible to critique the series with reference to

its historiographical decision to end its narrative at the beginning of the industrial era, a

decision which, alone, omits an enormous chunk of modern Welsh political and cultural

history, and thereby is a strong indication of its ideology. But *TLR* seems to me a series

that demands attention be paid to its noticeable emphasis on the rural Welsh

landscape.[136] The series places considerable emphasis upon anchoring its historical

observations into specific geographical sites, and this is, in fact, as Robert Dillon notes,

a visual strategy consistent with British history programming from its earliest

incarnation to the present day:

> [d]isparate landscape elements, a natural feature such as a river, great houses,
> churches, cathedrals, homes and public buildings act as tangible 'spots of time' in
> the formation of a nation-state and also as symbolic sights that fuse together the
> collective memory framework required to 'imagine' the concept of Britain as a
> nation.[137]

The same can be said of the process of imagining the concept of nation in Welsh

broadcasting more specifically; to be sure, visits to Welsh sites of historical interest

were one of the pillars of Welsh television in its beginnings in the early 1950s.[138] Of

particular interest to me are Dillon's remarks above about the sense in which places act

as ''spots of time' in the formation of a nation-state'. This seems to suggest that

television history documentaries serve a dual purpose in a national context, both

informing a national viewership of a given national historical narrative while

simultaneously inscribing specific sites onto the national consciousness.

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[136] David Berry also notes this in a small section on Ormond in his seminal study of Welsh cinema. There
he advocates an 'assessment of [...] [Ormond's] use of landscape and milieu'. *Wales and Cinema*, p. 297.
[137] Dillon, *History on British Television*, p. 43.
[138] See for example the first Broadcasting Council for Wales *Annual Report 1954-55*: 'In general the
output of television programmes from Wales can be classified under three headings of Events
(eisteddfodau and festivals); Places (visits to castles, cathedrals); and People (local customs, speech, and
talent).'

In *TLR*, these processes appear to act in tandem. This is closely in accord with theorists of "place" and "space" that attest to the idea that social knowledge of specific sites is fundamental to the ways in which communities narrate individual stories, collective histories, and, by extension, national memory. Theorist Christopher Tilley, for example, draws a distinction between "place" and "space". He suggests "places" are the physical environments in which we live and with which we interact, but that that "space" refers to the cultural construction of such places.[139] As another influential theorist, Denis E. Cosgrove, suggests: 'To see something is both to observe it and to grasp it intellectually.'[140] Thinking about this with regard to historical sites, this is therefore a conception that moves beyond the basic fact that historical events literally take place in given places, and closer to ideas about the ways in which – as I have been discussing in relation to Wales – human (and national) communities attach cultural significance to such places according to their own interpretations of history. In this sense, places and cultural perceptions of them are actually inseparable, and even in dialectical relationship with one another. Prys Gruffudd is one geographer who has explored this notion in a Welsh national context; he suggests that the cultural construction of physical places is central to the process whereby communities construct the historical narratives that sustain them:

> The idea of national landscape, even specific physical features (mountains, rivers, forests), can become emblematic of national identity and can offer cultural relationships through which a people make *a* land *their* land. This process almost inevitably draws on an awareness of history.[141] (Emphasis in original)

If we accept, then, that physical environments – or at least the human comprehension of them – are figuratively (though also in some ways literally) shaped by historical circumstances, it follows that the ways in which given communities construct those "spaces" can reveal much about what kind of communities they are. As Cosgrove suggests, 'The way people see their world is a vital clue to the way they understand that

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[139] Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 10.

[140] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 8.

[141] Gruffudd, 'Prospects of Wales', in Fevre and Thompson, eds., *Nation, Identity and Social Theory*, p. 150.

world and their relationships with it.'[142] Given that *TLR* is a history series as

preoccupied with the visual representation of national "space" as it is with history itself,

it would seem the ways in which it constructs those representations bears further

attention.

Peter Lord is one critic who has ably employed this conception of the sense in

which communities imbue landscapes with ideological meanings and values in relation

to Wales and Welsh culture. In his important book *The Visual Culture of Wales:*

Imaging the Nation (2000), Lord charts the development of the idea of landscape in

Wales from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth. He finds that some of the

most telling early representations of the Welsh landscape are to be found in the

paintings and writings of the eighteenth-century English artists and their patrons – Sir

William Gilpin, Paul Sandby and his patron Sir Watkins Williams Wynn, Moses

Griffiths and his patron Thomas Pennant. Such figures contributed to a conception of

Wales as a picturesque and historically static land whose only claim to historical

significance was its almost mythical physical beauty. Indeed, for the swathes of well-to-

do 'connoisseurial touris[ts]'[143] who followed these artists, Wales came to be seen 'as a

kind of living archaeology of Ancient Britain':[144]

> Their thoughts of the people [...] were expressed largely in terms of decorative
> elements in the construction of the picturesque scene, or as primitive tokens of
> Ancient Britain, generally in the form of blind harpists. That the common people
> so remotely observed were, at that moment, undergoing a dramatic process of
> regeneration either passed them by entirely or ran counter to the way in which
> they wished to picture them.[145]

This was thus a perception of the landscape forged by English (or occasionally

anglicised Welsh) aristocrats within a set of historical circumstances in which Wales

was economically, and thus ideologically, subordinate. However, with the emergence of

more self-conscious cultural-nationalist stirrings in the early nineteenth century, such

depictions of the Welsh landscape began to seem inadequate. Welsh periodicals such as

The Cambrian Register (1795-1818), though published in London, raised the possibility

of satirical swipes at these misleading images of Wales, and works such as Edward

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[142] Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, p. 9.
[143] Lord, *Imaging the Nation*, 139.
[144] Ibid, p. 156.
[145] Ibid, p. 141.

Pugh's *Cambria Depicta* (1810), Lord suggests, further signalled an emergent culture of self-assertion:

> the text of *Cambria Depicta* represented a profound change of view which would rapidly overtake Welsh intellectual life. [...] Pugh signalled that the Welsh were no longer simply Ancient Britons but also a people who might be expected to sustain a modern culture.[146]

Such views provided the kernel for what essentially developed, in tandem with the developments in Welsh political and religious institutionalism throughout the nineteenth century, into a re-appropriation of the conceptualization of the Welsh landscape from English connoisseurial terms into Liberal Welsh ones. This idea of the landscape was tied up with a conceptualization of the Welsh that was, as I noted earlier, in line with a Victorian evolutionary principle, in which each nation consists of a single, unique ethnic group. For those intellectuals who espoused the notion of the common Welsh people, the rural *gwerin*, the Welsh landscape was thus key; as one Welsh commentator wrote in the first issue of a new periodical, *Welsh Review*, in 1906, 'The scenery of our land has played a large share in our sympathetic development as a race'.[147] The Welsh landscape thus became inscribed with a significance that was not British but unique to Wales and, as Tilley suggests, dialectically enmeshed in its historical self-perception. And the capstone on this transformation was surely O.M. Edwards' decision to place, at the top of the first page of his seminal *Hanes Cymru*, 'not [...] a text or a poem but [...] a picture of Snowdon painted by Samuel Maurice Jones.' As Lord notes, 'The picture [...] was intended as a metaphor for the soul of the nation whose history he would describe'.[148]

TLR should thus be viewed as, in large part, a televisual effort to similarly imbue the Welsh landscape with national historical significance, and to do so in a way that rejuvenates the nation's relationship with a certain set of historical roots. The programme, subtitled in the first episode as 'An Excursion with Gwyn Williams', is veritably dominated by images of rural Wales; virtually all of Williams's lengthy explanatory pieces to camera are set against the backdrop of the mid- and north-Welsh landscape, and are shot in the idiom of the landscape painting. Granted, this is where

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[146] Ibid, p. 164.

[147] E. Griffiths Jones, 'The Celtic Genius', quoted in Lord, *Imaging the Nation*, p. 292.

[148] Peter Lord, 'Improvement: The Visualisation of "y Werin", the Welsh Folk', in *The Meaning of Pictures*, p. 108.

much of Welsh history prior to the industrial era – the cut-off date of *TLR*'s interests – took place; yet in those instances when town and city life is brought into the picture, the series is quite openly hostile to it. Some rather impressive images of Cardiff and its city hall, shot from the then recently constructed Capital Tower, for instance, are undermined by Williams's narration, which presents town life as the antithesis of a "Celtic" racial ancestry that never constructed a coherent empire:

> The story of our town life is one of coming to terms with a concept alien to our inherited culture. [...] Are we really the kind of people who like great centres? Certainly no great enthusiasm was shown for Cardiff as a capital. In the old Welsh society, only bondmen lived huddled together in the villages. (Series One, Episode Three)

It should be said, of course, that such pronouncements do not necessarily reflect the view of Ormond or of BBC Wales in any simple or straightforward way. Statements such as this clearly stem from Williams's own ideology, and the series makes fairly clear the fact that we are hearing one man's individual perspective.[149] But the overall effect of the series is implicitly, and quite strongly, to endorse this view, and further to convince viewers of its validity. Indeed, *TLR* makes every effort to interpellate a Welsh national viewership not only by imbuing the landscape with historical resonance, but further by encouraging the audience to actively cultivate its own historical understanding of it. Williams frequently addresses the viewer directly: 'I'm sure you must have seen it [...]';[150] 'even from a motorway you can spot them [...]'.[151] Related to this is the series' effort to encourage an *aesthetic* as well as historical appreciation of the landscape. Its visual palette, across twelve episodes, rarely veers from images of Wales's undulating, bucolic majesty, and the lilting classical compositions that accompany the images only add to the series' sense of refined aesthetic appreciation of the land. Indeed, town and city life is frequently judged in superficially aesthetic –

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[149] This is a perspective that Williams made somewhat more explicit in his own writings. In his unusual autobiography, *ABC of (D.)G.W.* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1981) (subtitled 'A Kind of Autobiography'), he is scathing on the subject of Cardiff and, it would seem, monoglot Anglophone Welsh culture and its national allegiances: 'As a capital city Caerdyf has proved no better than I expected. It satisfies if you think that communication with London is more important than with Aberystwyth or Caernarfon, if you go by population density, if you think that Welsh culture is a tolerable eccentricity so long as it keeps its distance, if you think that the English branch of Yr Academi Gymreif has a likelier future than the original Welsh branch, if rugby is more important to you than poetry, opera more important than penillion singing.'
[150] Williams, *The Land Remembers*, Series One, Episode One (BBC Wales, 1972)
[151] Gwyn Williams, *The Land Remembers*, Series One, Episode Three (BBC Wales, 1972)

rather than, for instance, economic - terms: Port Talbot can be 'pleasant enough on a day like this, but it can be grey and dismal too'. Inhabitants of the south Wales coalfield are pitied for their lack of access to the picturesque; as Williams gloomily intones, 'the coal tips were their alps, […] the blast furnaces were their volcanoes'. (Series One, Episode One) This further reinforces the unquestionable beauty and historical significance of rural Wales, thereby interpellating a certain brand of Welsh historical sensibility. This is one that is, if not wilfully hostile to, then at least dismissive of the significance of the Welsh industrial experience. The series ends in the early nineteenth century, a time that Williams exalts, deeply problematically, as a time of peaceful calm for the *gwerin*. It is worth quoting a statement from the last episode in the series in order to get a sense of Williams's idealized vision:

> The happiest times for ordinary people were those which have left no monuments. Times when no castles or prisons were built, when there were no new battlefields to scar the land and enrich it with blood. When even the towns were static, and the countryside largely undisturbed. When there was much poverty but little grim want, when men didn't quarrel over politics or religion. Wales, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was like that. But before the end of the century, new things were to come that are not easy to forget. (Series Two, Episode Six)

These words, accompanied by slow, picturesque pan shots of a peaceful and verdant rural Wales, thus verbalize the implicit logic of *TLR*'s overriding visual aesthetic, its attempt to project Wales as an agricultural idyll disturbed by the anglicising and urbanizing forces of industry – ominously alluded to in the final sentence. It should be said, though, that the final sequence of the series, at the end of the very last episode, does in fact shift towards a different visual and, thus perhaps different political idiom. After a discussion of some of the prominent intellectual figures of Wales in the eighteenth century – Methodist leaders such as Griffith Jones and Daniel Rowland, the poet William Williams Pantycelyn, the Morris brothers, founders of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion – Williams comes to the all-round Enlightenment polymath Richard Price. Price, hailing from Llangeinor, near Bridgend, was, in addition to being a dissenting minister, of course influential in a number of fields, but he most memorably found favour with the founding fathers of the United States with his writings on liberal

democracy.[152] It is this that *TLR* interests itself in, with particular reference to his lecture written in affirmative response to the French Revolution, 'A Discourse on the Love of our Country' (1789).

Price's lecture, though delivered to the 'Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain' with the country of *Britain* clearly in mind, is appropriated by *TLR* for a contemporary Welsh context; Williams quotes at length Price's principles of democratic self-governance, some of which are curiously at odds with the logic of a series that places such heavy emphasis on the significance of the national landscape: 'by our country is meant [...] not the soil or the spot of earth on which we happen to have been born, not the forests and fields, but that community of which we are members [...]'. Revealingly, Williams omits the second clause of Price's sentence: 'or that body of companions and friends and kindred who are associated with us under the same constitution of government, protected by the same laws, and bound together by the same civil polity.'[153] Indeed, Williams's appropriation of Price's remarks are undertaken not so as to confirm Wales's place within a wider British polity, but rather – and quite radically - to posit a cultural, and by extension political nationalism. The final words of the series are again borrowed from Price, but modify their intended meaning: 'an enlightened and virtuous country must be a free country.' Price had of course been referring to the democratic freedoms of citizens within the British nation state, but the message that chimes strongly here in the final moments of *TLR* is one of political freedom for the Welsh nation. Most relevantly for my interests, the visual idiom of the film shifts to accommodate this inclusive political idealism; as Williams iterates Price's inspiring remarks, the camera, which has, for the vast majority of the series, remained fixed to the ground, confining itself to slow pans and zooms, lifts off into a series of stunning aerial shots that encompass not only the rural landscape but also industry, the coalfield conurbations, and the ports - all of which had been all but omitted from the series' visual vocabulary until now. Thus in aiming toward an endorsement of a form of civic nationalism, *TLR* thus seems to gesture toward a rapprochement between agricultural and industrial Wales. This is, whatever one's position on Welsh political nationalism, an admirable and – judging by the divided historiographical efforts

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[152] See D. O. Thomas, 'Price, Richard (1723–1791)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., May 2005 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22761 [Accessed 9 Oct 2013].

[153] Richard Price, 'A Discourse on the Love of our Country' in *Political Writings*, ed. by D.O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 178.

examined so far in this chapter – much-needed gesture, but it seems to be a somewhat meagre offering in the context of a series that has so heavily endorsed a pastoral and anti-industrial vision of Wales.

The Land Remembers thus gestures toward a rapprochement between Wales's two historical communities, but ultimately struggles to incorporate the reality of industry into its vision. Yet this sense of historical aloofness was mutual. As I noted earlier, the 1960s and 1970s were decades in which Welsh industrial historiography was coming into full swing, and this was a movement largely uninterested in Welsh lives beyond the coalfield. The Labour party was politically dominant in Wales by the end of the 1960s, and the newly educated children of a militantly left-wing south Wales were embarking on their own careers in Welsh history, often adopting the burgeoning new methodologies of 'people's history', 'history from below'. One of the major achievements of the freshly established 'Welsh Labour History Society'[154] (1970) was the two-year South Wales Coalfield History Project (1972-74), led by the two young academics R. Merfyn Jones and Hywel Francis, which sought to collect and collate documents and books from miners' institutes and libraries from across the south Wales coalfield in order, as they wrote in the project's final report, to '[reconstruct] the history of a unique but rapidly changing community and culture.'[155] The project led to the establishment of the South Wales Miners' Library in Swansea as a repository for the valuable materials it garnered. Of course, as a product of the new left-leaning, revisionist historiography that developed in the years after E.H. Carr's radical questioning of the purpose, priorities, and power of traditional academic history, the work being done on Welsh industrial society was in large part a radical political project aimed at the commemoration and implantation of the radical activities of coalfield workers into received history, activities that would otherwise be forgotten by historians consulting only the official annals of historical and political documentation. But it was simultaneously an effort to memorialize a unique historical community for posterity, and in this sense shared certain important similarities with the work that people such as Iorwerth Peate had been doing for the folk culture of Wales in the post-war period. One of the most effective strategies the project adopted to this end – and one that had been

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[154] In the preface to the most recent edition of their important publication *The Fed*, Hywel Francis and Dai Smith recall a 1970 meeting in Swansea's Bay View Hotel to establish the society. Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p. xviii.

[155] *The South Wales Coalfield History Project: Final Report* (University College, Swansea: Departments of History and Economic History, 1974), p. 1.

used by Vincent Phillips and Roy Saer, colleagues of Peate at the Welsh Folk Museum, in the 1960s[156] - was the use of the methodologies of oral history. Where Phillips and Saer sought to record folk songs, the South Wales Coalfield History Project sought to record interviews with miners caught up in the major political events in the coalfield in the first half of the twentieth century. Hywel Francis justified this approach in an essay published in 1980, and it is worth quoting him at length:

> For the historian of the twentieth century to ignore oral evidence is tantamount to taking a decision to write off whole areas of human experience. Indeed there are human activities which can only satisfactorily be uncovered by collecting oral testimony. [...] [E]ven in such an advanced, reasonably literate, industrial society as the mining valleys of South Wales between the wars, with its range of social and political institutions each spawning a multiplicity of primary and secondary historical sources, there is a world beyond this which is not, and cannot be, analysed or even chronicled without the intervention of oral testimony.[157]

Francis here sketches the important central aim of this form of historical enquiry: the endeavour to bring into the historical domain voices and events that would otherwise remain unheard and undocumented, and thus be forgotten. This is in one sense the objective and logical function of historical enquiry. But Francis also, perhaps inadvertently, touches upon the more general social function that history performs within human communities. Note the shift in register from the distanced parlance of empirical "analysis" to the more archaic lexicon of "chronicle" which seems to allude to the more basic social function of folklore and myth. Here Francis echoes the work of Paul Thompson, the most prominent advocate of this form of historical enquiry. Thompson is an historian of the 'History Workshop' ethos insofar as he views the purpose of the historian as being to seek out and activate subaltern histories in the social domain in order to empower people to use historical knowledge to shape their own political destinies. This is an aim driven, of course, by a strong political impetus, but, as Thompson states in his important and influential book, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (1978), history should at the same time have a positively social function, and oral history is one method that can assist in the project of bringing history back into the social domain:

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[156] 'Roy Saer and Folk Song Collecting at St Fagans', *National Museum Wales Website* http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/folksongs/?display_mode=desktop [accessed 25 October 2013].
[157] Hywel Francis, 'The Secret World of the South Wales Miner: The Relevance of Oral History', in David Smith, ed., *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980* (London: Pluto, 1980), p. 167.

> The challenge of oral history lies partly in relation to [the] essential social purpose of history. [...] It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of enquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; [...] whether in books, or museums, or radio and film – it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.[158]

Moreover, as Thompson goes on to observe later in this important first chapter to *The Voice of the Past*, 'History and the Community',

> Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people. [...] It brings history into, and out of, the community. [...] It makes for contact – and thence understanding – between social classes, and between generations.[159]

Oral history, for both Thompson and Francis, then, carries the potential not only to chart what would otherwise be the hidden human depths of the past, but, in doing so, to help build and sustain those human communities that - for these socialist historians - *constitute* the past, and to do so through continued social contact and interaction.

These were central aims of the South Wales Coalfield History Project, and indeed important studies were undertaken that, in Francis's words, 'rely heavily'[160] on the oral history facet of the project. One of these was Francis's own doctoral dissertation on the 200 or so[161] miners who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War,[162] the research for which provided the basis for Ormond's final history series in 1979, *The Colliers' Crusade* and, later, Francis's book *Miners Against Fascism*

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[158] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1978]), p. 2.

[159] Ibid, p. 21.

[160] Francis, 'The Secret World of the South Wales Miner', in Smith, ed., *A People and a Proletariat*, p. 179.

[161] The exact number is open to some dispute. Francis's most recent count is 206, including all those who volunteered for the International Brigades but did not make it to Spain (having been refused or physically unfit to serve). (See Hywel Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2012 [1984]), pp. 300-305.) Robert Stradling lists 154 names, which includes those of five who fought with militias other than the International Brigades and one who served with the Nationalist Army, but not those who did not make it to Spain. (See Robert Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon's Dearest Cause?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 183-187.)

[162] Hywel Francis, *The South Wales Miners and the Spanish Civil War: A Study in Internationalism* (University of Wales, 1977).

(1984).[163] *Miners Against Fascism* uses the extensive oral testimonies acquired from volunteers to the International Brigades, and in drawing on these personal testimonies, Francis's book – and, I want to argue, Ormond's series – provides a unique and often intimate perspective on what has become a central episode in the history and popular understanding of the south Wales coalfield from the first event that publically memorialized it in 1938 down to the present day.[164] Indeed, the historian Robert Stradling suggests that Francis's book should itself be seen as not only the book that 'created the history of Wales and the Spanish Civil War' but in doing so 'became part of that history.'[165] By 'that history' Stradling here refers to the broad history of Wales's engagement with and understanding of that memorable event - itself an important historical phenomenon - and his revisionist *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon's Dearest Cause?* (2004) aims in large part to debunk much of this history as, broadly, myth - a 'minor mabinogion'.[166] The received perception of the Welsh response to that bloody war, one dominated by the notion of a selfless group of volunteers born of a radical and cosmopolitan coalfield that went out to fight the good fight against Fascism, is indeed firmly reified and reinforced in *Miners Against Fascism*. Francis portrays an internationalist, altruistic cadre of miners poised for chivalric military action by their own long-established opposition to poverty, political oppression, and even Fascism itself in the south Wales coalfield.[167] By Francis's logic, 'fighting and working for "Spain" was but an extension of a long-standing extra-parliamentary political tradition in Wales.'[168]

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[163] The other was Kim Howells' PhD thesis, titled *A View From Below: Tradition, Experience and Nationalisation in the South Wales Coalfield 1937-1957* (University of Warwick, 1979).

[164] The first major event took place at Mountain Ash on 7 December 1938. Over 7000 people were present, including the African American actor, singer and political activist Paul Robeson. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 249. As Daniel G. Williams has noted, Robeson's presence was highly symbolic and, indeed, anticipated what would become his 'talismanic role' in Welsh perceptions of the coalfield for decades to come. Daniel G. Williams, *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 150. More recent Welsh engagements with Spain include the Manic Street Preachers' hit single 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next' (1998) (which aptly borrows a quotation from one of the interviews Hywel Francis undertook as part of the Coalfield History Project: 'If I can shoot rabbits then I can shoot fascists'. See Francis, *Miners Against Fascism* [2012], p. xix.). On television, the recent BBC Wales programme *Return Journey* (2005) saw one of the men interviewed in Ormond's series, Alun Menai Williams, return to the battlefields on which he fought in Spain.

[165] Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. xii.

[166] Ibid, p. 49. Stradling presented his own revisionist views in a 2006 BBC2 documentary directed by Colin Thomas, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: Whose History, Whose Legend?*

[167] Oswald Mosley had organized meetings of the British Union of Fascists across south Wales in the 1930s. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 88.

[168] Ibid, p. 23.

Yet Stradling's book complicates this somewhat idealistic view by constructing a far broader account of the complex range of Welsh responses to Spain. These ranged, Stradling argues, from an indifference brought on by the "prophylactic"[169] effect of more pressing local concerns such as the Means Test and the nationalist arson attack on the RAF bombing centre at Penyberth in 1936, to a support for the Republic predicated not on altruistic compassion but on a hostile anti-Catholicism. Perhaps the most deflating of Stradling's contentions is his reminder that most of those who did "volunteer" to fight were 'hard-core [Communist] Party activists, some of whom had been trained in Russia, and whose loyalties were to the Party rather than to the Spanish Republic.'[170] While Francis's book does acknowledge the influence of the Communist Party on the volunteers, and further readily admits that its interests lie less with Spain or even the military experiences of the Welsh who fought in the war than with 'the kind of society which moulded their political outlook',[171] Stradling's revisionist work does allow us to see more clearly the sense in which *Miners Against Fascism* sets out to construct an exalting and even exaggerated account of the coalfield's contribution to the Republic's cause that is in line with the broader historiographical project taking place in Wales at that time.

Indeed, Francis's book is perhaps best viewed not only in political terms as an effort to extend the annals of history to include the important 'extra-parliamentary' activities of a radically pro-active British working class, but in a concomitant sense as a deliberately *national* historicizing of a chapter in the history of a Welsh nation that, as I have discussed, had been, before the 1960s, heavily overloaded by anti-industrial historiography. This was part of a broad process of painting a political history that had been, in G.A. Williams's terms, 'resolutely British and centralist',[172] in *Welsh* national colours. There was, naturally, a complex array of political and emotional factors at play in this process. The process of nationalising Welsh Labour history was no doubt a response to the successes that Plaid Cymru was enjoying in the late 1960s, as well as partly, in R. Merfyn Jones and Ioan Rhys Jones's terms, a 'bureaucratic rationalization'

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[169] Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 32.

[170] Ibid, p. 11. This being the case, it is unlikely many of the Welsh volunteers would have torn up their CPGB cards in protest as does David Carr, the protagonist of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995). There were, however, a few ILP members who did, like Loach's character, fight with the POUM; Francis counts three, one of whom, Urias Jones, fought alongside George Orwell. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 175.

[171] Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 23.

[172] Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p. 274.

in the face of an imploding Welsh economic base with no cohesive government to manage it.[173] There were, moreover, a group of "nationalistic" Labour MPs who certainly viewed some form of political devolution as emotionally as well as politically desirable (such as Tudor Watkins, Goronwy Roberts and Cledwyn Hughes), and had supported the 'Parliament for Wales' campaign in the 1950s.[174] However we choose to view it, the process of nationalizing Welsh Labour was in full swing by the 1970s, and was having tangible political effects: campaigns on behalf of an all-Wales TUC found success in 1973 (not coincidentally backed by two Welsh veterans of the Spanish Civil War, Tom Jones and Jack Jones), and there was considerable Labour support for devolution in the years leading up to the referendum in 1979.

Ormond's 1979 series *The Colliers' Crusade*, drawing heavily on Francis's research,[175] should therefore be viewed as a product of the burgeoning new historiographical methodologies that greatly enhanced the capacity to write and disseminate the history of labour history in Welsh terms in this era. It is a series that contributes to what Stradling describes as the 'routine, [...] always positive, and often referential'[176] treatment of the theme in print and audio-visual media in Wales since the late 1930s. Indeed the series could, being a BBC production, quite conceivably have explored in more general terms the British involvement in the Spanish Civil War, given that some 2500 volunteers from across Britain fought in Spain,[177] (as, for instance, Ken Loach does in his film *Land and Freedom* (1995), and in time with a rise in interest in Spain following the death of General Franco in 1975 and the country's subsequent transition to democracy. But consistent with Stradling's assertion that 'interest in the Spanish Civil War and in the International Brigades remains stronger and more widespread in Wales than in any other country which became involved',[178] the series capitalizes on these wider European historical developments in order to draw strength from an earlier moment in Welsh history. Indeed, the film is closely consistent with Francis's interpretation of the Welsh contribution to the war; it too downplays the influence of the Communist Party and completely omits the range of other responses to

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[173] R. Merfyn Jones and Ioan Rhys Jones, 'Labour and the Nation', in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin, eds., *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 151.

[174] See Ibid, pp. 252-254.

[175] Ormond had read Francis's unpublished PhD thesis prior to making *The Colliers' Crusade*.

[176] Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 7.

[177] Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 156.

[178] Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. x.

the war in Wales, instead favouring a portrayal of a south Walian society primed by a domestic radicalism for military intervention in a foreign war that echoed its own political problems.

The first episode sees the ever-effusive (though by now aging) Gwyn Thomas describe a south Wales that was ignited in indignation by the almost simultaneous occurrence of the major pit disaster at Gresford in September 1934 and the Asturian miners' uprising crushed by Spanish forces led by Franco in October of the same year. He recalls 'time and again in the Rhondda valley' stopping to talk to men who 'saw the logic of this. [...] This definitely did fix a mood in south Wales, that there was a link between what had happened [...] in Gresford and what was happening in the Asturias'. (Episode One) It is significant, too, that Ormond uses Thomas not as narrator of the series, but rather, like the miners' interviewed, as an historical contributor; instead, veteran BBC broadcaster René Cutforth steps in as the neutral narrator. This may seem peculiar, given Thomas's extensive experience in broadcasting and own his ties to both south Wales and Spain, but was likely in part to have been due to the fact that his deeply partisan position on the war would not have been sanctioned by the BBC. The BBC's recently published internal guidelines on documentary production, *Documentary Principles and Practice* (1972), had been firm on the issue of political neutrality; an entire section dedicated to 'Balance and Fairness' made clear the BBC's commitment to this fact:

> [T]he producer or director of a documentary occupies a complex position. On the one hand he is the BBC; half of him cannot escape being an official delegated to supervise broadcasting policies and practices. On the other hand half of him has creative responsibilities to the programme. Since many programmes deal with matters of high controversy [...], should he allow his own views to dictate the nature of the programme? The classic answer is that unless he can lay his own views totally on one side, he should on no account be producing this particular programme at all.[179]

In fact, Ormond evades this problem by including Thomas as a contributor rather than narrator, a strategy that *Documentary Principles and Practice* explicitly sanctions: in programmes 'dealing with a contentious subject on which differing opinions exists', it states, opinions should be 'carried firmly on the shoulders of the contributors'.[180] This

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[179] *Documentary Principles and Practice* (London: BBC, 1972), p. 23.
[180] Ibid, p. 24.

enables the series to implicitly (and quite emphatically) endorse Thomas's political

pronouncements on the war without fear of the charge of bias, and, to be sure, Ormond

exploits this to powerful effect. Gwyn Thomas's deeply evocative pronouncements on

the 'anger [that] will rise like a great lion, [...] [a] great tawny lion that will come and

eat injustice' are visually and sonically underlined by picturesque images of the plains

of the Spanish Meseta and the solemnly rousing tones of the Asturian miners' folk song,

'En el pozo María Luisa' (In the Pit of María Luisa). Such sequences leave little

question as to whose side the series is on.[181] But the major strength of using Thomas

and the other miners is, I would suggest, its extensive use of oral testimony. In its use of

extended interviews with some of the figures central to the Welsh contribution to the

Republic cause, men such as Will Paynter, Jack "Russia" Roberts, and Tom Jones,[182]

the series should be viewed as an historical supplement to Francis's use of oral history.

The miners movingly recall the hunger, the exhaustion and the fear of combat in a

foreign land, but also tell tales of camaraderie and laughter, all of which adds human

texture to the recounting of history. They do so in a Welsh accent and from a Welsh

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[181] Ormond provides additional political balance by including as one of his contributors the unlikely
Welsh volunteer to the Nationalist cause, Frank Thomas. Interestingly, Thomas is the only contributor to
the series who admits to having been drawn to Spain by a sense of adventure, which would surely also
have been a factor in many volunteers' decision to fight. Indeed, adventurism is not something that
Francis, either, countenances as a contributing factor to the miners in his book. This would not seem to
fit into his portrayal of a radical community poised for political action. Revealingly, the only volunteers
whom he considers to have been driven by such interests are those non-miners from outside the
coalfield: 'the appeal of adventure and a worthwhile cause could have been determining factors for the
apparently apolitical footloose unemployed labourer or farmworker'. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p.
209. It is worth, moreover, noting Stradling's claim in *Wales and the Spanish Civil War* that Ormond was
'somewhat nonplussed' to turn up to interview Thomas only to find that he had not fought for the
Republic. Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 46. Francis makes the counter-claim in the most
recent edition of *Miners Against Fascism* that 'on the contrary, I had made John Ormond aware of
Thomas: he was delighted to have had the opportunity of contrasting Thomas' outlook with those of the
International Brigadiers'. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. xii.
[182] Many of these men had also been prominent in coalfield politics before the outbreak of the Spanish
Civil War. Will Paynter, for instance, had been an influential figure within the Communist Party and was
in 1936 elected onto the executive council of the South Wales Miners' Federation. He went on to
become General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers. See Hywel Francis, 'Paynter, Thomas
William (1903–1984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online
edn, Sept 2010 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48653> [Accessed 28 Oct 2013). Jack "Russia"
Roberts had acquired his nickname as an outspoken polemicist during the General Strike of 1926.
(Roberts wrote a well-received poem, 'Spain', during his time in on the front line at Brunete that was
published in Stephen Spender and John Lehmann's collection *Poems for Spain* (London: Hogarth, 1939).
Surprisingly, considering its renown and undoubted power, Ormond doesn't find space for the poem in
this series.) Others, such as Tom Jones, who was pivotal in the creation of the Wales TUC, built political
careers after returning home.

perspective.[183] An example that is worth quoting at some length is Edwin Greening's recollection of the death of his friend during the Battle of the Ebro in late 1938:

> I got my weekly *Aberdare Leader* […]. I read it in the intervals of the bombing, then I crawled up to where Tom Howell Jones, from Aberdare, was in a stone crevice. I said 'here's the *Aberdare Leader*, Tom', then I got back to my place straight away. An hour later, there was terrible mortaring of the upper ridges of the Battalion area. There was a lot of shouting, and they came and said 'quick, your mate has had it'. And I rushed up and there Tom Howell Jones and his mates had been killed instantly. And the *Leader* lay there, blood-stained in the trench. (Episode Four)

This briefly related vignette of recollection demonstrates something of the power of oral history; Greening's stoic, matter-of-fact phrasing adds considerable gravity to what must have been a deeply disturbing moment in his experience of the war. Moreover the remarks further embody the potential of informal oral recollection in the context of national broadcasting. Greening's clipped yet unmistakeably south-Walian accent adds sonic texture to the heavily symbolic recollection of the presence of the *Aberdare Leader* on the battlefield.[184] Here this banally commonplace Welsh item - a token of local affiliation and camaraderie between two Welsh volunteers - potently symbolises the presence of the Welsh contingent in Spain; its subsequent despoliation with Welsh blood powerfully brings home the reality of war. The scene can usefully be seen, in Paul Thompson's terms, to '[bring] history into, and out of, the community' in order to strengthen the self-identification of, in this case, the national community.[185] The

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[183] It could be suggested that the series' airing on the BBC national network in the following year further helped to reinforce Wales as an historical community - or at least its perception as such outside Wales – albeit with recourse to certain dubious stereotypes. The series was well received in *The Times*, with that newspaper's television reviewer remarking that it is 'a good job the Welsh are good talkers […] because if they weren't, *The Colliers Crusade* wouldn't be half the programme it is.' Peter Davalle, 'Personal Choice', *The Times*, 6 June 1980, p. 27.

[184] The newspaper had, in fact, been a staunch supporter of the Republican Government, and even published articles and letters from men serving with the International Brigades. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 121. This was in contrast to the conservative *Western Mail*, which is spoken of sardonically as "jeer[ing]", "gloat[ing]" elsewhere in the series with regard to its support for the coalowners in the disputes of the 1920s. As it happened the *Western Mail*, having initially shown hostility toward the Republic, shifted its editorial position in support of it after the bombing of Guernica on 26 April 1937. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 125.

[185] There were precedents to the series' use of oral history on television. The BBC's *Yesterday's Witness* (1969-1981) - devised and produced by Stephen Peet – was a successful and long-running series that utilized oral testimonies from witnesses to and participants in major historical events. Steve Humphries, another prolific advocate of the form, has suggested that *Yesterday's Witness* was the catalyst for many oral history documents from the 1980s onwards Steve Humphries, 'Oral History on Television: A Retrospective', *Oral History*, 36:2 (2008), 101. But it is important to note that the way leading to the use

testimonies thus function in precisely the way in which interviews with Welsh-speaking Patagonians in *Y Gymru Bell* work, providing, to reiterate John Corner's remarks, a 'bridge [...] between viewer's world and subject's world' in order to promote 'not only knowledge and vicarious social adventure but also a form of social relationship.' If, as Paul Thompson notes, 'all history depends, ultimately, on its social purpose', there seems to me no question of the social purpose of a series such as *The Colliers' Crusade*; it is a series that strongly reinforces the sense of an historical Welsh national community – whatever that community's ties to a wider, extra-national set of political circumstances.

In his history of the BBC in Wales, John Davies draws attention to an internal memorandum of 1933 that reveals some of the reservations that staff in Cardiff had about finding material for radio programmes in industrialised south Wales at that time. 'If a programme is to be done on Merthyr', it noted, 'it would be better to do it on old Merthyr, because a programme on present-day Merthyr would be difficult to do without referring to its poverty.'[186] It seems to me that this effort of drawing strength at a time of national crisis from a more ideologically attractive past is at work in *The Colliers' Crusade*, with the ironic difference, of course, that this series finds strength in the acts of political solidarity that were themselves the product of the devastating poverty of the 1930s in south Wales. This is a neat illustration of the broad historical tendency with which I have been interested in this chapter; that process through which perceptions of the past are invariably bound up with the requirements of the present; and, moreover, the ways in which those subsequent perceptions themselves become part of the broader processes of history. I have tried to demonstrate here the ways in which Ormond's historical documentaries each embody this basic historical mechanism through which historical narratives were activated - and, in turn, themselves became part of - the historical process in the turbulent decades between the 1950s and the 1980s in Wales. The major problem for Wales at this time was the fact of its dual and often mutually opposed historiographies, and Ormond's films seem to me to demonstrate amply the difficulty of reconciling these internal differences, whether in history books or on the screen.

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of oral testimonies from members of the general public was paved in a more general sense by the broad developments in attitudes towards broadcasting and the media in Britain in the post-war period, in particular the more egalitarian approaches to television production. I explore these issues and their effects on Ormond's filmmaking in more detail in a separate chapter.

[186] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 90.

John Davies has argued that broadcasting itself was at least partly to blame for some of the divisions in Wales in the years leading up to 'the failure [...] to provide [Wales] with a democratic framework and a constitutional role'[187] in the 1979 referendum on devolution, and, given that the films examined here are quite clearly divided between two competing historiographical traditions, it could be suggested that such films contributed to internal fractures that proved to be politically irreconcilable. But it is difficult to assess with any methodological precision the exact role that documentaries such as Ormond's played in the years leading up to the referendum. I would instead echo remarks that Geraint Talfan Davies has made on the role of current affairs journalism on this subject. In a 1983 essay, 'The Role of Broadcasting in the Referendum', Talfan Davies acknowledges the suggestion that many journalists working within the media in Wales could be perceived to have had a 'vested interest' in editorially supporting the "Yes" campaigns in the years leading up to 1979,[188] given that Welsh devolution would mean more material for them to cover, and hence more work. But as he notes, 'rarely do newspapers or programmes create or dictate events, or generate movements'.[189] Judging by the films I have discussed in this chapter - films that are thematically split, on the whole, between two competing historiographical traditions - it is surely more instructive to view Ormond's work at BBC Wales as, at most, reifying and reinforcing debates and arguments that already existed in Wales at this time. This is not to downplay their significance, but rather to judge their effects more modestly as cultural texts operating within the wider Welsh public sphere. By engaging with and circulating more widely the debates that were already at play in that sphere, such texts helped to sustain them and, perhaps, helped contribute to their development.

During the 1980s a new set of socio-economic challenges would help to soften the acrimony between these competing interpretations of Welsh history. Martin Johnes has suggested that during these years, 'as the working class fragmented and the labour movement seemed to offer little hope, the anger began to adopt something of a national angle, especially since it was easy to see the Tories as a government imposed on Wales by the choices of an English electorate.'[190] In such a context, Welsh historians began to

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[187] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 320.
[188] Talfan Davies, 'The Role of Broadcasting in the Referendum', in Foulkes, Jones and Wilford, eds., *The Welsh Veto*, p. 186.
[189] Ibid, p. 186.
[190] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 238.

spend less time examining what divided them than the ways in which the Welsh could be understood in more cohesive terms. This could be seen, as I have suggested, in the developments towards a nationalisation of labour history in Wales in the 1970s; to be sure, by the time of the 1984-85 miners' strike, the labour movement in Wales was becoming more visibly national. As Hywel Francis later wrote, the strike 'created a Welsh unity and identity, overcoming language and geographical differences, which failed to materialise in 1979.'[191] Indeed, despite Smith's assertions of a "plural" Wales of resounding disagreements, the title of his book – *Wales! Wales?* - at least demonstrated that the voice of the argument was shifting from one of a battle of declarations to a measured debate – perhaps one even approaching cordiality. Gwyn Alf Williams's similarly influential *When Was Wales?* (1985) matched this tone, and was, alongside Smith's book, a significant contribution to - and token of - this process of slow but sure historiographical reconciliation at a time of considerable internal crisis.[192] It is, moreover, for my purposes of no small note (and, I would suggest, no coincidence) that these two pivotal texts were in fact derived from two memorable television history series, Dai Smith's *Wales! Wales?* (1984), produced by Selwyn Roderick at BBC Wales, and Colin Thomas's *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1984, HTV and Channel 4), featuring Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Gwyn Alf Williams.[193] What this seems to me to encapsulate is the fact of the centrality of television to the Welsh public sphere in these years. In the later 1980s, 'St Fagans', the 'Museum of Welsh Folk Life', a heritage museum initially founded upon assumptions which 'patently drew on long-standing and romantic notions of the *gwerin*',[194] added two major emblems of proletarian, south Walean life - a row of miners' cottages and a workmen's institute - to its displays, and by 1995 had changed its name to the more inclusive 'Museum of Welsh Life'. Scholars

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[191] Hywel Francis, *History on Our Side: Wales and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike* (Ferryside: Iconau, 2009), p. 69.

[192] In his 1993 article 'Beyond Identity', R. Merfyn Jones discusses the 'ironic discongruity' of a situation in which although 'the economic base of [Wales] has been disrupted by a dramatic pattern of boom, slump, and restructuring [...], the political and proto-state profile of the country has sharpened.' Jones, 'Beyond Identity', 334. Writing in the context of a newly consolidated European Union in the aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty, Jones suggests that this disruption of secure identities - and their consequent replacement with a more civic understanding of nationhood that reaches 'beyond identity' – is something to be celebrated.

[193] In fact, Gwyn A. Williams' work on this subject had earlier been broadcast in the BBC Wales annual lecture of 1979, *When Was Wales?* The later book and his contribution to Colin Thomas's series was an expansion of this earlier exposition.

[194] Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community*, p. 90. The museum had opened in 1948 as the brainchild of Iorwerth Peate, a poet, scholar, museum curator and staunch supporter of rural, Nonconformist Wales. It was partly modeled on the open-air museum pioneered at Skansen, Sweden.

wrote of 'corresponding cultures',[195] exclaimed 'vive la difference!',[196] and mooted the possibility of a Wales 'beyond identity'. Thus, by the 1980s the situation was plain; as Dai Smith wrote in 1984, Wales 'rings with the self-righteousness of those who make claims for it according to the image of the country necessary for them'.[197] And while this still may not seem like a harmonious state of affairs, the very fact that these competing voices were now on something of an equal footing was undoubtedly a sign of progress. Ormond's films were a crucial contribution to that process.

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[195] M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: the Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).
[196] Smith, *Wales! Wales?*, p. ix.
[197] Ibid, p. 1.

Chapter Six: Popular Ethnography

[W]hat the producer has to do is to create a human harmony by means of his own vision of those people and the world they inhabit. He implies his own view of life, but without editorializing and without distorting the truth that is the lives of the people he has chosen. [1]

Denis Mitchell, quoted by Norman Swallow

The ways in which television addresses itself to matters of public concern, debate and value are inextricably tied up with questions of how programmes are put together as combinations of pictures and speech. [2]

Graham Murdock, 'Rights and Representations: Public Discourse and Cultural Citizenship'

In chapter three I discussed some of the factors that contributed to the BBC's adoption of the documentary format in the early days of television production. This was a format that could, in the words of John Grierson, 'explain society to society,'[3] and thus help fulfil the BBC's public service remit, its role of reflecting upon and interacting with, in Dahlgren's terms, the 'array of [...] political, economic and sociocultural fields'[4] that constituted the British public sphere. The previous two chapters have attempted to examine the construction of two of these sociocultural – and, as I have been arguing, *national* - "fields" on Welsh television; those films that attempt didactically to inform the public of those two crucial areas of public knowledge: "culture" and "history". But I have yet to examine one other topic that has been a central area of interest for the documentary form since its very inception: "society" itself. This is, obviously, a term so enormously broad as to be virtually meaningless; not only in analytical terms but also in the sense that "society" can be interpreted as a topic that spans television forms and genres of just about every kind, even if we disregard, for instance, those journalistic television genres that can be understood to address "society" explicitly, such as "news" and "current affairs", as well as "documentary". Even the difference between the latter

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[1] Norman Swallow, 'Denis Mitchell: Master of Documentary', *Listener*, 2403, 24 April 1975, 551.

[2] Graham Murdock, 'Rights and Representations: Public Discourse and Cultural Citizenship', in Jostein Gripsrud, ed., *Television and Common Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 13.

[3] John Grierson, quoted in Paddy Scannell, "The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', *Media, Culture and Society*, 1:1 (1979), 101.

[4] Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, p. 44.

two of these is, as Caroline Dover notes, imprecise, given the 'long-standing importance of journalism within documentary television and the close association of both programme genres with the provision of public service information and the revelation of "real life".'[5] (Though there is, as I hope has been made clear by this stage in the thesis, a necessary distinction to make between such genres, so much so that it is necessary to conceive of the documentary as not only a "genre", but also a film "form" in its own right.) The category "society" therefore warrants some clarification. I will go on shortly to examine what I believe can be understood as the "ethnographic" impulse of Ormond's films on "society" or "real life". But for now it is perhaps useful to adopt the term "actuality" as a substitute for "society". To be sure, "actuality" was the central referent of John Grierson's early conception of the documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality', and became the driving force behind much of the work of the British Documentary Movement; that is, as I explored in chapters two and three, the effort to utilize the "documentary" ontology of the photographic image as a means of representing "actuality" in a way that informed and helped shape a democratic citizenry. Films such as Paul Rotha's *Shipyard* (1935) and *The Face of Britain* (1935) and, in particular, Edgar Anstey's *Housing Problems* (1935), set this social agenda early on by placing real working people and their lives on screen. Indeed, the employment of Paul Rotha - a major figure in the British Documentary Movement of the 1930s and 1940s - as the first Head of Documentaries at the BBC in 1953 was a clear indication of the BBC's intention to take up the mantle of a movement that had proved so influential during the War years and to establish itself as the new vanguard in the production of documentaries of social concern.

Yet the BBC's early forays into such programmes were fitful at best. Technical limitations were such that actually leaving the studio and entering the real world - the place where the very stuff of the true *social* documentary resided - was a tediously cumbersome and expensive enterprise. As Norman Swallow, an influential BBC producer of this era, later described:

> Cine-cameras, always 35mm, were heavy and ponderous, optical sound recordings involved a huge vehicle the size of a furniture van, and the quantity of lighting equipment, as well as the time taken to assemble it, was substantially that of a full-scale feature film. To try to get the essence of either a person or a flexible

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[5] Caroline Dover, '"Crisis" in British Documentary Television: the End of a Genre?', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 1: 2 (2004), 244.

situation with equipment of this sort, and within the shooting-time normally allocated to television productions, was almost impossible.[6]

The result was that the common fare of the BBC documentary producer of the late 1940s and early 1950s was the 'dramatized documentary',[7] a heavily scripted and rehearsed live studio performance whose only claim to 'social documentary' or "actuality" status was its reliance on research and interviews conducted in the outside world. It was not until the mid 1950s that important technical developments, notably the emergence of more affordable lightweight film cameras and magnetic tape recorders, enabled television producers to move closer to the kinds of "actuality" films produced by their predecessors in the British Documentary Movement. With the newfound ability to film material from the social world of real people, and to bring it back to the studio for editing, it was now possible to produce programmes that addressed topics of contemporary social concern with far greater authenticity and at far greater length. Programmes such as the influential *Special Enquiry* (1952-1959), and the extant *Panorama* (first broadcast in 1953) were able to incorporate actuality material into their broadcasts in a way that had never before been possible in television. And these paved the way for the emergence in the late 1950s of the kind of programme that could truly be called "documentary" in the sense that it addressed a specific social topic or theme for its entirety. However, while these technical innovations in filming and sound were certainly major factors in the development of the documentary format on television, it is important to recognise that they in no way dictated the new "social" emphasis that television producers began to adopt in the late 1950s. I have quoted elsewhere Raymond Williams' remarks on the issue of the specific *forms* that new technologies take, and the sense in which these are never the sole product of developments in technologies themselves. To borrow Stuart Hall's remarks on the different (but, as I will discuss shortly, related) topic of photojournalism, the television documentary of the late 1950s and 1960s should be viewed as 'not a point along the single evolutionary curve of development of a technical medium, but rather one variant among many'.[8] Indeed, as I have tried to demonstrate throughout this thesis, the kinds of films that Ormond was engaged in producing at the BBC were products of a specific and identifiable set of

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[6] Swallow, *Factual Television*, p. 194.

[7] Scannell, 'The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', 102.

[8] Stuart Hall, 'The Social Eye of *Picture Post*', in Glenn Jordan, *'Down the Bay': Picture Post, Humanist Photography and Images of 1950s Cardiff* (Cardiff: Butetown History and Arts Centre, 2001), p. 68.

social and ideological circumstances. Thus, if we are to begin to understand the formation of one of the central topics in documentary production on television at this time, that of, broadly, *people* – a topic that, I want to argue, provided the sub-theme for an important group of Ormond's films – it is necessary to take into account some of the broader tendencies in social and cultural thought in post-War Britain.

This was, after all, an era of massive social change. The chaos of total war had violated many of the traditional bonds of social and cultural life, and this gave rise in the immediate post-War years to a new set of social and cultural expectations. These manifested themselves politically in the unprecedented (in Britain, at least) policy of social redistribution, with health, housing, education, and even areas of employment and industry taken over by the state. And, as I discussed in Chapter Four, these social shifts further translated into newly democratic approaches to the production, interpretation and distribution of culture. We are, of course, still feeling the effects of such changes in the field of cultural analysis, for the erosion of cultural hierarchies in the post-war period paved the way for the cultural historian of today to register shifts in not only the traditional "high" arts but also all other forms of cultural representation. Indeed, one key area of change was the new trends in humanist documentary journalism that emerged in this era. Paddy Scannell views the prestigious War-era photojournalist weekly *Picture Post* (1938-1957) as one of the signal texts in this era of cultural transformation, and suggests that the massive success of *Picture Post* during the War proved that while the pre-War moves towards more political and socially-charged forms of journalism and social observation - from the British writing of Orwell, Auden, Day-Lewis and the "Mass Observation" movement, to the grittily realist photojournalism of Henri Cartier-Bresson in France, as well as, of course, Grierson's Documentary Movement – it was in fact the War itself that brought these tendencies into mainstream focus in Britain. To be sure, for Scannell, *Picture Post* 'crystallized the deeply felt movement towards social democracy of the war years'.[9] Popular journalism was, for the first time in Britain, concerned with real people and with real social and cultural diversity. What was being brought into effect was thus, as Stuart Hall similarly argues, the 'democratisation of the subject', a 'desire to break through the crust of tradition and inherited social-sightlessness which had kept the greater half of Britain such a well-guarded secret from

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[9] Scannell, 'The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', 103.

the other, lesser but more powerful half.'[10] Of course, it was at this prestigious

magazine that Ormond found his first significant job, and he confirmed such

observations himself when he described it as a 'magazine of great prowess and concern

for human values. *Picture Post* established the blueprints for the Welfare State founded

by the first Labour Government under Attlee in 1945 before it commissioned Beveridge

to look into the prospects of a health service.'[11] While such a cultural determinist view

perhaps exaggerates the social efficacy of a single magazine, Ormond's remarks here

certainly reveal something of his own perception of the importance of such forms of

democratic cultural representation.

It was the 'crust of tradition' to which Hall refers, the residue of an older, more

prejudiced order of representation, that was beginning to seem decidedly anachronistic.

Thus the decades following the end of the Second World War saw the gradual

relaxation of the rigid Reithianism that had dominated broadcasting policy since the

1920s. The 1949 Beveridge Report on Broadcasting's recommendation of the

establishment of a commercial television channel, which came into being in 1955, was

one major manifestation of this. Another was the gradual shift in terminology that took

place at the heart of the BBC in these years, when successive Directors General adopted

tellingly different metaphors in their understanding of the institution. As media historian

Ien Ang notes, Reith, the first Director General, had preferred the metaphor of the BBC

as a "ship", 'of which he was the chief pilot – a nautical metaphor which suggested a

mission of leading and directing the audience in the modern world.'[12] Reith's successor

after the War, William Haley, preferred the idea of the BBC as a cultural "pyramid";

Haley was the Director General that split the radio service into three, guided by the

conviction that this would lead audiences from the populism of the Light Programme up

to the "best" content on the Third Programme at the top of the pyramid. But by 1960,

when Hugh Greene took up the job, the metaphor had become one of the BBC as the

reflexive "mirror" of society. As Ang notes,

> Abandoned was the explicit desire to take the audience on board, as it were, and
> lead it in a previously determined direction – as implied in Reith's model of
> public service. Instead a far more neutral task was formulated: that of representing
> and 'registering' society's many different voices and faces.[13]

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[10] Hall, 'The Social Eye of Picture Post', p. 71.

[11] Ormond, quoted in Poole, 'Conversations with John Ormond', 41-42.

[12] Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 108.

[13] Ibid, pp. 115-6.

Such changes of attitude and approach soon percolated down into programming. Cecil McGivern, the then Controller of BBC Television, who devised, alongside Norman Swallow, the BBC's important series *Special Enquiry*, had revealingly suggested that this new programme should be the 'television equivalent of *Picture Post*'.[14] Swallow was himself a vocal advocate of a more populist, egalitarian broadcasting style to supersede the stuffy Reithianism of the pre-War BBC. It is worth quoting some of his remarks on *Special Enquiry* at length:

> [U]p to that point [...] television and to some extent radio treatment of what we call current affairs subjects had been a little pompous. It was mostly so-called experts [...] talking about things as experts in whatever kind of territory. [...] [T]he thought was that we would do something in which our presenter would in fact be one of us, so the presentation would be from the point of view of the audience, of the public, not from the point of view of someone who knew everything about it or thought he did.[15]

This was, then, certainly a more egalitarian approach to broadcasting, and if not exactly more democratic – after all, the style and content of broadcasting was still dictated by an unelected minority - then at least a little less imperious and paternalistic. Moreover, this relaxation of convention extended out to an expansion of the kinds of themes and topics that were deemed appropriate for television to address, and these were in turn enhanced by the new technologies of sound and film becoming available in the early 1960s.[16] Swallow noted some years later that 'What was missing [...] from television documentaries before the mid-fifties was, quite simply, *people*.'[17] What the new technologies provided was a means of moving out into the social world of ordinary people, and to film what they saw and record what they heard.

For some BBC producers during the late 1950s and 1960s, this new freedom to document social reality was a veritably political gain. Indeed, media historians Ieuan Franklin and Paul Long have suggested that certain producers saw this new fieldwork as

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[14] Norman Swallow, quoted in Corner, 'Documentary Voices', in Corner, ed., *Popular Television in Britain*, p. 44.

[15] Ibid, p. 44.

[16] Swallow notes that the major achievements in the early 1960s were 'the substitution of 16mm for 35mm as the normal gauge for television film-making, and a modification of the tape-recorder which allowed it to operate as a synchronised sound recorder with the film-camera.' *Factual Television*, p. 198.

[17] Norman Swallow, quoted in Scannell, 'The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', 104.

an 'exercise in equality'.[18] They suggest that the chief development was the improved tape recorders in the early 1960s. These provided producers with the capacity to record extensive off-the-cuff aural material and to juxtapose this with filmed visual scenes in creative ways. This became known in the industry as the 'think-tape' technique, and given that it 'obviated the need for narrator, presenter and scripted commentary, [and gave] the listener or viewer direct access to vernacular voices,'[19] the new technique thus brought the television documentary far closer to the kind of democratic form that McGivern and Swallow had envisioned in the 1950s. Innovative producers such as Denis Mitchell and Philip Donnellan were using the new technologies to make documentaries that represented, for a mass audience, the 'underprivileged and unmapped sections of British society'[20] according to Franklin and Long. Denis Mitchell's celebrated *Morning in the Streets* (1959), for instance, paints a sensitive portrait of life in a Northern working class community.[21] The film brings a painterly eye to a depiction of the multifaceted nature of working class life: the light and the dark, the good and the bad, the squalor and deprivation but also the anarchic energy of a lively community spirit. Hailed for 'bringing television documentary to a new level',[22] the film deliberately evades stereotype by utilizing the possibilities of the 'think-tape' technique and omitting voice-over commentary. Mitchell claimed that the role of the documentary producer was to 'impl[y] his own view of life, but without editorializing and without distorting the truth that is the lives of the people he has chosen.'[23] This distinctly personal but also democratic technique was, moreover, seen in the pioneering work of Philip Donnellan. He too was concerned with representing the lives of the unrepresented, and focused in the mid-1960s on immigrant and diaspora communities. Films such as *The Irishmen* (1965), an 'account of the marginal status of the community of male Irish migrants responsible for rebuilding much of Britain's post-war

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[18] Ieuan Franklin and Paul Long, 'The Overheard and Underprivileged: Uses of Montage Sound in the Post-War BBC Television Documentaries of Denis Mitchell and Philip Donnellan', unpublished conference paper, *Documentary Now!* Conference held at UCL, London, January 2011. http://www.academia.edu/483597/The_Overheard_and_Underprivileged [Accessed 10 March 2014], no page number.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Though the community was in fact a composite of several different Northern communities; Mitchell filmed in the deprived areas of Liverpool, Stockport, Manchester and Salford.

[22] Patrick Russell, 'Morning in the Streets', *BFI Screenonline* http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1224984/index.html (Accessed 10 January 2013)

[23] Mitchell, quoted in Swallow, 'Denis Mitchell', 551.

infrastructure',[24] and *The Colony* (1964), an examination of the West Indian migrant community in 1960s Birmingham, similarly use the innately dialogical potential of the 'think-tape' technique to offer open-ended and unresolved but nevertheless sensitive, poetic accounts of the deeply conflicted nature of such communities. Donnellan later described the act of producing documentaries that were able to concern themselves with the 'voices of the ignored' as 'intoxicating'.[25]

Producers such as Mitchell and Donnellan should thus be seen as representatives of this new tendency, in BBC current-affairs programming, to look beneath the lofty world of politicians, political parties, government, and foreign affairs, and to examine more closely the texture of a more recognisable British social life. Indeed, the *British* dimension of such programming should not be forgotten: the BBC's public service remit – the Royal Charter that cemented its role as a central agent of the British public sphere – bestowed upon it a duty to help contribute to the on-going national definition and negotiation of "Britishness". Thus, while the BBC was slowly but surely absorbing the observational tendencies of post-war humanism, it is important to emphasise here a point that Glenn Jordan makes with regard to the humanism of *Picture Post*. While the BBC, like *Picture Post*, 'share[d] the classic humanist emphasis on "ordinary people"', it was nevertheless 'more concerned with contemporary Britain and the British than with humanity in general.'[26] This was, according to Jordan, 'humanism with a national face'.[27] To be sure, it was thought that part of the BBC's project of enriching and deepening Britain's understanding of itself could be achieved through, in John Corner's terms, the 'de-metropolitanisation'[28] of the BBC's administrative structure and its representational priorities. Norman Swallow had, for instance, insisted the new *Special*

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[24] Patrick Russell, 'Philip Donnellan', *BFI Screenonline* <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/500920/index.html> [Accessed 10 January 2013].

[25] Philip Donnellan, 'Memories of the Future', *Sight and Sound*, 2:4 (1992), 40. Donnelan's films were guided by an unflinching eye for social injustice, which often got him into trouble with his superiors. *The Irishmen*, for instance, though filmed for the BBC, was never televised. One interesting 1962 BBC memorandum reveals some of the internal resistance towards the more democratic documentary forms emerging at this time. Stuart Hood, then BBC Controller of Programmes, was responding to the concerns of the North regional Controller that Donnellan was exacting too much creative freedom: 'I have been enquiring into Donnellan's activities. What he has been engaged on is a pilot programme based on the idea of a prolonged interview with a "man from the people" – in this case a coal miner. From what I hear of it, I do not expect it to be seen on the screen.' (Memorandum dated 9 April 1962, BBC Written Archives Centre, T16/61/2)

[26] Glenn Jordan, *'Down the Bay'*: Picture Post, *Humanist Photography and Images of 1950s Cardiff* (Cardiff: Butetown History and Arts Centre, 2001), p. 13.

[27] Ibid, p. 13.

[28] John Corner, 'Television and British Society in the 1950s', in John Corner, ed., *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFI, 1991), p. 11.

Enquiry should have a 'strong regional bias', and that each edition should 'state an important national issue in local terms'.[29] And as I noted in chapter three, the end of the 1950s had seen the investment in and development of regional sectors of the BBC. One of the consequences of this initiative was the emergence of new regional film units such as the one Ormond headed in Cardiff. Indeed, Mitchell and Donnellan's important examinations of regional and working class life in England were a direct consequence of this initiative, with Mitchell producing his films at the BBC Northern headquarters in Manchester, Donnellan at BBC Midlands in Birmingham.

Popular Ethnography

Frequently this movement towards the representation of a more regionally and economically diverse Britain manifested itself in programmes that were concerned with *people* of all walks of life. This has led John Corner to suggest that this new style of television documentary amounted to 'a form of popular ethnography'.[30] I find this phrase, 'popular ethnography', quite suggestive, particularly when taking into consideration some of John Ormond's films of the same era. For the term "ethnography" has resonances beyond the idea of a focus or emphasis on particular "people" or social communities. Indeed "ethnography" is perhaps better described as a discursive formation that emphasises the interaction or difference *between* peoples, or more accurately, between *ethnicities*. This certainly seems to me an appropriate way to describe Philip Donnellan's films on Irish and West Indian migrants in 1960s Britain and also, as I intend to explore, a number of Ormond's films in the same vein. Indeed, the very titles themselves of some of the films I want to take into consideration in this chapter signal loudly this concern with cultural difference and interaction: *Song in a Strange Land* (1964), *Borrowed Pasture* (1960), *The Mormons* (1965), *From a Town in Tuscany* (1963). Taking into account the wider political climate in 1960s Britain, this is hardly surprising. This was the era of unprecedentedly high levels of immigration into Britain. Migrants from across war-torn Europe were welcomed in the years after 1945, and the 1948 British Nationality Act awarded the 800 million subjects of the Commonwealth full British citizen status, with the right to freely enter and settle in

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[29] Scannell, 'The Social Eye of Television, 1946-1955', p. 103.
[30] Corner, 'Documentary Voices', p. 55.

Britain.[31] Of course, neither of these open-armed gestures was wholly humanitarian at heart; both were in large part dictated by the pressing need for Britain to expand an emaciated post-war labour force. Similarly, there was little humanity in the way many British people responded to the influx. Though there had been a trickle of immigration from Europe (particularly Ireland) and beyond from at least the eighteenth century, the majority of British people had, until the post-war era, little contact with ethnicities other than those within their borders.[32] Yet, by the 1960s, there were substantial communities of migrants from, particularly, the 'New Commonwealth' - the nations of the West Indies, the Indian Subcontinent and parts of Africa. The result was a period of sustained racial and ethnic tension: this was the era of the 1958 'Race Riots' in Nottingham and Notting Hill, and a time when a member of the Shadow Cabinet could deliver a caustic message of racial intolerance to considerable public support.[33] Thus, whether it liked it or not, Britain as a whole was becoming more visibly "polyethnic",[34] to borrow political philosopher Will Kymlicka's term, and so the BBC, as the principal instrument of the British public sphere, was obliged to register these demographic changes. It was thought by key producers within the BBC that the new "personal", "prestige" documentary that was developing in the 1950s and 1960s was the ideal format to perform this humanist, ethnographic function. Films such as Donnellan's *The Colony* and *The Irishmen,* and indeed Ormond's films on migrants in Wales, *Song in a Strange Land* and *Borrowed Pasture*, were, for instance, deemed by Norman Swallow to be crucial to the BBC's new democratic agenda. In their more fluid, associational style, such films were better equipped to approach what were often thorny and always complex social issues, and were an antidote to more "objective" documentaries that '[ran] the risk of confusing people with statistics, [...] and [had] a habit of implying the

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[31] Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. v.

[32] The little contact they did have was far from encouraging. Hostility towards Irish migrants was common in most industrial areas in the late-nineteenth century. Colin Holmes, the author of an important history of British immigration, notes that while these were often triggered by competition over employment, 'it was in these circumstances that long-standing religious animosities were brought to the surface.' Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society*, 1871-1971 (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 58.

[33] Political historian Randall Hansen notes that Enoch Powell's sustained ideological attacks on non-white migrants in the 1960s (culminating in the infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech of 1968) were 'backed by a majority of the public.' Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration*, p. 14.

[34] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 11.

kind of generalisation which ignores the fact that people cannot accurately be lumped together as though they were identical pieces of machinery.'[35]

It should be noted at this point that while these "ethnographic" films at the BBC in the 1960s were a first on British television, the form itself was not without precedent. To be sure, the "ethnographic film" has been a branch of documentary filmmaking since the form's very inception. One of the earliest examples of the documentary film itself was *In the Land of the Headhunters* (1914), a film made by Edward S. Curtis, then an already prominent American photographer who was one of the first to utilize the peculiarly realist 'ontology of the photographic image'[36] to (putatively) "document" native American tribes. In fact, the result of Curtis's foray into film was, in documentary historian Brian Winston's terms, 'crude melodrama', mere 'dramatized ethnographic exotica', but nevertheless, as Winston goes on to note, the film was considered to have 'documentary potential'.[37] Indeed, it was likely this film that at least partly inspired the work of Robert Flaherty, whose films *Nanook of the North* (1922), which finds its material in an Inuit family in northern Canada, and *Moana* (1926), whose subject is a Samoan tribe, directly inspired John Grierson to coin the term "documentary" and attach to it its current meaning.[38] Photographic and film cameras have, moreover, been used extensively in the field of anthropology throughout the twentieth century, with un-edited film footage being used by some prominent anthropologists (such as Margaret Mead and Geoffrey Bateson) as scientific evidence of their findings.[39] These were rarely viewed publicly, however, and it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that the "ethnographic film" entered mainstream American film culture as a branch of documentary in its own right. It is important to note, also, that while the American ethnographic film shared the same moment of inception as its counterpart in Britain, it possessed a somewhat different intellectual lineage. David MacDougall, the theorist to have first expounded the format in aesthetic terms in 1969 with his important essay 'Prospects of the Ethnographic Film', was at that time a young graduate of the Anthropology department of the University of California who had

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[35] Swallow, *Factual Television*, p. 189.

[36] The phrase is André Bazin's, coined in his seminal work of cinema studies, *What is Cinema?* Trans. by Hugh Gray.

[37] Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, p. 12, p. 173.

[38] Grierson had coined the term in a review of Flaherty's *Moana* in a New York newspaper. See Winston, *Claiming the Real*, p. 11. Flaherty's later *Man of Aran* (1934), on the inhabitants of the islands of Aran off the Western Irish coast, functions in a similarly ethnographic vein.

[39] See Winston, *Claiming the Real*, p. 173.

specialised in ethnographic film. MacDougall was, then, a social scientist who had

moved into the realm of cultural production: he went on in the 1970s to forge, with his

wife Judy, a career in ethnographic filmmaking. Yet despite these somewhat different

intellectual origins, the work of the MacDougalls and that of Ormond and his

contemporaries at the BBC intersect in important ways. In 'Prospects of the

Ethnographic Film', MacDougall had defined the genre by including under its banner

'any film which seeks to reveal one society to another',[40] and declared himself, in spite

of his social scientific background, an advocate of a distinctly *aesthetic* approach to its

production:

> As [traditional] societies vanish, and as the peoples of the world come more and
> more to resemble one another, the variety that once characterized the social life
> of man may be fully grasped only in the works of skilful writers and film-
> makers. *There is an aesthetic value in the diversity of cultures*; and to the
> humanist there is a wisdom to be derived from viewing one's own way of life
> and values in the light of others.[41] (Emphasis added)

While we might modify MacDougall's definition slightly in the context of films made

at the BBC – in their case we should perhaps refer to 'any film which seeks to reveal

[...] society to *itself*' - these approaches can certainly be understood to share the same

humanist impulse of cultural interaction, the same desire to view these interactions in

aesthetic terms and to draw wider human conclusions from them. Indeed Ormond

certainly shared these concerns. I have explored in an earlier chapter Ormond's own

poetic approach to filmmaking and his conviction that the documentary is as much an

artistic medium as a social tool. It is worth quoting Ormond's own remarks at length, as

they bear striking similarities to MacDougall's:

> All documentary has to have an element of revelation: that of the camera in a
> place as proxy witness for the audience; of a complex circumstance revealed in a
> simple and understandable form; of people and things in a seemingly ordinary,
> workaday world poetically revealed, inductive rather than deductive at heart,
> moving from particular observation to general, universal conclusion.[42]

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[40] David MacDougall, 'Prospects of the Ethnographic Film', in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods: An Anthology: Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 136. The essay was first published in the journal *Film Quarterly* in 1969.
[41] Ibid, p. 136.
[42] Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision*, p. 10.

These synonymous desires to represent ethnicity on film and to "induce" wider, more "universal conclusions" do share limitations as well as advantages, however. For "representation", as many theorists since the 1960s have attested, is in no way an ideologically neutral activity. It is always caught up with and structured by extant relations of power. Henrietta Lidchi, for instance, offers a useful formulation of this problematic in the context of the field of ethnography. As she explains, ethnography is

> not *reflective* of the essential nature of cultural difference, but classifies and *constitutes* this difference systematically and coherently, in accordance with a particular view of the world that emerges in a specific place, at a distinct historical moment and within a specific body of knowledge.[43] (Author's emphases.)

Thus, representation is not the neutrally descriptive or merely observational activity we might expect, but rather the process through which our (always ideologically-burdened) understanding of the world is structured. It is useful to remember, moreover, the sense in which ethnography is a form of representation that is - perhaps self-evidently but not obviously – bound up with the ethnic identity of the *author* of the representation as well as the represented. 'One of the principal functions of ethnography', notes intellectual historian James Clifford, 'is "orientation"'.[44] In other words, ethnography is as much an act of mapping out and describing reality in a way that reinforces one's *own* position as much as it is about extending the boundaries of knowledge. In the light of such observations, MacDougall's definition of the ethnographic film as one that 'seeks to reveal one society to another' becomes somewhat suspect: is it really possible to "reveal" another society or ethnicity fully using one's own structures and conventions of representation?[45]

Returning to the idea of the representation of "ethnicity" on British television, we encounter similar problems. It is instructive to consider here the work of Paul Gilroy, whose seminal *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) examines the ways in

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[43] Henrietta Lidchi, 'The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures', in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage 1997), p. 161.
[44] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 13.
[45] Brian Winston recounts an anecdote told by two ethnographic filmmakers, Sol Worth and John Adair, that succinctly illustrates this point. During the production of a film on the Navajo people of North America, 'one of the Navajo, Sam Yazzie, asked Worth and Adair, "Will making movies do the sheep good?" On being told that it would not, Yazzie asked, "Then why make movies?"' Quoted in Winston, *Claiming the Real*, p. 180.

which a particular set of 'racial meanings'[46] was constructed in the 'distinct historical moment' of Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. Taking a "culturalist" approach, like Lidchi's, Gilroy argues that racism

> exists in plural form, and [...] it can change, assuming different shapes and articulating different political relations. Racist ideologies and practices have distinct meanings bounded by historical circumstances and [are] determined in struggle.[47]

In *There Ain't No Black*, Gilroy adopts this theoretical position in order to undertake a sustained critique of the ways in which "Britishness", in late twentieth-century cultural and political discourse, excluded and defined itself against the idea of racial "otherness' in order to bolster itself in the face of imperial and economic decline. Thus one central strand of Gilroy's argument is that representation of ethnicity is always, inevitably, bound up with the representation and construction of nations, and vice versa: 'the limits of race', says Gilroy, 'have come to coincide [...] with national frontiers. [...] "Race" is bounded on all sides by the sea.'[48] It is useful to translate the structure of Gilroy's argument here into the context of post-war British television, particularly into the context of the kinds of documentary film produced on the issue of "ethnicity". Indeed, we know that the BBC is a major instrument in the construction of the idea of "Britishness", or in David Morley's terms, in providing a 'symbolic home for the nation's members'.[49] These films, then, in their concern with ethnic diversity, are implicitly caught up in the act of defining the borders of the nation. Yet this opens up a further question. As I have been emphasising throughout this thesis, "Britain" was not the only nation that was evoked by the BBC during these years. Indeed, Ormond's films on the subject of "ethnicity" and cultural interaction were produced under the auspices of BBC Wales, a sector of the BBC that openly applied itself to the project of aiding a "Welsh" nation, or, in the Habermasian terms I adopted in chapter three, a *public sphere* coterminous with the borders of Wales. As I have been arguing, the decades following the end of the War were a time of particular optimism in Welsh broadcasting, particularly after the establishment of the Broadcasting Council for Wales in 1952. This

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[46] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1987]), p. 4.
[47] Ibid, p. 42.
[48] Ibid, p. 46.
[49] David Morley, 'Broadcasting and the Construction of the National Family', in Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill, eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 418.

is evident in the outward-looking titles of radio programmes such as 'Citizens of the World' and 'Hosts of the Nations',[50] in Welsh translations of European plays (such as Max Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* ('Y Llosgwr Tai'), Molière's *Le Misanthrope* ('Y Cybudd') and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*),[51] and in BCW reports that proudly announce, for instance, that 'from Patagonia to Perth, from Bardi to Berlin, from California to New York – and all over Wales; this is an indication of the compass of features and talks programmes during the past year.'[52] Thus, while the 'popular ethnographic' and internationalist radio and television programmes can certainly be seen as products of wider cultural tendencies within the BBC and Britain as a whole, I want to argue that, in the context of BBC Wales, they should further be understood to employ an "ethnographic" eye in order to aid that institution's project of building upon and developing a *Welsh* public sphere. It could be said that in political terms they contribute to effecting a shift from Wales as one constitutive region of – to borrow again from Kymlicka's terminology - a "multinational" *British* nation, towards a *Welsh* nation that is "polyethnic" and "internationalist" in its own right. Thus, one broad question that I will be asking in the chapter is: in what ways, and to what extent, do the "ethnographic" films of Ormond's oeuvre contribute to the "representational" facet of a Welsh public sphere? Though I will at the same time be asking an attendant question: in what ways do Ormond's own aesthetic inclinations help shape the kinds of public or political knowledge that are generated in these films? Indeed, as media critic Graham Murdock explains, these two factors – the aesthetic and the political - are always complexly interrelated, particularly in a medium that is as powerfully ubiquitous as television:

> Questions of representation are, first, questions about social delegation, about who is entitled to speak for or about others, and what responsibilities they owe to the constituencies whose views and hopes they claim to articulate. But they are also questions about cultural forms and genres, about ways in which the raw materials of language and imagery are combined in particular expressive forms [...] and about how well these contribute to the resources of information, experience, interpretation and explanation required for the exercise of full citizenship.'[53]

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[50] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1955-1956*, p. 10.

[51] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 323.

[52] Broadcasting Council for Wales, *Annual Report 1962-1963*, p. 10.

[53] Graham Murdock, 'Rights and Representations: Public Discourse and Cultural Citizenship', in Jostein Gripsrud, ed., *Television and Common Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 13.

My analyses in this chapter will thus address the complex ways in which Ormond's distinct approach to filmmaking – the deep cultural and aesthetic assumptions that shape his films - intersects and interacts with the processes of representation of ethnicity on Welsh television.

Popular Ethnography at BBC Wales

Readers familiar with Ormond's work on film may notice that I have so far in this thesis neglected to talk about what is perhaps his most well-known and celebrated film, *Borrowed Pasture* (1960). It is perhaps appropriate, then, to begin my close analyses of what I have here termed Ormond's "ethnographic" films with this one. *Borrowed Pasture*, the film that examines the lives of two Polish refugees, Eugenius Okolowicz and Vlodek Bulaj, living – or rather surviving - on a remote farm in Carmarthenshire, is a splendidly poetic piece of filmmaking that wholly deserves its reputation as one of Ormond's best. It is undoubtedly the film in Ormond's oeuvre that received the most attention (perhaps in small part due to the fact it was narrated by Richard Burton[54]). The film was shown at the Edinburgh International Film Festival and received high praise from important figures in British documentary-making at the time; Norman Swallow, the veteran BBC producer mentioned earlier, deemed it one of the key films in a 'golden age' of television documentary,[55] and the doyen of documentary, John Grierson, is reported to have exclaimed, after seeing the film, 'Ormond, you're a poet!'[56] It has been particularly well received in Wales: writer Alun Richards suggested, in terms that further confirm the creative ambition of Ormond's work on film, that 'were it a book upon the shelf it would be much thumbed.'[57] Indeed Ormond characteristically saw the film as a primarily poetic statement. His wife Glenys later recalled that, upon suggesting to him that he might write a poem on 'the subject that had so moved him', replied 'No, that film was the poem'.[58] Thus, embodying as it does this self-consciously poetic form, yet at the same time concerning itself so overtly with the

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[54] Though Burton seems not to have been as impressed by the task as viewers were its outcome. The entry in his diary for the day of recording (8 March 1960) simply reads 'John Ormond'. Richard Burton, *The Richard Burton Diaries*, ed. by Chris Williams (London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 73.

[55] Swallow, 'Denis Mitchell', 551. Swallow felt this 'golden age' extended from 1955-1965.

[56] Ormond's wife, Glenys, remembers this in an obituary essay in a special issue of *Poetry Wales* the year of Ormond's death: 'J.O. and "Rod"', *Poetry Wales*, 27: 3 (1990), 44.

[57] Alun Richards, 'Berries on the Tree', in Patrick Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 46.

[58] Ibid, p. 44.

issue of an "other" culture within the borders of Wales, the film is ripe for the kind of analysis that I have proposed in this chapter.

Borrowed Pasture, like most of Ormond's films of this era, immediately announces itself as a documentary with poetic intentions. It opens with shots that are clearly designed to strike an emotional chord and provoke an aesthetic response: extreme close-ups of two ageing men, their sombre, hardened faces set dramatically against a black backdrop, dissolve into similarly extreme close-ups of hardened plant-life: nettles rustling in the wind, a rose-stem with disconcertingly sharp thorns on display: nature's own inuring against a hostile environment. Meanwhile Burton's sonorous voice narrates, and though this narration provides us with explanatory information and context – itself a rarity for a director who predominantly allows the visual image to speak for itself – this is overtly poetic in cadence, and in diction matches the images' vocabulary of toilsome, toughened nature:

> This is a simple story of two men who came upon a stubborn piece of land that lay neglected for a generation. Here in despair but hoping in their hands they worked together and as best they could borrowed rough pasture from the alien ground and water, and coaxed small comfort from decrepitude. (My emphasis)

Cue a rise in background music that quickly reaches a plangent crescendo, and the film's title, *Borrowed Pasture*, suddenly appears, scrawled obliquely across the screen in an austere white paint-effect typeface. These early moments signal the film's aesthetic intentions, then, by its attempt to poeticize, to cinematize these men's lives. Indeed, true to his Wittgensteinian philosophy of the 'organic mosaic', Ormond is aesthetically disciplined in this film as in much of his best poetry. He utilizes only the symbolic palette of his subject in his aim to find a poetic correlative for these men's austere existence. The film restricts itself throughout to the vocabulary of scarcity and toil adopted in the opening scenes, and we never venture outside of the farm's vicinity and the meagre resources it offers. A stream that runs through the land is dredged by hand and used to power a small dynamo; tiles from the pigsty are borrowed to fix the cottage roof; scaffolding is made out of the tall trees that surround the farm. Such instances of *bricolage* serve brilliantly to convey the men's process of 'coax[ing] small comfort from decrepitude', while on another level underlining Ormond's poetic approach to his subject. Even the film's soundtrack is drawn from the world of the men themselves; BBC Wales composer Arwel Hughes based the orchestrations on Polish

lullabies Ormond had picked up from another Polish farm in Pembrokeshire.[59] Thus, while "ethnographic" and humanist in subject, *Borrowed Pasture* is far from the kind of observational-expository format that was being developed in programmes such as *Special Enquiry* at the BBC in the same era. Rather, Ormond's hand is visible at every turn. This is clear from the film's narrative structure as well as its poeticism. The film impressionistically but effectively narrates the men's refurbishment of the farmhouse from a dilapidated abandoned structure to a habitable homestead, and, as Ormond later noted in an interview with film historian David Berry, 'there are four fades in, four fades to black and it's in four movements, each representing a season.'[60] Moreover, true to his professed strategy of 'moving from particular observation to general, universal conclusion', the film draws themes of wider poignancy from otherwise prosaic observations. The most central of these is that of 'making do', of enduring life in spite of time's inexorable passing. Bulaj tries to fix a tractor and finds his glasses are too weak, while Burton poetically intones, 'You can muster a few more years of life from almost anything, given that you can see. But you begin to blunder when half crown glasses hinder your subtle gadgetry.' Indeed, the film, aided by this skilful poeticism, is often genuinely moving. One sequence portrays Bulaj reflecting upon missing his daughter's wedding. We see him looking through photos his family have sent from Poland. 'Twelve years in Penygaer Farm', he sighs. 'It broke my heart'. The film cuts to a shot in which Bulaj forcefully slams metal milk containers onto his truck, and the sense of resentment and emotional frustration is palpable.

On one level, then, *Borrowed Pasture* seems profoundly to confirm one of David Macdougall's claims about ethnographic films, namely that in their most sensitive form they are able almost to transcend the political and to 'reiterate [...] the commonalities of being human.'[61] Indeed, as I indicated earlier, MacDougall is a strident advocate of viewing ethnographic documentaries in firmly humanist terms. While acknowledging the structures of cultural dominance implicated in the act of documentary representation, he contends that we should view these as 'but one aspect of [the film's] coming into being',[62] claiming that it is always possible for an ethnographic film to be 'pulled back and reclaimed by the lives that generated it.'[63]

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[59] Ormond, 'Beginnings', in Hannan, ed., *Wales in Vision*, p. 8.

[60] John Ormond, quoted in Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 292.

[61] David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 246.

[62] Ibid, p. 158.

[63] Ibid, p. 152.

While I don't want to dismiss this perspective out of hand, it is nevertheless important, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, to keep in mind the institutional and ideological pressures which inevitably and invariably exerted themselves on Ormond's films, whatever their strengths in humanist terms. Stuart Hall usefully articulates this problematic when he notes that

> Many meanings [...] are potential within [an image]. [...] Meaning 'floats'. It cannot be easily fixed. However, attempting to 'fix' it is the work of a representational practice, which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one.[64]

Indeed, it seems to me that this "fixing" or "privileging" of ideological meaning is - somewhat ironically, perhaps - at least partly shaped by the very poetic-humanist approach that Ormond applies to his subjects. This is hinted at in the film's opening lines: 'this is a simple story of two men [...]'. This early attempt to signal the film's cinematic intentions simultaneously betrays its representational ideology by glossing the historical complexity of its protagonists' circumstances and thereby neutralizing the political significance of their presence in Wales. For the "story" of Eugenius Okolowicz and Vlodek Bulaj, as with those of any political refugees, is far from being "simple", and neither was the situation in which they found themselves in 1950s Britain. As I have noted, this was a time of considerable political tension surrounding the issue of immigration in Britain after the passing of the 1948 British Nationality Act. And although the men were members of the some 150,000 ex-Polish servicemen who had fought with the British Army and were thus encouraged to settle in Britain under the 1947 Polish Resettlement Act,[65] with ethnic tensions at a high at this time it is no surprise that Ormond was asked to produce a film that so clearly aims at presenting a sympathetic representation of two immigrants in Britain. Indeed, 1960 had been named 'World Refugee Year' by the United Nations in an effort to draw attention to and 'help resolve' the continuing global problem of human displacement in the years following the Second World War.[66] This film was one of many BBC programmes produced in aid

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[64] Stuart Hall, 'The Spectacle of the "Other"', in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage 1997), p. 228.

[65] Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, p. 169.

[66] UN Resolution A/RES/1285(XIII). See <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/r13_en.shtml> [Accessed 28 February 2014].

of the 'refugee problem'[67] in Britain at that time,[68][69] ostensibly to aid understanding but, as is clear from the film's logic, primarily to appease potential local opposition. Indeed *Borrowed Pasture*'s strategy is to mollify concerns about the 'refugee problem' by accentuating the noble, gwerin-like simplicity of two men forging a life from the land. Of course, this emphasis on the nobility of rural folk life would have had a further significance in Wales at a time when, as I discussed in the previous chapter, nationalist intellectuals such as museum curator Iorwerth Peate and anthropologist Alwyn D. Rees were lauding the 'completeness of traditional rural society' against the overwhelming urbanization and anglicization of Wales.[70] In drawing parallels with these wholesome rural lifestyles Ormond seems to have been tapping into a reservoir of social sympathy while at the same time implicitly consigning the men and, it could be argued, that facet of Wales's social existence, to a rustic and harmless past.

To be sure, much of the strength of *Borrowed Pasture* lies in a sustained dramatic tension that is predicated on the social exclusion of its protagonists. The film eloquently conveys the drudgery and hardship that Okolowicz and Bulaj endure in order to eke out a life from this unforgiving plot of land, and yet, as the film's title implies, this is land that is never fully theirs. As Burton's narration explains, these are men who 'struck a bargain with the land upon the land's conditions', whose 'home has meant surrender to the land. The land's demands are everything.' It is also significant that Burton's narration speaks for the men throughout much of the film. This would partly have been for pragmatic reasons, of course – the men speak very little English - but the

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[67] Swallow, *Factual Television*, p. 189.

[68] Indeed, at least one BBC Wales programme had addressed the issue before Ormond produced *Borrowed Pasture*; in 1956, Dafydd Grufydd produced a film called *Strangers in Our Midst* (the title betrays something of the anxiety of the times), which, according to David Berry, 'presented the plight and life-style changes of the thousands of Poles living in Wales since the War'. Berry, *Wales and Cinema*, p. 532. Gruffydd was a 'veteran radio man' who had been instrumental in the development of Welsh radio in the 1930s and switched to television production in 1954. Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 208.

[69] Added to this was the fact that perceptions of Polish migrants in south Wales in these years were likely to have been particularly strained following the high-profile trial of Michael Onufrejczyk, the 'Butcher of Cwmdu'. Onufrejczyk, like Okolowicz and Bulaj, had too fought with the British Army and been resettled in Wales after 1947, and, under circumstances very similar to the protagonists of Ormond's film, had purchased a farm in rural Wales with another Polish émigré, Stanislaw Sykut, in an effort to rebuild a life for himself. Yet relations between Onufrejczyk and Sykut soon turned sour, and under suspicious circumstances Sykut disappeared some time in 1953. Onufrejczuk claimed his business partner had taken a trip to London, but after a police investigation found suspicious dark stains on the walls of the farmhouse, he was in 1954 charged with murder. Nathan Bevan, 'A Grisly History of Welsh Murders', 28 January 2008 http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/grisly-history-welsh-murders-2205058 [Accessed 28 February 2014]

[70] Alwyn D. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1950), p. 170.

device additionally confirms their disenfranchisement. Indeed, the first time we hear either of the men speak is a scene in which Okolowicz tries to teach himself English, and there his words are framed by Burton as 'strange syllables [...] from the student who never leaves Penygaer'. The fact that Okolowicz is attempting to learn how to ask a train conductor for information adds a further sad irony to the scene. This sense of dispossession and isolation is compounded, moreover, by the transient nature of all their dealings with the outside world: they meet once a week with a 'travelling grocer', and twice a year are visited by their 'only visitor', a Polish priest – himself an 'itinerant in a Nonconformist country'. On this score, the restricted visual palette of the film – there is no footage outside the farm's boundaries - only serves to enhance the sense of isolation. But perhaps the film's most powerful depiction of this is a scene in which Bulaj attempts to send a telegram to his wife. The frustrated – and rather comic - conversation with the prim telegram operator potently conveys both Bulaj's distance from his wife and from the administrative Welsh society that lives on unheedingly outside the farm's borders:

> Operator: Telegrams. Telegrams?
> Bulaj: Speaking seven nine one eight.
> Operator: Pardon?
> Bulaj: Speaking seven nine one eight.
> Operator: Seven nine one eight where?
> Bulaj: Yes.
> Operator: Swansea?
> Bulaj: Pardon?
> Operator: Seven nine one eight where?
> Bulaj: This is Penygaer farm.
> Operator: Yes, but are you Swansea? Or Carmarthen? Or Port Talbot? Or Llanelli?
> Bulaj: Yes.
> [...]
> Operator: I'm very sorry, are you speaking from Carmarthen?
> Bulaj: Yes! No! From Penygaer Farm.

Thus, although the film ends with Bulaj's wonderfully eloquent broken English – 'You know, without the farm, I am nothing. And you know, the farm, it is me' is perhaps Bulaj's final claim on their merciless plot of land – *Borrowed Pasture* is a film that finds its aesthetic impulse in measuring the distance between these men's isolated lives and an implied Welsh civic society of the present. While the film doesn't exclude Bulaj and Okolowicz from this society exactly – it does, after all, offer them a space in which

to reside, however compromised by isolation and hardship – it nevertheless, in its poetic observation of them, implicitly evokes a Welsh citizenship that is not theirs. Thus *Borrowed Pasture*, in subtle but significant ways, can be said to invite its audience into what David Morley calls a 'forum of sociability'. As I have suggested, I believe that this 'forum of sociability' can be described in another way in this context as a Welsh public sphere. Even if we ignore the politics of representation bound up in the poetic manner in which Ormond addressed the subject of Polish migrants in Wales, the very decision to use the film unit to examine a political issue in purely Welsh terms demonstrated a degree of confidence on the part of BBC Wales.

With immigration and its attendant racial politics at the forefront of British civic consciousness in the early 1960s – 1962 had seen some of the freedom of movement encouraged by the 1948 British Nationality Act restricted by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act - it is hardly surprising that Ormond would eventually return to the topic. Indeed, there was a prime location for such a film on the very doorstep of the Welsh Film Unit: the (in)famous "Tiger Bay", a vibrant multi-ethnic community that had been fuelling the Welsh popular imagination for close to a century. His 1964 film *Song in a Strange Land* focuses on the area. "Tiger Bay", or to use its real name, Butetown, a small community close to the docklands area of Cardiff Bay, was at that time renowned for being one of the few communities of its kind in Britain.[71] In the 1960s some 80 per cent of its inhabitants were non-white,[72] and the area was made up of people from over fifty nations.[73] As Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon have written, this multicultural community had emerged as a result of its close proximity to the docks:

> The expansion of Cardiff as a coal-exporting port attracted [...] a kaleidoscope of immigrants to build and service the docks, to work aboard the ships and to otherwise service the new industrial and maritime city.'[74]

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[71] There were similar, small communities near the docklands of Liverpool and London.

[72] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 139.

[73] Glenn Jordan, '"We Never Really Noticed You Were Coloured": Postcolonialist Reflections on Immigrants and Minorities in Wales', in Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, eds., *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 59.

[74] Jordan and Weedon, *Cultural Politics*, p. 135. Glenn Jordan has been a social commentator and activist in the Butetown area for many years. He has written extensively on the history of the area and the cultural politics of its representations, and in 1987 helped to set up the Butetown History and Arts Centre, an organisation that aims to empower local residents to write their own histories of their community.

Seafaring labourers from all over the world would arrive on the "tramp steamer" freight ships that carried Welsh coal out from the docks, and while most would leave again with the ships, many would stay, and these gradually forged a community. And as Jordan and Weedon's colourful phrase - 'kaleidoscope of immigrants' - suggests, this unusual community quickly gathered attention and became the subject of a vast range of representations in popular culture and the media. Jordan and Weedon have themselves scrutinized the wide variety of such representations, and make the suggestive claim that "Tiger Bay" consequently became a discursive construct whose wild reputation far exceeded its social reality:

> There have been, literally, thousands of newspaper articles (of which hundreds are feature articles). There have also been about ten novels and collections of short stories, a dozen or so television programmes, perhaps a few dozen radio programmes, hundreds of undergraduate projects and dissertations, a few dozen masters and doctoral theses, several plays and a feature film. [...] So, ultimately, it is impossible to separate Tiger Bay from stories about it. Tiger Bay is a textual phenomenon [...] as much as it is a physical and social one.[75]

Frequently, these representations have been outrageously and harmfully sensational; Glenn Jordan in particular has spent considerable energy debunking those that 'combine negative portrayal[s] with a sense of exoticism, danger and mystery'[76] in order to sell books, newspapers or, indeed, screen time. He has written, for instance, of journalist Howard Spring, whose memoirs *Heaven Lies About Us* (1939) described the area in terms that succinctly capture something of the tenor of this sensationalism: 'It was a dirty, rotten and romantic district, an offence and an inspiration, and I loved it.'[77] Jordan has also, however, written of the significance of the more restrained, liberal and indeed positive images that emerged in the post-War years. In 2001 he contributed to a book that revisited a series of photographs that were printed in *Picture Post* in the 1950s, '*Down the Bay*': Picture Post, *Humanist Photography and Images of 1950s Cardiff*. Naturally, given its humanist concern with, in Jordan's words, the '"universals" in human experience [...] that are shared across societies and cultures',[78] *Picture Post's* portrayal of the area was far closer to the humanist ethnography of someone like David

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[75] Ibid, p. 138.

[76] Jordan, *Down the Bay*, p. 12.

[77] Howard Spring, quoted in Glenn Jordan, 'Images of Tiger Bay: Did Howard Spring Tell the Truth?', *Llafur*, 5:1 (1988), 54.

[78] Jordan, *'Down the Bay'*, p. 13.

MacDougall than the sensationalism of Howard Spring. Indeed, the series of photographs no doubt contributed to – or were at least a part of - the shift in perception that took place in the 1950s and 1960s: from Tiger Bay as a hotbed of depravity to Tiger Bay as, in historian Neil Evans's terms, a 'respectable [...] symbol of tolerance to the world'.[79] Indeed, as Martin Johnes notes, by the 1960s, 'amid growing ethnic tensions in England and the United States, Wales actually seemed rather peaceful.'[80] I want to suggest, then, that Ormond's *Song in a Strange Land* needs to be understood as a part of this shift toward a more tolerant perception of Tiger Bay in 1960s Wales. But I also want to highlight the ways in which it simultaneously derives a peculiar strength from its ethnographic representational logic.

Song in a Strange Land announces itself as a determinedly poetic (rather than plainly expository) documentary film in its opening minutes. It opens with a slow-motion shot of a seagull gracefully gliding over the ocean, while a plaintive melody, played by a solo flautist, rises and falls with the bird's wings.[81] The music directs our mood towards the montage of images that follow: rusting, derelict handling cranes stand at the water's edge; a slow pan shot of tidal mudflats. Small waves break and roll inland; tugboats haul a cargo liner into port; a captain stands at the bow of a ship that sails past the frame; a flag flutters on some rigging. True to Ormond's poeticism, the film refrains from offering the viewer explicit contextual information; rather a tone, a mood, is impressionistically set using images and music. This mood is one of a sort of sad transience, a sense of the passage of time (implied by the derelict cranes) and - as it slowly becomes clear from the impressionistic visual fragments that build towards a mosaicked scene of the incoming of a ship - of the passage of people. Indeed, this idea of the movement of people is further established by a cut to different sort of music, with the plaintive flute giving way to the rousing sound of Arabic singing; here follows a shift to a more buoyant mood. We cut to footage of what is clearly, to any local viewer, Cardiff docklands (for anyone in doubt, the bow of a tugboat is shot displaying the name of its port), and once again the speed of editing increases to match the footage. Now we see the docks operating in full flow: cranes shifting cargo, incoming ships, the

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[79] Neil Evans, 'Immigrants and Minorities in Wales, 1840-1990: A Comparative Perspective, in Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O'Leary, eds., *A Tolerant Nation?: Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 20.

[80] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 139.

[81] Though the BBC Wales composer Arwel Hughes is not credited, it is likely he was, as in *Borrowed Pasture,* commissioned by Ormond to interpret the religious music of the film's subjects.

bustle of the working day. The texture of sound thickens; we hear the slosh of water against the side of the ships; cranes mechanically whir and clunk; a van chugs past. All is movement, and another kind of song is heard in the distance, this time a Greek tenor singing a hymn. Thus, without the need for voiceover narration or superimposed text, Ormond conveys a denotative message to the viewer: this is a film about the multiple religious cultures that reside in Cardiff Bay. But the manner in which it achieves this simultaneously hints at the film's ideological thrust; namely, that the film, like *Borrowed Pasture*, while offering an ethnographic insight into "other" peoples living within the borders of Wales, intends to anchor these ethnicities to the docks, so to speak, and to link them with ideas of movement and migration rather than with stasis and integration.[82] The film's title (and the manner in which it is displayed – superimposed over a shot of the sea meeting the land's edge) further implies this, borrowing as it does from Psalm 137, the lament of the Jews in Babylonian exile: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'[83]

As it happens, *Song in a Strange Land* goes on to perform a quite overtly expositional, informational function, despite these impressionistic opening minutes. Indeed, the film's purpose is, on the surface, a respectably liberal, educational one. It concerns itself with three men of differing ethno-religious backgrounds – A.A. Callinicos, a Greek Orthodox Catholic; Sheikh Said Hassan Ismail, the Imam of the local Islamic community; and Jaswant Singh, a local Sikh. The film allows each one of them to explain, directly to the camera, their belief system, their rituals of worship, and the social and familial conventions of their respective faiths. In this sense, the film draws very effectively on the 'think tape' format advocated by Mitchell and Donnellan, insofar as it completely dispenses with the use of an authoritative voiceover narrator and foregrounds its subjects' viewpoints. Indeed, Ormond's 'organic mosaic' poeticism

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[82] This was a familiar trope in images of Tiger Bay around this time. The 1959 feature film set in the area, *Tiger Bay*, draws on precisely the same discourse of permanent transience in its construction of its central character, Korchinsky (played by Holtz Buchholtz). Korchinsky, a Polish seaman, gets into an altercation with his lover and, in the heat of the moment, shoots her dead. Much of the film's drama is predicated on Korchinsky's unbridled emotionalism and unpredictability as he runs from the law. He rarely stands still throughout the film, and is consistently linked with the tumultuousness of the sea: the first time we see him he stands in line on a ship in dock, waiting for his payment (along with migrants of various other ethnicities), and in the film's final shot he sits dripping wet and shivering, having moments earlier dived into the ocean to rescue his young friend Gillie (played by Hayley Mills).

[83] It is very likely that Ormond's use of the phrase was a nod to the Welsh National Opera's recent celebrated productions of Verdi's *Nabucco*, which had helped establish the company the 1950s, and whose 'Slave's Chorus' evoking the Babylonian captivity, had become the effective 'theme song' of the WNO's celebrated chorus.

serves the film particularly well on this score. The film is duly reverent in its use of every means available to fully and faithfully convey a sense of these religions. We are invited into a Greek Church during the Divine Liturgy; the camera movement and speed between cuts slows noticeably in order to convey a sense of respectful awe, while Callinicos whisperingly translates for us the reading of the Liturgy. After a number of minutes spent here, the film dissolves to a very different place of worship: a small mosque within Sheikh Said's own home. Here Sheikh Said explains to us some of the theological particulars of his faith, and we are offered footage of the daily rituals associated with it: a man performs his ablutions; another sits quietly reading the Qur'an; a group of men face Mecca and kneel to pray. Soon we turn to Singh's place of worship, the local gurdwara, and the film again conveys its respect for this particular style of worship by finding a shooting style appropriate to it: quick editing and camera movement matches the upbeat, rhythmic music; the camera films from floor-level as the worshipers kneel to kiss the ground before the Guru Granth Sahib, their holy text. Ormond thus strives to find in each of these religions something of its *aesthetic* essence: a set of symbols, a style of music, a form of worship. He translates each into filmic content, and in turn each contributes to a sense of his "mosaic". It is thus with this pluralist approach in mind that we could suggest this film opens up a space for a multicultural Welsh citizenship. To be sure, its subjects are frequently shown to be firmly and comfortably integrated into their community: the first time we meet Callinicos and Sheik Said it is in their respective places of work: Callinicos as he (in a rather contrived way) ends a telephone conversation with a client in the office of his successful shipping firm; Sheik Said as he welds a radiator in a large dockland workshop. We meet each in his own home; indeed, in one suggestive shot the camera pans across a row of houses and locates Singh's own by the sound of Sikh music flooding into the street, as if demonstrating that this form of worship is now a part of local life. In this sense the film does not ghettoize or essentialize these men by reducing them to mere metonyms of their religious faith; each has his own unique relationship with his faith and with the community in which he lives.

Yet this admirable pluralism is, as the film develops, increasingly brought into tension with a persistent relativism. *Song in a Strange Land* continually seeks out the distinctly *aesthetic* qualities of each religion – the music, the exotic scripture, the various paraphernalia of faith – and exhibits each for the audience, in effect mimicking what Lidchi calls the "poetics" of the ethnographic museum. As Lidchi argues, such

museums 'do not simply reflect *natural* distinctions but serve to create *cultural* ones'.[84] Moreover, despite scenes that seem to offer a space for these "other" identities, the film invariably returns to the same plaintive melody and images of the docks we saw in the opening minutes, along with their attendant connotations of transience, movement and dislocation. Thus these ethnicities are framed and exhibited as they might be in a museum; the return to footage of the docks serves to remind us, like glass cases and informational placards, that we are engaged in an act of ethnographic viewing of an exceptional community. This tendency is ultimately borne out in the film's ambitious final sequence, where Ormond, in a wordless six-minute montage, attempts to direct the film towards its 'general universal conclusion'. The montage builds quite effectively towards a stirring climax: rousing orchestral music rises and accompanies shots in which solemn acts of worship are counterpointed with dramatic footage of waves crashing up against the cliffs. The editing quickens and we begin to cut rapidly between the church, the mosque and the gurdwara. The message here is thus a universal one of the enormous human profundity of faith itself, rather than an endorsement, for instance, of any one particular faith. From here the music and images slow and soften to convey a calmer mood, until we finally fade to black. We find ourselves on an ordinary street in Tiger Bay; a young Greek man sings a song to himself while shaving; next, a pan of the street stops at a 'Continental Grocer' shop, outside of which two young boys in turbans listen to a pop song on a portable radio. Again, while this footage, on one level, offers an encouraging vision of a new, multicultural generation growing up on the streets of Cardiff, the film frames this footage in such a way that relativizes it, viewing the subjects on screen as symbolic of the universal "song" sung by the sum of all religion in this place. Tiger Bay thus becomes the museum. It is significant too that the film only seeks out footage in Tiger Bay itself; we never see, for instance, these ethnic minorities going about their business in Cardiff city centre, or in any way interacting with the world outside Butetown. In this sense, the film seems unwittingly to mirror the social attitudes towards Butetown in 1960s Cardiff, which was in fact, as a number of recent historians have noted, not a reality of tolerance and integration, but frequently one of intolerance and segregation. Historian Martin Johnes notes that the area was at this time 'physically and socially isolated from the rest of the city [...]. [O]ther Cardiffians thought it a dangerous and disreputable place and were often very unwilling to socialise

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[84] Lidchi, 'The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures', p. 161.

or work with blacks.'[85] This had, moreover, been the case for some time. Neil Evans

suggests in his sobering survey of Welsh racial intolerance that boundaries were drawn

after the racial riots that took place in 1919: these 'redrew the boundaries of the black

community [...]. Those who had settled in areas north of the South Wales Railway

bridge were forced to leave their homes.'[86] Thus, while there was less outward evidence

of racial prejudice and intolerance in the half-century that followed, that is, less than

was seen in the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots of the late 1950s (to which *Song in a*

Strange Land is in part a fairly self-satisfied response), this relative harmony hinges

upon the fact that Butetown was in fact 'rather cut off from the rest of the inner city'.[87]

Thus it seems to me that *Song in a Strange Land* is an effort to laud Wales's

multicultural credentials against those of a racially tense Britain, but in a way that, in

reality, *idealizes* it in a way that limits the potential for meaningful multicultural

integration.[88] Yet this is simultaneously where the film's peculiar strength as a *national*

documentary lies: in its symbolic reification of the emergent national political

mythology of a racially tolerant and progressive Wales. The film eloquently portrays a

poetic sense of these "other" ethnicities living within Wales's borders, but leaves no

question as to who are the true inhabitants of this "land".[89]

　　　Borrowed Pasture and *Song in a Strange Land* are thus films that perform their

national documentary function of interpellating a Welsh national viewership by

creatively constructing a picture of religious and ethnic diversity in Wales that

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[85] Johnes, *Wales Since 1939*, p. 139.

[86] Neil Evans, 'Through the Prism of Ethnic Violence: Riots and Racial Attacks in Wales, 1826-2002', in Charlotte Williams, Neil Evans and Paul O'Leary, eds., *A Tolerant Nation?: Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 99. Interestingly, another BBC Wales documentary, produced on the same subject a few years later, addressed this issue head-on. Selwyn Roderick's film *A Tamed and Shabby Tiger* (1968) accompanied shots of the railway bridge with a voiceover that stated, 'Above this bridge, on the other side of the tracks, lives the city of Cardiff – civic and suburban, and rather smug; below it, an uninvited community which has coloured the city's reputation around the world'. Such remarks, which more explicitly address the issue, in effect highlight the sense in which Ormond's poeticism to a certain extent masked his films' ethnographic logic; the fact that their poeticism was predicated on an ethnographic distancing. Though A *Tamed and Shabby Tiger* is, too, itself undoubtedly guilty of a somewhat idealized and self-serving vision of a tolerant Wales.

[87] Evans, 'Immigrants and Minorities in Wales', in Williams, Evans and O'Leary, eds., *A Tolerant Nation?*, p. 28.

[88] In this sense the film confirms Daniel G. Williams's thesis in his recent book *Black Skin, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), in particular his chapter 'Paul Robeson, Race and the Making of Modern Wales' (pp. 142-207.). Here Williams problematizes Wales's construction of itself as a racially tolerant nation through an examination of the legacy of the African-American singer and political activist Paul Robeson in Wales.

[89] Indeed, Ormond's use of the phrase from Psalm 137 seems to border riskily on the implication that Wales is a sort of Babylonia exhorting its exiles to song.

simultaneously circumscribes those ethnicities as "other". Ormond's 1965 film on the

presence of another religious group in Wales, *The Mormons*, performs a similar

function, but moreover extends this ethnographic impulse outward, finding much of its

material abroad by exploring Wales's connections with the famous Mormon Salt Lake

City in the American state of Utah. The film itself informs us at length of the Welsh

connection with the Church of Latter Day Saints: namely, Merthyr-born Captain Dan

Jones's close friendship with its prophet and leader, Joseph Smith. Indeed Jones has

since been enshrined in Mormon mythology, having allegedly been with Joseph Smith

the night before the latter's assassination in an Illinois jail in 1844. On that night, Smith

had prophesied that Jones would return to Wales and convert legions of followers to his

religion, and this Jones duly did; from his headquarters in Merthyr, Jones converted

some five thousand Welsh people to his faith.[90] Many of these emigrated to Salt Lake

City in the years that followed and became instrumental in the establishment of that

city; hence Ormond's visit there. In this sense *The Mormons* is perhaps guilty of a

tendency that irritated veteran BBC Wales producer Selwyn Roderick in his humorous

but nonetheless earnest essay 'Us Over There',[91] namely, Wales's obsession, in its

television programmes, with itself:

> While the French have taken their cameras into the depths of tropical seas, and the
> West-country English have passed Antarctic seasons recording the frosty matings
> of polar bears and penguins we, the Welsh, have diligently ventured abroad to
> film – chiefly – ourselves.[92]

Roderick views this as a weakness; his argument is that Welsh broadcasting should seek

to forge a distinctively Welsh perspective that can 'illuminate the world',[93] to look to

the international in order to bolster and confirm its sense of itself, rather than allowing

'strangers based in London and around the globe'[94] to do it for us, so to speak.

However, I want to suggest that the ways in which Ormond informs his Welsh

viewership (indeed "informing" seems to be the central intention of this film: its subtitle

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[90] Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 400.

[91] The essay was published in Patrick Hannan's anthology of essays on Welsh broadcasting, *Wales in Vision* to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of BBC Wales. The anthology's authorship, consisting entirely of men, alone speaks volumes about the era in which Ormond was working.

[92] Selwyn Roderick, 'Us Over There', in Patrick Hannan, Wales in Vision (Llandysul: Gomer, 1990), p. 19.

[93] Ibid, p. 23.

[94] Ibid, p. 23.

is 'A Film Report by John Ormond') of this often overlooked chapter in Wales's history actually contributes quite powerfully to the promotion of a Welsh public sphere.

Like *Song in a Strange Land*, *The Mormons* celebrates the exotic cultural paraphernalia of its subject in a way that posits a Welsh viewership. Here those paraphernalia are the stuff of the American Wild West. The film opens with a cheerfully upbeat Country and Western tune, and we are greeted with postcard pans and still shots of the magnificent Rocky Mountains. From here the camera pans down the side of a snowy mountain into a small valley, and as a slide banjo takes over to twang the melody on the soundtrack, we cut to shots perfectly selected to accompany this Western theme: horses on a small ranch; the local sheriff. We cut to a close up of the sheriff's badge, and then to the logo on the side of his car; the camera pans up, and we see the man himself sitting inside, complete with obligatory dark sunglasses and Stetson hat, coolly lighting a cigarette. We could well be watching a Western, were it not for the almost incongruous title earlier displayed on screen in an oddly comic, cartoonish typeface, as if informing us that we are on a foreign jaunt not to be taken too seriously. Typical of Ormond's preference for allowing the visual and musical to speak for themselves, to generate wonder and intrigue, there is no narrator at this stage, and with images alone the film leads us to what appears to be a series of large tunnels built into the Rocky Mountains. Again, the scenes that follow are purely and ambitiously filmic (as opposed to merely expository): the music fades out and we hear only the sounds of the howling wind; next we cut to a man spinning a hand-wheel on an enormous vault door, and now only echoing footsteps are audible. We shortly discover that this opening sequence's journey into the heart of the mountains has in fact sought to encapsulate the film's wider project: to delve deep into the history of the Mormon people and discover the Welsh presence among them. A spokesman of the Church greets us in a large empty chamber of this underground vault, and politely explains to us the purpose of this place: to store their vast quantities of microfilmed genealogy records. Here an omniscient narrator cuts in,[95] and confirms for us the distinctly Welsh perspective that the preceding images have hitherto only implied:

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[95] The narrator is Hywel Davies, then Head of Programmes at BBC Wales, who had been a pivotal figure in Welsh broadcasting from his employment at the corporation in 1942. For John Davies, he was 'the most outstanding figure in Welsh broadcasting in the post-war years'. Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 136. Sadly Davies passed away the year this film was produced at the age of 44.

> In the waiting vaults in the mountains, and among the neat, clinical, grey files in
> Salt Lake City, it's difficult not to feel that they know all about us. They've got us
> tabulated and docketed by the million. [...] They've got our family histories at
> their fingertips, and they've got their young men in our streets.

These words are dubbed over footage of endless rows of filing cabinets: we cut closer to

see the labels on some of the drawers: 'Wales General and Anglesey'; 'Wales

Montgomery'; 'Wales Pembrokeshire Radnorshire'; 'Wales Glamorgan Merioneth'. A

young clerical assistant flicks through the reference cards headed by Welsh place-

names: Llanelli, Llanilltern, Llanishen. Thus the film in this way strongly posits a

Welsh viewership by contributing to the powerful process of, in Michael Billig's

phrase, 'flagging the homeland'. [96] This is the process of "deictic" signalling that,

according to Billig, in his influential book *Banal Nationalism*, is crucial to the

perpetuation of modern nations, contributing as it does to the everyday "banal"

normality of the national homeland. This process is clearly at work in *The Mormons*, in

which Wales and its inhabitants (the implied audience) and the Mormon-American

"others" are invariably referred to in deictic terms: '*they* know all about *us*'; '*they've*

got *our* family histories at *their* fingertips'. As Billig confirms in his own (somewhat

tortuous but nevertheless effective) words: 'the little words can flag the homeland, and,

in flagging it, make the homeland homely.'[97]

This is not to say that the film refuses to open up a space for a Welsh-

Mormonism of sorts. The film is not entirely the kind of 'televisual tourism' that media

critic Graham Murdock has described in an interesting essay about televisual images of

"other" nations; that is, one in which cultural differences are 'constructed as exotic,

picturesque or simply quaint, but [...] present no challenge to our sense of self.'[98]

Indeed, a good part of the film's focus is the presence of Mormons in Wales and

exploring the reasons for that presence. We meet a dignitary of the Merthyr Church of

Latter Day Saints, Ralph Pulman, who explains to us his family's long-held

commitment to the church; indeed Pulman's great-grandfather had been converted by

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[96] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 93.
[97] Ibid, p. 106.
[98] Graham Murdock, 'Televisual Tourism: National Image-Making and International Markets', in C. W. Thomsen, ed., *Cultural Transfer or Electronic Imperialism?* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitatsverlag, 1989), p. 173. Murdock's focus is on dramas and nature documentaries that are syndicated abroad, but the same could certainly be said of the travel review programmes that emerged on British television around the late 1960s as a result of improved incomes and affordable foreign travel, such as BBC's *Holiday* (1969-2007); ITV's (Thames Television) *Wish You Were Here...?* (1974-2003).

Dan Jones himself, and returned with him to Utah in the first wave of Welsh emigration to the Mormon state. We are privy to footage of a church meeting in which members of all ages profess their faith. A young woman addresses the audience: 'I know that this is the true church of Jesus Christ. I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that he revealed to the world the true church of Jesus Christ.' She is clearly, in her youth, her fashionable dress, and her pronounced Merthyr accent, intended to symbolise the on-going, contemporary relevance of the church in a diverse 1960s Wales.

However, there seems no doubt that the final message of *The Mormons* is one of a *normative* Welsh identity – and that is an identity that is decidedly not Mormon. This is partly indicated by the return of a deictic distancing of the followers of the faith as not quite Welsh: Davies intones that '2,500 of them here in Wales agree with them'. And it is further confirmed by the typically aesthetic approach Ormond adopts towards this religion; again he finds the primarily *aesthetic* content of Mormonism and visualises it on film in a way that posits a normative "Welsh" aesthetic subjectivity. A sequence towards the end of the film illustrates this, in which we are invited to experience a performance by the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Ormond finds an appropriate visual correlative to this rousing choral music: majestic aerial shots of the Rockies. As if lifted by song, the camera penetrates the clouds to come upon a vista of the snow-covered mountains, and we spend some time in the air before cutting to the interior of the Salt Lake Tabernacle itself, where the choir's 375 members sit neatly arranged and sing in perfect unison. Thus Ormond again draws filmic content from the aesthetic features of the Mormon faith, and in doing so simultaneously distances this faith as exotic, "other"; the sequence is framed as an invitation into a distinctly American experience: 'on Sunday mornings, as on every Sunday morning for the past thirty-five years, America tunes in coast-to-coast to listen to the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir'. Indeed, there is no question that the film ultimately accentuates the idea of the faith as, at best, a kind of amusing curiosity. The final sequence of the film views two Mormon missionaries going about their work on the streets of Cardiff; their heads are cut out of the frame, as if to emphasise the generality of this image and also the missionaries' permanent marginality: their work is never complete because they can never convert all of Wales. Meanwhile the soundtrack ends with a jaunty folk song, further emphasising the film's – and, correlatively, Wales's - wry amusement at these

people: 'None can Preach the Gospel Like the Mormons do' by folk singer Rosalie Sorells.[99]

I want to look briefly, also, at another film that draws its strength as a national documentary from the way that it travels abroad in order to place Wales in a position of ethnographic authority. This is Ormond's 1964 film *From a Town in Tuscany*. Filmed in the Tuscan town of Arezzo in 1963, *From a Town in Tuscany's raison d'etre* was to visit the hometown of a choir – the Concorso Polifonico Guido d'Arezzo - that was due to perform at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod in the following year. In this sense, then, like *The Mormons*, and indeed despite its postcard-esque title, the film is not entirely touristic in purpose. *From a Town in Tuscany* seeks partly to forge a link and to find a set of commonalities between Wales and this little town rather than merely, to return to Murdock's terms, indulge in a form of 'televisual tourism'. There is throughout the film a genuine attempt to understand these people of Arezzo, with a particular focus on the choristers' everyday professions. The film interestingly emphasises the fact that music, whatever its importance to these people's lives, is necessarily a hobby for most. Finding a topic that choristers in Wales could surely sympathise with, the narrator (here John Darran) explains that 'like the members of most choirs, music is pleasure in the evenings; but all day, a job of work to do [*sic*].' We visit some of them in their places of work: a jewellery factory, a railway yard. A furniture polisher sings to himself on the doorstep of his business. Even Sylvestro Valdarnini, the choir's conductor, has to make his living as a music teacher. These are ordinary people, then, whatever their extraordinary talents. In this way, the film strongly bears out Selwyn Roderick's remarks on the issue of the importance of Welsh programming finding and forging links with foreign places and cultures. But there is

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[99] Ormond's choice of singer is particularly interesting (as is the fact that he credits her, which is rare in Ormond's oeuvre, despite his extensive use of music). Sorells was a folk singer from Utah whose bitingly satirical songs frequently railed against the Mormon people. In her song 'Brigham Young', for instance, she sings, 'He lived with his five-and-forty wives in the city of the great Salt Lake,/ where they breed and swarm like hens on a farm and cackle like ducks to a drake'. There is thus little doubt that the meek-sounding song that ends this film is heavy with irony.

It is worth mentioning, too, the film's curiosity with regard to the Mormons' conception of race. Several minutes are dedicated to Ralph Pulman's explanation of the Mormon Church's relationship with "Negroes" who, according to the Church, bear, in their black skin, the mark of Cain: 'because of this', says Pulman, 'negroes cannot be given the Priesthood in the Church'. Though the film neither endorses nor condemns the statement, its very curiosity on the matter seems to me a further symptom of the broader anxiety about race in 1960s Britain.

also in this film, as in *The Mormons*, a tension between the film's capacity to forge such links and its inevitably poetic – and therefore inevitably essentialising – format.

To be sure, Ormond's poetic inclinations were perhaps most pronounced in Arezzo of all places. As I have discussed elsewhere, it was this very excursion to Arezzo in 1963 that Ormond claimed inspired his surprise return to writing poetry after some twenty years; the place where, he felt, 'long-felt ideas and long-heard musics seem [...] to cohere',[100] and where he returned many times in later years. It is not surprising, then, that Ormond's propensity to use film to "poeticise", to "universalise", is so strongly apparent in *From a Town in Tuscany*. And, as I have been arguing, it was this very propensity that brought out the ethnographic impulse in his film-making about "other" cultures. The film returns more than once, for instance, to the admittedly beautiful sound of the Concorso Polifonico Guido d'Arezzo. Ormond seeks out an appropriately exotic set of "Italian" images to match these beautifully ethereal choral voices, and the result is a strong sense of the film travelogue, with its postcard-perfect shots of Arezzo's immaculate Renaissance architecture and scenic footage of the surrounding Tuscan landscape. There is, moreover, the strategy of experiential filmmaking, of attempting to evoke a foreign experience on film that is strongly in tune with Ormond's 'organic mosaic' poetics. A group of folk dancers perform in the town square, and the camera takes part in their festivities by using point-of-view shots to twirl and dance along with them. A sequence in the marketplace adopts a similar technique, with a handheld camera jostling its way through the shoppers and surveying the produce on display. The narrator even addresses the viewer in the second person to reinforce the effect: 'you taste and you try. In time you'll almost certainly buy'. Thus, though the intention was likely, given Ormond's usual inclinations, to have been one of evoking a certain lifestyle on film, of constructing out of footage of Arezzo and its people an aesthetic televisual artefact, *From a Town in Tuscany* nevertheless comes dangerously close to becoming a form of 'television tourism'. In its attempt to construct a modernist mosaic of this exotic place, it frequently renders that place, like a postcard, statically "other". Arezzo is repeatedly constructed as a product of its past, being largely defined by its most exemplary citizens - all of whom were products of the Renaissance and earlier: Giorgio Vasari, Michaelangelo, Petrarch, Guido of Arezzo. Indeed, even its modern citizens live in the shadow of these great men; they live, according to the

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[100] Ormond, 'Letter from Tuscany', 22.

narrator, 'in a place where buildings put up by medieval craftsmen and Renaissance architects are a part of their everyday lives.' *From a Town in Tuscany* therefore travels abroad to celebrate an "other" culture in a way that – intentionally or otherwise – simultaneously reinforces a distinctly Welsh perspective. It offers a Welsh viewership a perspective on another place, and in doing so confirms its own sense of itself.

Given the internationalising purpose of a film like *From a Town in Tuscany*, it was perhaps inevitable that Ormond should eventually turn to an event that performs this very function within Wales's own borders. *Music in Midsummer* (1968) finds its material at perhaps the ideal place for such a Welsh national-cultural purpose: the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. This was an ideal topic not only because of the sheer spectacle of a festival of international music and dance, but also because the festival itself shared many of the same post-war Welsh internationalist impulses that were clearly fuelling much of the work at the BBC in Wales at that time. The festival at Llangollen, though a product of these wider impulses, had stemmed from the work of one man in particular, Harold Tudor, a journalist and officer of the British Council. Tudor had sought in the War years to take diplomatic advantage of the presence of exiled Allied governments residing in London by inviting them to the National Eisteddfod. This gesture, as is clear from Tudor's own account of it, was clearly calculated to revive something of Wales's national sovereignty through the development of its international status:

> As a Welshman who believes that his nation should seek to escape from mere provincialism by forging her own direct links with the Continent, the scheme especially appealed to me because it meant that the Allied delegates would be the first official envoys to Wales from other governments since the days of Owain Glyndwr.[101]

Indeed, such a position would undoubtedly have been shared by influential figures at BBC Wales – people like Alun Oldfield-Davies and Aneirin Talfan-Davies – who, as I discussed in Chapter Four, were interested in raising Wales's cultural profile at home and abroad for the same reason.[102] Tudor's scheme was a success, and set in motion the efforts that resulted in the first International Eisteddfod at Llangollen in 1947. The

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[101] Harold Tudor, *Making the Nations Sing: the Birth of the Llangollen International Eisteddfod* (Keele: Keele University Library, 1973), p. 7.

[102] As Michael Billig astutely writes on this issue: 'if "our" nation is to be imagined in all its particularity, it must be imagined as a nation amongst other nations.' Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 83.

festival was, from these early days, covered on the Welsh Home Service in short news bulletins and, later, in fully relayed concerts, and after the arrival of the Welsh Film Unit in 1957, BBC television cameras were also an annual presence at the festival grounds.[103] But the grainy black and white footage could of course never quite capture the full spirit of the event. As Selwyn Roderick has remarked, 'if ever a place was designed for colour television, Llangollen was.'[104] Television viewers would have to wait until Ormond's film in 1968 for the opportunity to view Llangollen in all its colourful splendour.[105] Though, interestingly, many *Welsh* viewers would have to wait two years longer than that. Ormond's *Music in Midsummer* was filmed in full colour by the Welsh Film Unit of BBC Wales at the 1967 festival, very probably with the intention of broadcasting it soon after on the new all-colour BBC 2, which came into service in July of the same year.[106] It was one of the 'very few' Welsh contributions to the BBC network because, as John Davies notes, BBC Wales was 'obliged [...] to devote its resources to home output'[107] - evidently the rich and exotic colours of the International Eisteddfod were deemed worthy of the national network. However during these early days the potential coverage of colour broadcasting was estimated at just 52 per cent,[108] and as the Wenvoe transmitter – which serviced most of the population of Wales – was not upgraded until 1970, a large part of the Welsh viewership would have been watching *Music in Midsummer* on BBC 2 in black and white.[109] The film should

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[103] Interestingly, the Welsh Home Service was initially reluctant to endorse the first festival. Tudor suggests this apprehension may have been related to the concern of some patrons of the National Eisteddfod, who viewed Llangollen as a threat. In the end the Welsh Home Service dedicated some airtime to the festival. Tudor, *Making the Nations Sing*, p. 29. The first television coverage was an Outside Broadcast in 1956. (See Broadcasting Council for Wales's *Annual Reports* of these years.) Moreover, Tudor later recalled he '"hawked" the pictorial possibilities of the festival among the cinema news reel companies' in an attempt to generate interest. Only British Movietone News came. Tudor, *Making the Nations Sing*, p. 29.

[104] Selwyn Roderick, in *Wales Video Gallery: Selwyn Roderick* (2002).

[105] Although, Ormond's film was not the first "prestige" film on the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. Fellow Welsh filmmaker Jack Howells had produced a colour film (funded privately by Esso) on the festival in 1965, titled *The World Still Sings: An Impression of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod.* Howells had himself talked of the importance of producing a "prestige" – rather than merely informational – film to combat the standard fare on television: 'The Eisteddfod, after all, has been covered each year on television – much on the lines of an outside broadcast, say, or a test match.' Jack Howells, quoted in Berry, 'The World Still Sings: Jack Howells', in Russell and Piers Taylor, eds., *Shadows of* Progress, p. 148.

[106] BBC 2 had been broadcasting in monochrome since its inauguration in 1964.

[107] Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*, p. 317.

[108] Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition*, p. 858.

[109] Some viewers in mid and north Wales would likely have received signals from other transmitters in England already broadcasting in colour. Thus John Davies is not entirely accurate when he states that 'the first colour programme made by BBC Wales was [...] transmitted on 9 July 1970'. Davies,

thus be viewed not only as an effort to raise Wales's cultural confidence at home, but also – like the International Eisteddfod itself – as a means of raising Wales's profile elsewhere; in this case, the rest of Britain.

Ormond achieved this in his usual distinctive fashion. Television production in the late 1960s was still largely free from the restraint of standardized programme formats, and Ormond uses this freedom to full advantage in *Music in Midsummer*. Certain striking sequences could be seen as an extension of some of the "experiential" filming techniques that Ormond experimented with in *From a Town in Tuscany* and *Song in a Strange Land*. The film opens by delving straight into a sequence that attempts to capture something of the raucous multicultural atmosphere of the festival. It is a glorious summer's day; a handheld camera pushes its way through a busy crowd; there is clapping, cheering, singing, but above all the sound of exuberant middle-eastern music. It becomes clear that the camera is jostling its way to the front of the crowd for a better view of what seems to be an impromptu performance outside of the main tent. The camerawork attempts to mimic this lively spontaneity: it zooms in and out, shifts in and out of focus, cuts rapidly between shots of the revelry: a hand bashes out a rhythm on a drum; a mouth blows spiritedly into a *kaba zurna*; feet dance happily through the mud. The intention, clearly, is to use every means available to invite the viewer into this unique experience: essentially, a performance of middle-eastern music in a field in rural north Wales. Shortly, however, with the music still on the soundtrack, we cut to footage of a serene pastoral scene that seems visually altogether more appropriate to a film made in a place like Llangollen. A slow pan shot takes in the perfect calm of the idyllic rural surroundings, and there is a deliberate dissonance between soundtrack and image for some seconds before the song ends and we finally hear the more fitting sound of birds, bees, and the wind blowing through bushes on the side of a hill. What is significant about this transition is not so much its poetically stylized juxtaposition – this is common fare for Ormond, who, as I have been arguing, invariably prefers to communicate his message through the manipulation of sound and image alone – but rather the fact that a narrator (here Ormond himself) has prosaically to explain this juxtaposition to the viewer:

Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales, p. 282. Though the first colour programme *transmitted* by BBC Wales was in 1970 (it is significant that this too was a programme about Llangollen), the first colour programme *made* by BBC Wales was very likely Ormond's *Music in Midsummer*.

> Unlikely sounds, you may think, to hear echoing across a valley in north Wales. But in fact the countryside around Llangollen is familiar ground to thousands of singers and dancers from all over the world.

This omniscient intervention is a part of a small segment of narration – it lasts only around forty seconds – that constitutes the only voiceover in the film. Judging by the film's predominantly poetic-observational mode, there is the sense here that Ormond would have preferred not to use any omniscient narration at all; indeed, for the viewer with prior knowledge of the International Eisteddfod, the film would be perfectly intelligible without it. This short snippet of contextualising information thus signals the fact that *Music in Midsummer* was as much an advert of Wales's cultural cosmopolitanism intended for a *British* audience as a celebration of this on Wales's own terms. Indeed, sticking closely to the observational mode established in the opening sequence, the film's overriding strategy is to offer viewers the *experience* of being at this spectacular carnival. The camera wanders the grounds as might the ordinary festivalgoer, stumbling across colourful performances of folk music and dance from all over Europe and beyond.[110] Wales is thus projected to a primetime national BBC 2 audience as a culturally confident nation actively engaged in bringing together cultures of all creeds.[111] Indeed, much of the early section of the film is concerned with the massive community effort required in order for the festival to go ahead: men of all ages chip in to set up the enormous main tent; women discuss hospitality arrangements; schoolchildren help to carry in the seating. Wales plays the host of the nations; it is thus simultaneously, here, the nation that wields the power of representation.

This filmic experience of Llangollen is a powerful means of contributing to a conception of Wales as a distinct cultural – if not quite political – entity in the British public sphere. To be sure, it is highly significant that the film adopts the form of an

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[110] In this sense *Music in Midsummer* could be viewed in the manner of some of Ormond's other films that were inspired by the creative works of other artists (see chapter on cultural documentaries). Here the film, in its colourful enthusiasm, bears a striking resemblance to Dylan Thomas's celebrated essay written for the Welsh Home Service in 1953, 'The International Eisteddfod'. Indeed, Ormond would no doubt have had the piece in mind when making this film. Thomas's piece complements Ormond's film nicely: 'Burgundian girls, wearing, on their heads, bird-cages made of velvet, suddenly whisk on the pavement into a coloured dance. A Viking goes into a pub. In black felt feathered hats and short leather trousers, enormous Austrians, with thighs big as Welshmen's bodies, but much browner, yodel to fiddles and split the rain with their smiles. Frilled, ribboned, sashed, fezzed, and white-turbaned, in baggy blue sharavari and squashed red boots, Ukranians with Manchester accents gopak up the hill. Everything is strange in Llangollen'. In Dylan Thomas, *Quite Early One Morning: Stories, Poems and Essays*, ed. by Aneirin Talfan-Davies (London: J.M. Dent, 1971 [1954]), pp. 58-59.

[111] The film was aired at 8pm on Thursday 4 July 1968. It was also repeated – presumably for those in Wales who could not receive BBC2 at that time - on BBC Wales the following night at 9.35pm.

experience of the festival as opposed to, for instance, a film report on the festival undertaken by a correspondent from London. This was, as I have been arguing, one of the real strengths of having a film unit based in Wales. The film, after all, addresses those outside its realm of experience – 'Unlikely sounds, *you may think* [...]' – and in doing so proves itself to be in the privileged position of being able to invite those outsiders in. Moreover, as with the other films examined in this chapter, *Music in Midsummer* contributes to a sense of Welsh cultural distinctiveness in its capacity to observe "other" cultures. This, of course, underlies the very idea of the International Eisteddfod – and by extension the film itself. But perhaps the most effective way in which it does this is in two interesting final performances, in which the film, rather than emphasising differences, instead draws parallels. Unlike those seen throughout most of *Music in Midsummer*, these final performances are clearly set up specifically for the film. In the first, a section of an American choir sits aboard a small boat being pulled by a mule down the Llangollen canal. They sing the popular early-twentieth century American folk song 'Low Bridge, Everybody Down', written by the Tin Pan Alley composer, Thomas S. Allen. This was a song that looked with a melancholy nostalgia at the end of use of mule barges on the Erie Canal, that crucial artery of the American economy in the nineteenth century:

> I've got a mule and her name is Sal
> Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
> She's a good old worker and a good old pal
> Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
>
> We hauled some barges in our day
> Filled with lumber, coal and hay
> And every inch of the way we know
> From Albany to Buffalo

Thus Ormond finds a resonance through which a song marking the end of an era in American history rings true for the end of a similar one in Wales. The Welsh canals that were once the mainlines of the Welsh industrial economy now serve – like the Erie Canal – a primarily recreational function, providing, for instance, the scenery for BBC Wales filmmakers. From here, the film segues smoothly into a striking final sequence. The American choir finishes its song, and there is a peaceful moment in which the camera faces down at the canal water slowly drifting by; on its surface is reflected the magnificent ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey, the Cistercian Abbey built near Llangollen by

Madog ap Gruffydd Maelor, Prince of Powys Fadog, at the turn of the thirteenth century. There follows a virtuoso single three-minute take in which the camera somewhat shakily (these were before the days of the Steadicam) but nevertheless very effectively walks us through the abbey while an Italian male voice choir performs a solemn Gregorian chant. This liturgical music is in perfect keeping with this ancient place of worship nestled in the hills of northeast Wales; the effect is to remind the viewer of Wales's ancient links with Latin Europe. Thus *Music in Midsummer* serves to showcase a distinctly cosmopolitan, internationalist cultural confidence to both its domestic Welsh audience and the broader British audience viewing on BBC 2; indeed, the BBC Wales logo brandished proudly at the end of the film's impressive final sequence (beneath, naturally, Ormond's prestigious "Produced by" credit) would itself have been a statement of Wales's renewed cultural confidence in the late 1960s.

I would suggest in conclusion, then, that it is necessary to view Ormond's films in more than simply "aesthetic" terms. These films certainly embody the poetic concern that is present in all of Ormond's work on paper and on film, namely the poetic philosophy of the "organic mosaic", that modernist, Wittgensteinian belief in the capacity of the creative artefact, forged out of whatever artistic medium is available, to act as an aesthetic mediator between the human subject and the absence of final meaning. But, as I have been trying to demonstrate here, these concerns take on a quite different significance in the context of national broadcasting. The very process of documentary production is a deeply civic undertaking; its very shape as a cultural form is one that seeks implicitly to produce an informed, civic viewership. Therefore the artistic preoccupations that Ormond brought to all his work inevitably took on a profoundly "extra" dimension in his role as a BBC Wales filmmaker. These meanings, as I have attempted to show throughout this thesis, varied considerably according to the topic at hand. In the case of his documentaries about "other" cultures – inside and outside Wales - they implicitly performed an ethnographic function, and served, in Lidchi's terms, to 'classif[y] and constitute' these cultures in identifiable ways. I have no doubt that Ormond sought as faithfully as possible to convey (what he saw as) the essence of these cultures on film, but, whatever his philosophical inclinations, such universalism is impossible to sustain. This problematic is even more visibly apparent in the context of national broadcasting. To clarify this, it is worth returning to David Morley's useful essay on this subject, 'Broadcasting and the Construction of the Nation Family'. There Morley states that

> By the very way (and to the very extent that) a programme signals to members of some groups that it is designed for them and functions as an effective invitation to their participation in social life, it will necessarily signal to members of other groups that it is not for them and, indeed, that they are not among the invitees to its particular forum of sociability.[112]

As I have shown, Ormond's films on "other" cultures and ethnicities serve, in a variety of ways, implicitly to accentuate their difference. However, while this is, in the context of thinking about the politics of ethnographic representation, a problem, an interesting corollary of the situation was that in the context of broadcasting in Wales, it rather became something of an advantage. For broadcasting in Wales was, by definition, an attempt to foster a *Welsh* national public sphere, a Welsh perspective on common and current affairs. I would therefore argue that Ormond's poetic style of ethnographic representation, on Welsh national television, while to some extent excluding "others", actually served to reinforce a Welsh inclusiveness, a *Welsh* 'forum of sociability'.

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[112] Morley, 'Broadcasting and the Construction of the National Family', p. 422.

Conclusion

[H]owever good his films are, it is primarily as a poet that he needs to be profiled.[1]

Dannie Abse

This thesis has attempted to examine and assess the films produced by John Ormond at the BBC Wales Film Unit between the late 1950s and early 1980s. Part One examined Ormond's individual creative philosophy and the ways in which this fed into his approach to "personal" documentary filmmaking at the BBC. Part Two assessed those films in relation to a changing Welsh society in those years, with particular focus on their filmic interpretation of and contribution to three main Welsh national discursive formations: culture, history and ethnicity. I have attempted to stress throughout both Ormond's unique contribution to the tradition of documentary filmmaking and the contribution such filmmaking made to the development of a Welsh public sphere in those years.

The nature of this thesis, however, focusing as it has upon a single producer, has meant it can only claim to be a case study of a much broader set of institutional practices. I would naturally contend that Ormond was an exemplary producer of this form of documentary filmmaking, but there is much further research to be done on the work of other producers at the BBC Wales Film Unit – people, as I mentioned in my introduction, such as Selwyn Roderick, Gethyn Stoodley Thomas, Nan Davies and Derrick Trimby – as well as producers working in independent contexts. Further work on their films would help not only to build towards a fuller understanding of the history of film and television in Wales, but also, the history of Wales itself.

Such research would further benefit from different forms of comparative analysis. With Ormond's work being very predominantly in the English language, I have not had scope here to examine in much detail the role of Welsh language documentary filmmaking. Further comparisons, along the lines of those I made between the BBC Wales Film Unit's two films on Patagonia in the 1960s, would, I believe, greatly enhance our understanding of the politics of language within bilingual national

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[1] Interview with Dannie Abse, *In Requiem and Celebration*, dir. By Richard Trayler-Smith (BBC Wales, 1995)

communities. Moreover, this approach could, I am sure, be very fruitfully applied to documentary filmmaking outside Wales. There is certainly scope for comparative work on, for instance, the various national and regional film units within Britain, but also those beyond; such work would enrich our understanding of the role of the documentary film and of the mass media in national contexts.

In a recent book published by the Institute of Welsh Affairs, media practitioners and thinkers from across Wales came together to discuss the serious implications of an emaciated Welsh television service. In the aftermath of the 2004 consolidation of the ITV regional franchises in England and Wales into one company – "ITV plc" – this emaciation became critical, with "non-news" programming in the English language in Wales cut to just ninety minutes per week.[2] (Spending on television in the devolved regions from both the BBC and ITV continues to fall.[3]) All of the contributors to that book agreed that television programming, in all its range of themes and its possibilities, performs a crucial role in the imagining of the national community, one that extends far beyond the functionality of news reporting – as important as that form of television is. Green Bay Media producer John Geraint exemplified the general tone of the book when he remarked that the documentary on television in particular could explore, for instance, '[a]spects of human experience – culture, spirituality, history, science, personal relationships, attachments to place – which may be more fundamental and significant than the pressing issues of the day'.[4] I have attempted in this thesis to explore the sophisticated ways in which the documentaries made at the BBC Wales Film Unit were able to explore some of these possibilities at a pivotal time in the history of Wales. I hope that, in doing so, I have contributed to the debates that, clearly, we need to continue to have about the role of television in an evolving Welsh nation, as well as the role that the documentary film can play within it.

But finally, I have sought in this thesis to celebrate John Ormond's work as a filmmaker. These are films that I feel have been sorely neglected in the years since they were produced. This thesis has explored the sense in which these films – a substantial

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[2] Geraint Talfan Davies, *English is a Welsh Language: Television's Crisis in Wales* (Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2009), p. 6.

[3] Ofcom's *Public Service Broadcasting Annual Report 2013* confirms that total public service broadcasting spending on the devolved nations dropped by 30% between 2007 and 2012. See http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/reviews-investigations/psb-review/psb2013/PSB_Annual_Report.pdf [Accessed 13 March 2014].

[4] John Geraint, 'Convergent Realities', in Geraint Talfan Davies, *English is a Welsh Language: Television's Crisis in Wales* (Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs, 2009), p. 54.

body of work – constitute an important contribution to, and fascinating reflection of, Wales's social, political and creative life. They span an enormous thematic range, and do so skilfully and watchably. They deserve to be better recognised as important historical documents, but also as the splendid creative pieces that they undoubtedly are. I hope, then, that I have gone some way to showing that it is not *only* as a poet that John Ormond needs to be profiled.

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Ofcom
http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/

Prosiect Teliesyn
www.teliesyn.co.uk

Films, TV and Radio (See 'Filmography' for full list of films directed by Ormond)

A Tamed and Shabby Tiger, dir. by Selwyn Roderick (BBC Wales, 1968)

Chronicle: Cracking the Stone-age Code, dir. by David Collison (BBC, 1970)

Civilisation, dir. by Michael Gill (BBC, 1969)

David, dir. by Paul Dickson (World Wide Pictures, 1951)

Eastern Valley, dir. by Paul Rotha and Donald Alexander (Strand Film Company, 1937)

In Requiem and Celebration, dir. by Richard Trayler-Smith (BBC Wales, 1995)

Rest and Unrest: The Art of Ceri Richards, Radio Broadcast Written by John Ormond
(BBC, 1954) Manuscript, National Library of Wales, NLW MS 23008E

Selwyn Roderick (Wales Video Gallery, 2002)

The Dragon Has Two Tonuges, dir. by Colin Thomas (HTV and Channel 4, 1985)

The World Still Sings, dir. by Jack Howells (Jack Howells Productions, 1965)

Tiger Bay, dir. by J. Lee Thompson (Independent Artists, 1959)

Today We Live, dir. by Ruby Grierson and Ralph Bond (Strand Film Company, 1937)

Wales: Green Mountain Black Mountain, dir. by John Eldridge (Strand Film Company, 1942)

Wales! Wales?, dir. by Selwyn Roderick (BBC Wales, 1985)

Archives Consulted

BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham

National Library of Wales Archives

Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University

Filmography

Title	Time, date first broadcast	Channel
A Sort of Welcome to Spring	22.45 Thursday 26/3/59	Regional opt-out
Borrowed Pasture	21.15 Wednesday 18/5/60	BBC Network
Enquiry: Fitness for Work	21.30 Friday 11/11/60	BBC Network
Once There Was a Time	22.00 Wednesday 1/3/61	BBC Network
Y Gymru Bell (4 films)	13.10 Sundays 6/10/62-27/10/62	Regional opt-out
The Desert and the Dream	22.20 Thursday, 20/12/62	BBC Network
From a Town in Tuscany	22.15 Tuesday 9/7/63	Regional opt-out
The Mormons	21.25 Tuesday 18/2/64	BBC Wales opt-out
Meeting Point: Operation Salvation	18.15 Sunday 21/6/64	BBC Network
Song in a Strange Land	22.15 Monday 21/12/64	BBC Wales opt-out
Dylan Thomas: Return Journey	21.50 Tuesday 27/10/64	BBC Wales opt-out
Under a Bright Heaven: A Portrait of Vernon Watkins	22.50 Thursday 13/1/66	BBC Network
Horizons Hung in Air	19.00 Wednesday 20/4/66	BBC Wales opt-out
Alone in a Boat	21.55 Friday 9/12/66	BBC Network
Music in Midsummer	20.00 Thursday 4/7/68	BBC2 Network
A Bronze Mask: A Film in Elegy for Dylan Thomas	21.35 Sunday 8/6/69	BBC2 Network
The Fragile Universe: A Portrait of Alun Lewis	21.35 Sunday 15/6/69	BBC2 Network
The Ancient Kingdoms: A View of Wales	10.50 Wednesday 25/6/69	BBC1 Network
Piano with Many Strings: The Art of Ceri Richards	21.35 Sunday 29/6/69	BBC2 Network
Private View: Leslie Norris	21:40 Monday 16/2/70	BBC Wales opt-out
Private View: Kyffin Williams	21.40 Monday 9/3/70	BBC Wales opt-out

Private View: Dannie Abse	21:45 Monday 23/3/70	BBC Wales opt-out
Private View: Robert Graves	21.45 Monday 13/4/70	BBC Wales opt-out
Private View: Howard Roberts	22.10 Monday 27/4/70	BBC Wales opt-out
Private View: John Grierson	22.10 Monday 11/5/70	BBC Wales opt-out
The Land Remembers Series 1 (6 films)	22.15 Tuesdays 15/2/72-21/3/72	BBC Wales opt-out
R.S. Thomas: Priest and Poet	21.40 Sunday 2/4/72	BBC2 Network
The Land Remembers Series 2 (6 films)	22.00 Mondays 4/3/74-8/14/74	BBC Wales opt-out
A Day Eleven Years Long	22:45 Friday 12/9/75	BBC1 Network
The Life and Death of Picture Post	21.55 Tuesday 30/8/77	BBC1 Network
Sutherland in Wales	23.05 Sunday 2/10/77	BBC Wales opt-out
Fortissimo Jones	20.10 Friday 8/9/78	BBC2 Network
Land Against the Light	22.50 Sunday 24/9/78	BBC Wales opt-out
The Colliers' Crusade (5 films)	22.45 Thursdays 29/11/79-27/12/79	BBC Wales opt-out
Poems in Their Place: A.E. Housman	22.40 Thursday 11/3/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: Edward Thomas	22.30 Friday 12/3/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: Thomas Gray	22.35 Tuesday 16/3/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: W.B. Yeats	22.35 Thursday 18/3/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: Dylan Thomas	22.35 Monday 29/2/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: Thomas Hardy	22.40 Wednesday 14/4/82	BBC2 Network
Poems in Their Place: John Clare	22.35 Friday 16/4/82	BBC2 Network
I Sing to you Strangers	19.40 Thursday 10/11/83	BBC2 Network