

An Interactive „Crime and the Media” Module

Stefan Machura

Bangor University

s.machura@bangor.ac.uk

Eurocrim conference, 9 September 2021

ESC WG University Curriculum Panel 1

“On teaching about crime and teaching specific criminological topics”

Abstract

In the UK, teaching aspects of Crime and the Media is part of the model curriculum for criminology as a subject. The paper introduces a concept for a “Crime and the Media” module, as offered at Bangor University (Wales) for undergraduates. Its roots go back to a “Law in Film” module taught by the presenter at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (Germany), starting in 1995.

A Crime and the Media module should take account of the findings from academic research and the students’ own contemporary experiences with media. The content of a module can be extraordinarily varied: drawing on different media from different times to highlight developments, and on examples from a range of countries.

Students can be introduced to methods of systematic content analysis, for example, focusing on news values in news stories, or on entertainment values in films and tv series on crime.

Through group discussions, student presentations, essays involving small-scale empirical research and other methods, students should be included as “active learners”.

An additional attraction of such a module is that it supplements the lecturer’s own research on crime, media and audience reactions.

Introduction

- ▶ Media are one of the sources of people's views on crime
- ▶ Students can be engaged by using their media awareness
- ▶ Constellations of conflicts can be studied in a unique way
- ▶ In the UK, teaching aspects of Crime and the Media is part of the model curriculum for criminology as a subject.

The module

- ▶ “Crime and the Media” module for second and third year criminology students at Bangor University (Wales).
- ▶ Its roots go back to a “Law in Film” module taught by the presenter at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum (Germany), starting in 1995.
- ▶ “Crime and the Media” also taught as shorter module during three times as Erasmus Lecturer at the University of East Finland.

Module aims

- ▶ “1. To introduce students to the crime and media nexus.
- ▶ 2. To provide a framework for interpreting and evaluating the information-value, symbolic meaning and entertainment-value of various media products.
- ▶ 3. To explore media-narrated stories of crime and law.
- ▶ 4. To explore any relationships between the media and deviant/criminal behaviour.
- ▶ 5. To cultivate an awareness of the importance of interdisciplinary research and thinking.
- ▶ 6. To cultivate an appreciation of the significance of media narratives for different audiences.”

Module outcomes

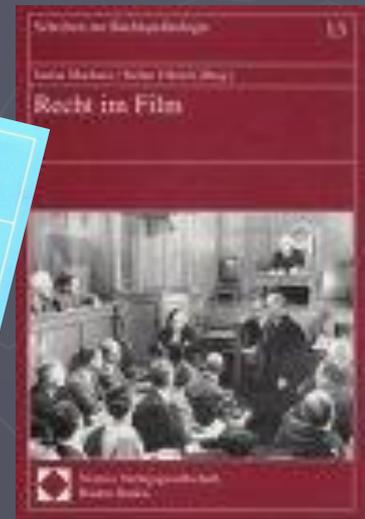
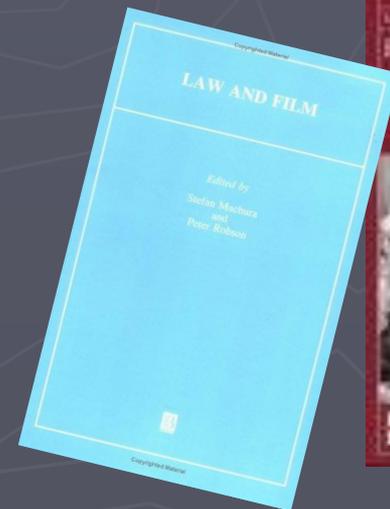
- ▶ “1. Comprehend the economic, legal, political and other socio-cultural phenomena which are typically related to media and crime.
- ▶ 2. Be able to interpret and evaluate media products and to assess their function as sources of information and entertainment for the audience.
- ▶ 3. Know how the media influence deviant behaviour and political responses.
- ▶ 4. Be familiar with the concepts of popular legal culture, media panics, typical narratives and modes of telling in media on crime and law.
- ▶ 5. Understand the relation of media and crime and the repercussions on law and politics.”

Students as active learners

- ▶ Emphasis on active student participation in the classroom and „active learning“ generally.
- ▶ Assessed through
 - presentation in class (power point or poster presentation)
 - and essay based on a „mini research project“ (content analysis of news reporting, or a tv series).
- ▶ Students to work with
 - Analysis scheme for law-related films (Machura 2007)
 - Luhmann's (2000, 27-35) criteria of news value
 - the presenter's criteria of entertainment value (Machura 2018).
- ▶ Watching and discussing films/tv series/documentaries in class, including setting small group tasks.

Student tools

- ▶ Background readings
 - ▶ Reading list
 - ▶ Analysis scheme, Guide for Referencing and Citation, essay checklist
- ▶ Student knowledge and experience
- ▶ Students' *visual literacy*



Lecturer support includes

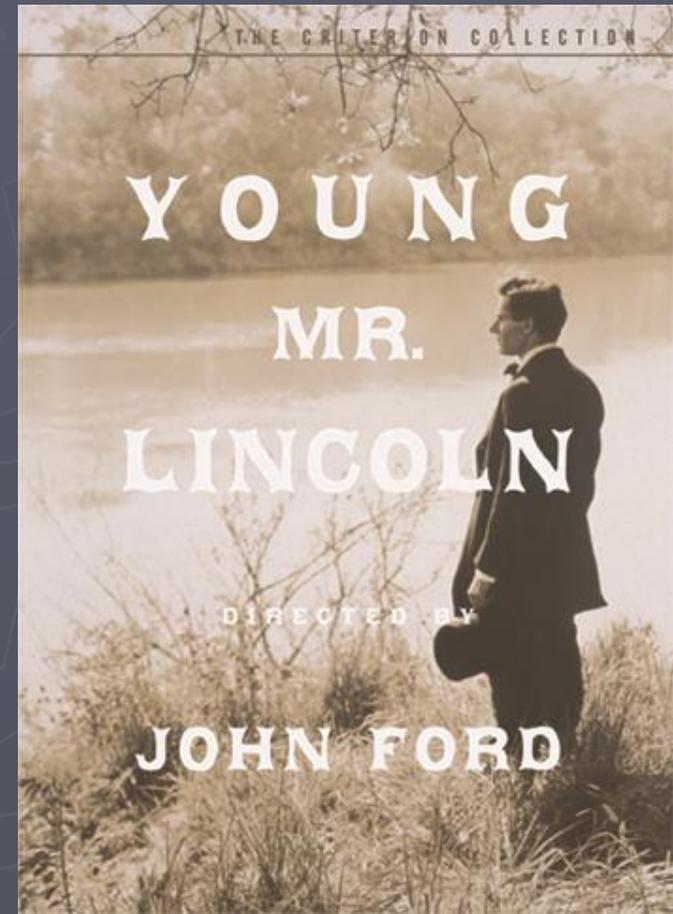
- ▶ Analysis scheme, Guide for Referencing and Citation, essay checklist, lecturer's articles
- ▶ Assessment criteria explained
- ▶ Module outline
- ▶ Evaluation sheet for presentations
- ▶ Examples for good and bad power points and posters
- ▶ Students send their power points in advance for feedback
- ▶ Marked example essay(s) from previous years on the VLA

Unique essay topics

- ▶ „Designing out“ plagiarism
- ▶ Thus, ask students to analyse very recent media material
- ▶ For example:
 - Analysing news reporting on the BBC news website over two weeks within a recent time period
 - Analysing a brandnew police series.

Example first film:

- Young Mr. Lincoln, USA 1939, director: John Ford
- Introduce analysis scheme (Machura 2007)
- Concept of “law”, lawyer-hero, aspects of the American legal system
- Students tasked to note film aspects:
 - ▶ Characters like Lincoln or the jury members
 - ▶ Religious motives, film music etc.
- Students bring those into discussion
- Text: Böhnke (2001)

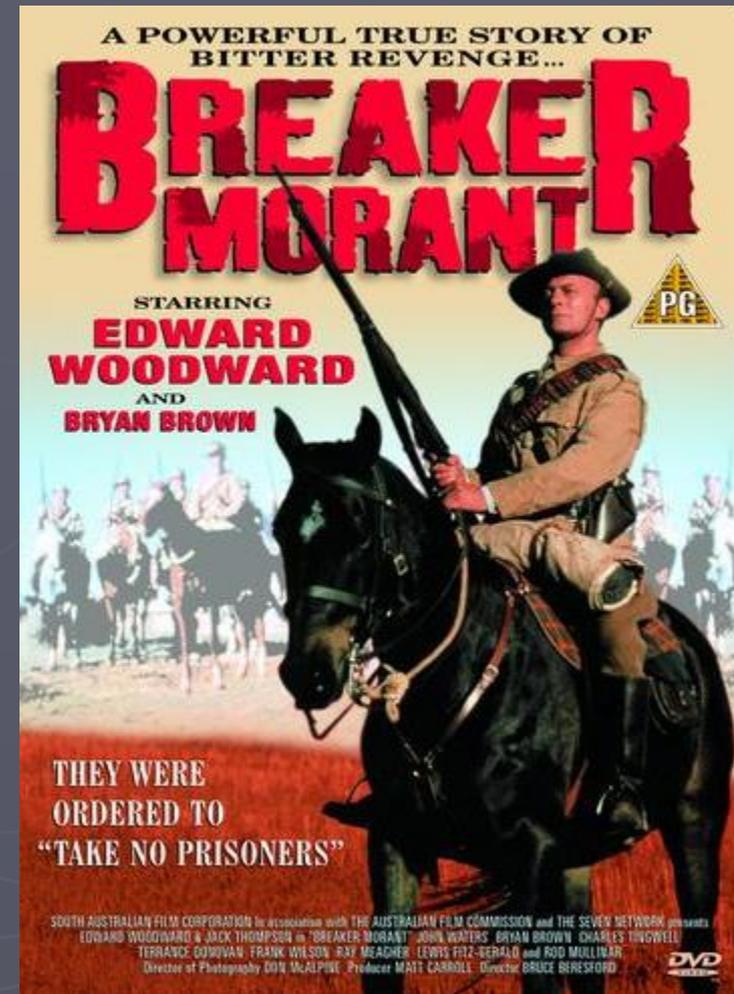


Cover extreme cases

- ▶ Breaker Morant, Australia 1979, director: Bruce Beresford

War crime, court martial, military law, corruption

Text: Kershen (2006)



Picture: DVD cover

Star vehicle

- ▶ A Few Good Men, USA 1992, director: Rob Reiner

Character development,
adversarial system,
military court

Text: Rosen (2006)



Picture:

Jack Nicholson in a Few Good Men

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-08/jack-nicholson,-a-few-good-men/9528442?nw=0>, accessed 10 09 2021

Or even comedy

- ▶ Adam's Rib, USA 1949, director: George Cukor

Legal comedy, gender and law

Text:

Bergman/Asimow (1996) on the film.



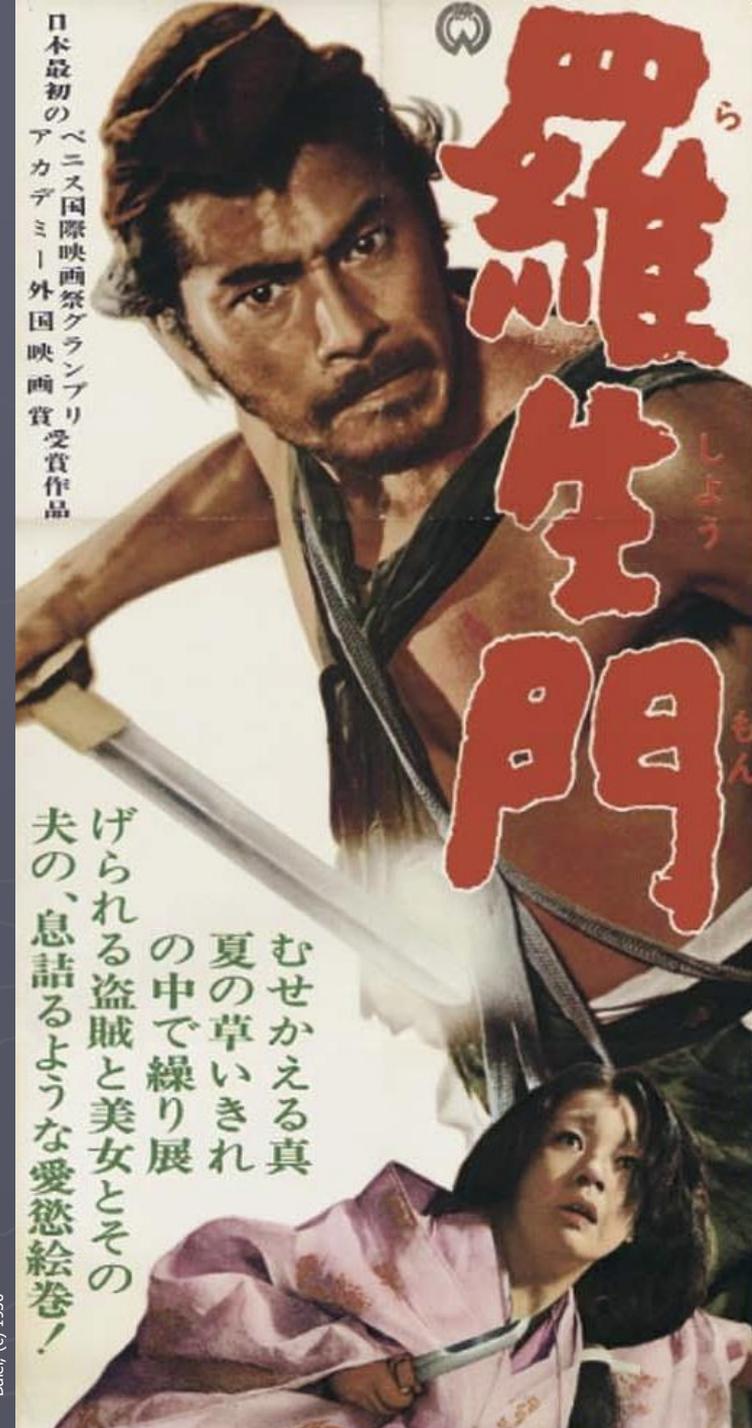
Theatrical release poster,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam%27s_Rib,
accessed 10 09 2021

Or the enigmatic

- ▶ Rashomon, Japan 1950,
director: Akira Kurosawa

„Truth“ in court
Gender stereotypes

Text: Kamir (2000)



In conclusion

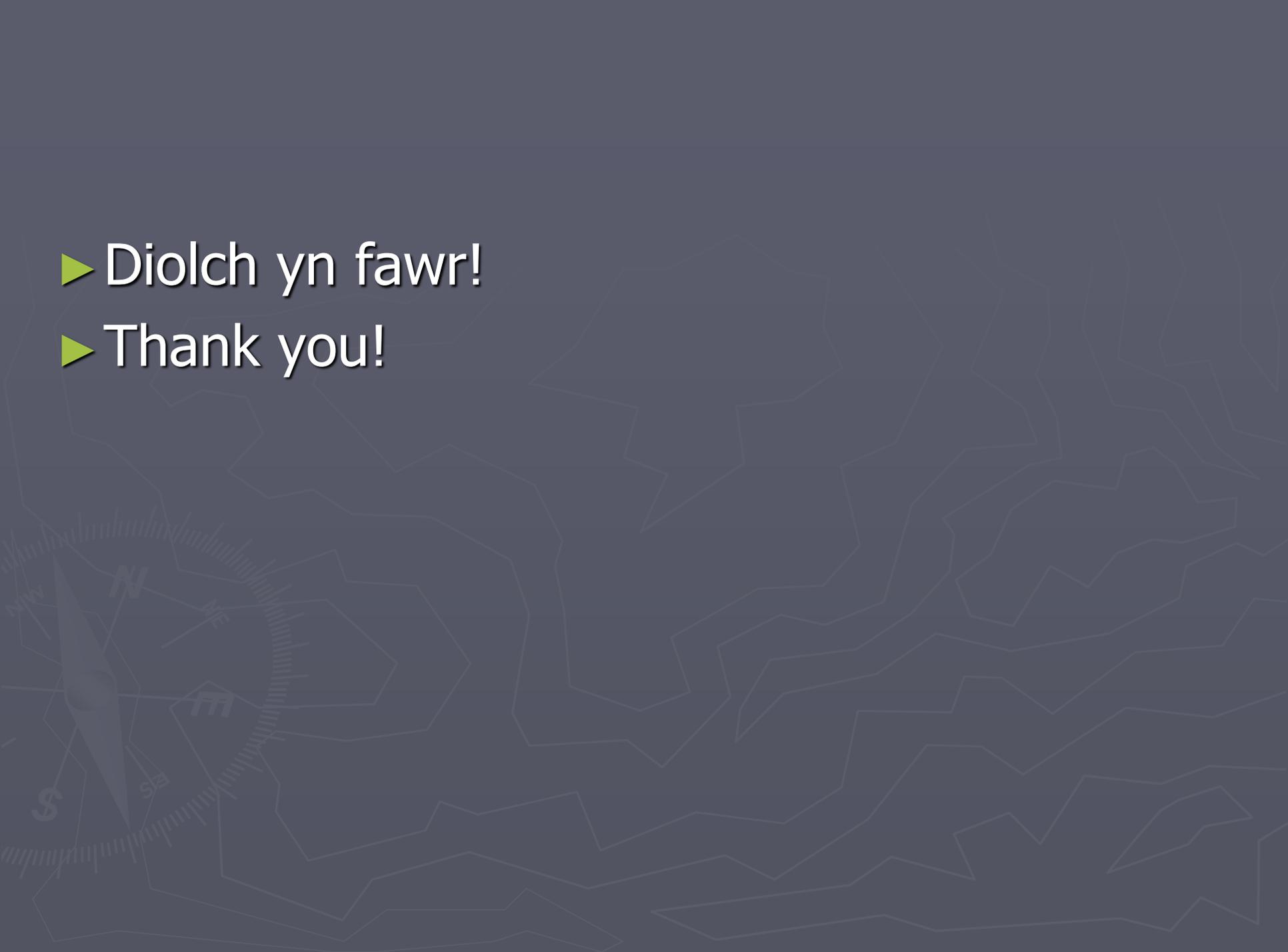
- ▶ Module that encourages active learning
- ▶ Deepens and broadens student knowledge
- ▶ But: students need to be prepared to put in the extra work and time, to explore the unusual.
- ▶ Allows the lecturer to stay in touch with the media behaviour of the student generation.

Literature

- ▶ Bergman, Paul, and Asimow, Michael (1996), *Reel Justice*. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel (also 2nd edition).
- ▶ Böhnke, Michael (2001), Myth and Law in the Films of John Ford. *Journal of Law and Society* 28:47-63.
- ▶ Kamir, Orit (2000), Judgment by Film: Socio-Legal Functions of Rashomon. *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 12:101-163.
- ▶ Kershner, Drew L. (2006), Breaker Morant (1979). In: Rennard Strickland et al. (eds.), *Screening Justice – The Cinema of Law*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Hein, pp. 353-371.
- ▶ Luhmann, Niklas (2000), *The Reality of the Mass Media*. Cambridge, Polity.
- ▶ Machura, Stefan (2007), An Analysis Scheme for Law Films. *Baltimore Law Review*, 36:329-345. **Open access!**
- ▶ Machura, Stefan (2017), Representations of Law, Rights and Criminal Justice. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology*. New York: Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.201>.
Open access!
- ▶ Rosen, Eli Robert (2006), A Few Good (and Angry) Men (and Women). In: Rennard Strickland et al. (eds.), *Screening Justice – The Cinema of Law*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Hein, pp. 607 -615.

Plus, on the „Law in Film“ version:

Machura, Stefan (2016), Recht im Film – Themen und Formen des Unterrichts. *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Rechtswissenschaft*, 3:363-381. (Law in Film – Topics and Forms of Teaching).



▶ Diolch yn fawr!

▶ Thank you!