

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if only we take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

- ▶ What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?
- ▶ Which incidents made you think or feel most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?
- ▶ What issues did the film raise for you?
- ▶ What character(s) do you most identify with and why?
- ▶ Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about eisteddfodau

- ▶ The National Eisteddfod of Wales is the most important of several eisteddfodau that are held annually, mostly in Wales. It is traditionally held in the first week of August and this year's event is currently taking place at Llanelli in Carmarthenshire.
- ▶ The "chaining of the Bard" is one of the most important events in the Welsh Eisteddfod tradition and takes place on the Friday afternoon of the National Eisteddfod. Winners are referred to as *Y Prifardd* (literally "The Chief Bard").
- ▶ The first modern Eisteddfod was held in Aberdare in 1861 and "The Chair" was first awarded in 1880. However, the custom of chaining the bard is much older and is known to have taken place as early as 1176.
- ▶ A new bardic chair is specially designed and made for each eisteddfod and is awarded to the winning entrant in the competition for the *Awdl*, poetry written in a strict metre form known as *cyghanedd*.
- ▶ The chair for 1917 was hand crafted by Flemish craftsman, Eugeen Vanfleteren, a carpenter born in Mechelen, Belgium, who had fled to England on the outbreak of war and had settled in Birkenhead.

ELL AND THE BUTTERFLY EDWARD SCISSORHANDS JUNO THE KITE RUNNER SON OF RAMBO



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

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| 1st Jun | Gravity |
| 6th Jul | Ruby Sparks |
| 3rd Aug | <u>Hedd Wyn</u> |
| 7th Sep | 12 Years A Slave |
| 5th Oct | Jimmy's Hall |
| 2nd Nov | The Railway Man |

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)
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E KITE RUNNER SON OF RAMBOV PRECIOUS NEVER LET ME GO FREEDOM WRITERS LEMON T

Hedd Wyn

***** SPOILER ALERT - If you do not want to know how the film ends, please do not read this leaflet until afterwards! - *****

Hedd Wyn tells the true story of the Welsh poet Ellis Humphrey Evans and the way the First World War affected his life and the lives of the small Welsh community of Trawsfynydd, in Meirionnydd. The title of the film is taken from his bardic name (ie. the name under which he wrote, from the Welsh term *bardd* meaning “poet”) and can be translated “Blessed Peace”.

To fight or not to fight

People ended up fighting in the war for all sorts of reasons. Some firmly believed in the cause; others did not but felt they had to join in along with everyone else. Meanwhile, others became conscientious objectors and simply refused to fight - and faced great hardship as a result, some even being executed for taking such a stand. Ellis was fiercely opposed to the war but, in the end, joins up so as to prevent his younger brother having to go. What might you have done? Is it ever right to take up arms against someone else? The Bible teaches us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek and to remember that everyone is a child of God. It also tells us to fight for justice and to stand up for the widow, the voiceless and the oppressed. How do we deal with the “playground bully”? How do we foster peace and reconciliation? Are there times when, despite the provocation, we need to be patient remembering that, like the story of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 24 - 30), everything is ultimately in God’s hands and to act prematurely will only cause great damage?

Greater love

In the end, Ellis gives his life for his brother. He simply could not have been able to live with himself if he had not gone and his brother had died in his place. It was a noble thing to do, but it also highlights the difficulties in letting others make the same gesture. Many people who come back from conflict talk of “survivors’ guilt” - the fact that they have survived while many of their friends and companions haven’t. Is it sometimes easier to die than be left behind?

Fighting another man’s war

Throughout the film, we see tensions between Wales, England and “Britain”. Many Welsh men ended up fighting for the British cause in wartime, despite their being at odds with aspects of the conflict and the priorities of a Westminster government. In the film, this plays out as the warmongering attitude being synonymous with England and Englishness, with the Welsh and English languages being persistently juxtaposed. The Welsh language itself becomes a site of struggle, but in so doing also becomes a means of defining and strengthening one’s identity. A similar situation was to be found in Ireland, particularly after the Easter Rising in 1916 after which it was very difficult to get anyone from southern Ireland to fight for the British cause.

Who do you identify with? Are you English, Welsh, British, something else? And, given the ever increasing richness of our multi-cultural society, what holds us together? Are there “British values” that are worth fighting for? Or are they simply things imposed by one group (“the establishment”) on another?

The real Hedd Wyn

Ellis Humphrey Evans was born on 13th January 1887 in the middle of Trawsfynydd, the eldest of eleven children. A few months later, the family moved to the isolated hill-farm of Yr Ysgwrn, a few miles outside the village. He received a basic education at elementary and Sunday school, leaving at the age of fourteen to begin work as a shepherd on his father’s farm. Despite an otherwise average academic performance, he held a talent for poetry and had already composed his first poems by the age of eleven.

He took part in eisteddfodau from the age of 19 and, in 1910, took the bardic name of Hedd Wyn, Welsh for “blessed peace”, a reference to the sun’s rays penetrating the mists in the Meirionnydd valleys. His main influence was the Romantic poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and themes of nature and religion dominate his work.

In 1916, the Evans family had to send one of their sons to join the British Army despite farming being a work of national importance. Ellis enlisted rather than his younger brother Robert. In February 1917, he received his training at Litherland Camp, Liverpool, before being temporarily released to help with the harvest back home. He spent most of that time working on his awdl, *Yr Arwr* (“The Hero”), his submission for the National Eisteddfod. Because of the weather, he stayed an extra seven days beyond his official leave, technically making him a deserter. As a result, the military police came to fetch him from the hayfield and in the haste he left the poem on the kitchen table. He thus had to rewrite it from memory on the journey.

In June 1917, he joined the 15th Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers at Fléchin, France. His arrival depressed him, as exemplified in his quote, “Heavy weather, heavy soul, heavy heart. That is an uncomfortable trinity, isn’t it?” Nevertheless, at Fléchin he finished his poem and sent it via the Royal Mail on 15th July, the same day that the battalion marched forward towards a major offensive that became known as the Battle of Passchendaele. The attack began on 31 July at 5.30am. By 11am, Ellis Evans was dead. He is buried at Artillery Wood Cemetery, near Boezinge, and special permission was granted after the war to include on his gravestone the additional words: “Y Prifardd Hedd Wyn”.

The Eisteddfod was held on 6th September 1917, with David Lloyd George present, and the Archdruid solemnly announced that the winner had been killed in action. The chair was draped in a black sheet and, forever after, that Eisteddfod has been known as “The Eisteddfod of the Black Chair”.

Some facts about the film

- ▶ The film ends with the words of R. Williams Parry and his *Englynion coffa Hedd Wyn* (“Englynion in memory of Hedd Wyn”). Parry won the Chair in 1910 and an englynion is form of short poem.
- ▶ In 1993, *Hedd Wyn* became the first Welsh film to be nominated for an Oscar as Best Film in a Foreign Language. In the end, the Spanish film *Belle Époque* took the award.