



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

How Green Was My Valley

John Ford's Oscar[®]-winning adaptation of Richard Llewellyn's best-seller about the hardships faced by a Welsh mining family in the late 19th century fields some glaringly inappropriate accents, yet its polished craftsmanship – especially Richard Day's production design – and emotional force are considerable. That the community's suffering and its supportive mechanisms are viewed as if through a child's eyes adds to the film's power.

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1941 was an important year for John Ford. The success of films like *Stagecoach*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Long Voyage Home* had brought him to a greater eminence in the industry than he had ever enjoyed before; nor was this fortuitous, for his work in the last two years had acquired, almost suddenly, a stylistic richness and command that elevated him without question to the status of a great director.

So the two films which Ford made at Fox in 1941 were both 'important' productions, adaptations from bestselling literary works which had been bought by the studio, and made on generous budgets. And, oddly enough, although superficially quite dissimilar, both had certain essential themes in common which made a strong emotional appeal to Ford. For both *How Green Was My Valley* and *Tobacco Road* are stories – tragic, pathetic or merely sentimental – of disintegration.

Adapted from the enormously successful novel by Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley* was a deliberately lyrical picture (not a realistic one) of golden days of youth in a Welsh coal-mining valley, recollected by the narrator in after-years when the progress of industrialism has turned the valley into one vast slag-heap. A subject of obvious appeal to Ford – though it is interesting to note that the director first assigned to it was William Wyler, who even shot the first tests of Roddy McDowall. However, once the picture was given to him, there is no doubt that Ford gave it all his care and attention. An anecdote retold by Frank Nugent demonstrates his attitude towards Front Office interference during shooting:

'During the making of *How Green Was My Valley*, the production manager approached him on the set and nervously reminded him he was ten days behind schedule. Ford reached for a copy of the script and calmly tore 20 random pages from it. "Now we're right on schedule," he said. "Feel any happier?" The production man admitted that he didn't. "Make up your mind," Ford told him then. "Do you want it fast or do you want it good?"'

To be fair however to Fox, the picture was given a very large budget, and the village scenes were shot on one of the largest composite exterior sets ever constructed for a Hollywood feature – and which has turned up, incidentally, in a number of Fox films since. Finally Ford was 13 days over schedule when shooting finished. The picture cost \$1,250,000; and by 1949 it had grossed over four times that amount.

National Film Theatre programme notes

A contemporary review

This is a splendid picture. It is a fine human story, most admirably produced and most sensitively directed. The acting from a cast obviously chosen with the greatest care is generally excellent, and the performance of Donald Crisp as Mr Morgan quite outstanding. Sara Allgood, too, as Mrs Morgan, gives an understanding to her characterisation of this mother of fine men and husband of a finer that is most praiseworthy. Walter Pidgeon makes Mr Gruffydd live, and we suffer with him his renunciation of Angharad for his work’s sake. The little Huw is most sensitively played by Roddy McDowall. The story-teller, too, deserves notice in that he avoided sentimentality but retained true sentiment in his narration. The lighting and photography and sound recording are of a consistently high standard, and the film generally is certainly a feather in John Ford’s cap. One could wish it had been made over here, for its subject’s sake, but it could not have been better made.

Monthly Film Bulletin, February 1942

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY

Directed by: John Ford
Production Company: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation
Produced by: Darryl F. Zanuck
Screen Play by: Philip Dunne
Based on the novel by: Richard Llewellyn
Director of Photography: Arthur Miller
Film Editor: James B. Clark
Art Direction: Richard Day, Nathan Juran
Set Decorations: Thomas Little
Costumes: Gwen Wakeling
Make-up Artist: Guy Pearce
Music: Alfred Newman
Sound: Eugene Grossman, Roger Heman
uncredited
Unit Production Manager: Gene Bryant
Production Manager: William Koenig
Location Manager: Ray Moore
Executive Assistant to Mr Ford: Jack Pennick
Assistant Director: Edward O’Fearna
2nd Assistant Director: Wingate Smith
Camera Operator: Joseph La Shelle
Assistant Cameraman: Paul Lockwood
Special Photographic Effects: Fred Sersen
Head of Construction: Ben Wurtzel
Stand-by Painter: Walter Cooper
Costumes: Elaine Davis Owen
Music Arranger: Tudor Williams
Music Research: Gomer Jones
Sound: Edmund H. Hansen
Stand-in for Donald Crisp: C.C. Hardy
Technical Advisers: Rhys Williams, Idwal Jones
General Press Representative: Hal Horne

Cast

Walter Pidgeon (Mr Gruffydd)
Maureen O’Hara (Angharad Morgan)
Donald Crisp (Mr Gwilym Morgan)
Anna Lee (Bronwyn Morgan)
John Loder (Ianto Morgan)
Sara Allgood (Mrs Beth Morgan)
Barry Fitzgerald (Cyfartha)
Patric Knowles (Ivor Morgan)
Master Roddy McDowall (Huw Morgan)
The Welsh Singers (themselves)
Morton Lowry (Mr Jonas)
Arthur Shields (Mr Parry)
Ann Todd (Ceinwen)
Frederick Worlock (Dr Richards)
Richard Fraser (Davy Morgan)
Evan S. Evans (Gwilym Morgan)
James Monks (Owen Morgan)
Rhys Williams (Dai Bando)
Lionel Pape (Mr J.C. Evans)
Ethel Griffies (Mrs Nicholas)
Marten Lamont (Iestyn Evans)
uncredited
Clifford Severn (Mervyn)
Dennis Hoey (Mr Motshell)
Eve March (Meilyn Lewis)
Tudor Williams (ensemble singer)
Herbert Evans (postman)
Mary Field (Eve)
Mae Marsh (wife of a miner)
Louis Jean Heydt (miner)
Elizabeth Jones (Mrs Tossel, the toffee lady)
Jack Pennick (mine superintendent)
Irving Pichel (narrator)

USA 1941
122 mins

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