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Theorising Irish Animation: Heritage, Enterprise and Critical Practice

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Introduction

Irish animation currently benefits from a relatively high public profile, both internationally and at home, partly as a consequence of the Oscar nomination of two Irish-made productions: *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* (Cathal Gaffney/Brown Bag Films, 2000) and *Fifty Percent Grey* (Ruairí Robinson, 2001). Various newspapers articles, at least one international festival, and a high profile season of screenings on Irish television have been devoted to Irish animation, and specifically to the films funded by Bórd Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board.¹ Media attention has tended to focus primarily on the distinctive structure of the animation and digital media sector, or on the role played by agencies such as the Film Board and the Digital Hub, but some commentators have sought to situate animation in relation to the wider context of Irish film culture. For example, animator Andrew Kavanagh has suggested that Irish animation is particularly well-placed to reach global audiences because it is characterised by distinct, recognisable aesthetic qualities. He emphasises, that by

¹ The Bradford Animation Festival presented a special selection of Irish animation in November 2003 and an extensive season of recent Irish animation, entitled ‘Animating Ireland’, was broadcast on RTÉ One in December 2002. Despite the prominent of this season, however, RTÉ has been criticised for its failure to *commission* new Irish animation for television. See Jan Battles, ‘Cartoon Makers Cut Up by RTÉ Snub’, *Sunday Times* (Irish edition), 24/10/04. For more general coverage of the animation sector see Karlin Lillington, ‘Digital Media Gets Animated About its Future’, *Irish Times* (Business and Finance supplement), 23/1/04, and Jennifer O’Connell, ‘Irish Film-makers Animated about Oscars’, *Sunday Business Post*, 3/2/04.

comparison with much international animation, Irish work 'is a lot more *literate*' and he notes that Irish animation producers 'don't write as animators', but instead 'write as filmmakers'.²

Kavanagh's position is intriguing because it directs attention towards an exploration of the modes of production which might be particular to the Irish cultural context. This emphasis on 'literate-ness' also seems to echo a familiar trope in Irish cinema studies - the construction of the Irish filmmaker as an auteur with strong associations to literature and theatre.³ In this respect Kavanagh's comments also hint at a less obvious parallel between Irish animation and Irish cinema - the prevalence of adaptation as a mode of production. As this article sets out to demonstrate, adaptation from literature, folklore, autobiography or popular fiction is widely prevalent in Irish animation. Examples include Edith Pieperhoff's films *An Bonnan Bui* (adapted from an Irish song) and *Orpheus* (based upon the Greek myth), Andrew Kavanagh's *From an Evil Cradling* (adapted by from Brian Keenan's autobiography), Terraglyph's *Wilde Stories* (adapted from the short stories of Oscar Wilde) and Steve Woods' *Window* (adapted from the writings of Bobby Sands). It is also possible to find references to Irish art and design in animation productions that are not funded by the Irish Film Board, as in the case of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Moving Still Productions). This film, which was commissioned by Channel Four and short-listed for a BAFTA Award, is based upon the medieval poem and inspired by the stained glass windows of Harry Clarke.

Adaptation has, of course, long been central to animated feature production but its prominence in Irish animated short films is perhaps less easy to explain, and may be linked

² Andrew Kavanagh, cited by Lillington, 'Digital Media', 55.

³ For evidence of the 'literary' status of certain Irish filmmakers see Eugene O'Brien, 'Series Introduction' in Emer Rockett and Kevin Rockett, *Neil Jordan: Exploring Boundaries*, (Dublin: The Liffey Press: 2003), p. i.

to a range of economic, cultural and political factors specific to the national context. As yet, Irish cinema studies has tended to engage with Irish animation only as a part of the broader field of digital media production.⁴ Paul O'Brien has offered one of the few accounts of Irish digital media that is explicitly focused on cultural form and content. He emphasises that traditional conceptions of national culture are difficult to sustain in relation to digital media, because the internet (and its associated processes of production and distribution) 'challenges cultural nationalism in a radical way'.⁵ But he suggests that, despite this, Irish culture has come to occupy a privileged place within digital media discourse because Ireland is 'seen as a repository of mythic 'pre-modern' values *and* as the locus of cutting-edge developments in technology'.⁶ O'Brien theorises a recovery of mythic form in various contemporary cultural practices, including 'bio-art, interactive art, digital film, computer animation and the developing VR/web/gaming interface' and cites, as specific examples, the referencing of Joyce's *Ulysses* in hypertext theory and the framing of web cinema as a contemporary form of traditional storytelling.⁷

⁴ There is little in-depth discussion of animation in recent accounts of Irish cinema such as Ruth Barton's *Irish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), Martin McLoone's *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (London: BFI, 2000) and Lance Pettitt's *Screening Ireland: Irish Film and Television Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). For a discussion of the Irish games industry, a major site of animation production, see Aphra Kerr, 'Live Life to Power of PS2: Locating the Games Industry in the New Media Environment', *Irish Communications Review* 9, 2003 (<http://www.icr.dit.ie/>). My own interest in animation forms part of a broader exploration of 'marginal' practices in Irish cinema, but is also very directly shaped by the experience of teaching animation and film studies on the BA in Animation at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.

⁵ Paul O'Brien, 'Hyperlinks, Changelings and the Digital Fireside', in Ruth Barton (ed) *Keeping it Real: Irish Film and Television*, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), p.111.

⁶ O'Brien, 'Hyperlinks, Changelings and the Digital Fireside', p.111.

⁷ O'Brien, 'Hyperlinks, Changelings and the Digital Fireside', p.115. O'Brien's analysis is attuned to the cultural context of new media production and reception in Ireland, referencing events such as Darklight digital film festival and monthly screenings organised by the Dublin Art and Technology Association (DATA). Significantly, the programmes for these events encompass fiction, documentary, music videos, electronic arts installations and artists films, as well as various forms of animation.

This complex relationship between mythic form and technological innovation is not, however, necessarily specific to digital media production. Instead it should perhaps be considered in relation to the processes (evident since the early 1980s) through which national culture is constructed within the global economy as a site of both ‘heritage’ and ‘enterprise’. As John Corner and Sylvia Harvey have demonstrated with respect to British national culture, the recovery of the past in the form of commodity to be consumed is often intimately linked to political investment in entrepreneurialism.⁸ Informed by the work of Corner and Harvey, and by related critiques in national cinema studies, this article approaches Irish animation as a site of practice structured around the interdependent discourses of heritage and entrepreneurial innovation.

The Unwritten History of Irish Animation

While very little academic analysis of Irish animation has been published to date, a considerable number of *practitioners* have produced short, but valuable, studies of the field.⁹ The Digital Hub (an Irish government initiative intended to support digital media production in Ireland) has also published a short history of Irish animation on its website, focusing specifically on industrial production. Although it makes reference to aspects of indigenous independent practice, the text locates the roots of Irish animation in the state-supported industrial initiatives of the 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁰ During this period, the

⁸ See John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, ‘Mediating Tradition and Modernity: The Heritage/Enterprise Couplet’, in J. Corner and S. Harvey (eds) *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 45-75.

⁹ See Maeve Clancy, ‘Animation in Ireland’, in C. Lerm Hayes (ed.), *Thought Lines: An Anthology of Research: Faculty of History of Art and Design 6*, Dublin, 2002, pp 18-26; Paul Farren, ‘Irish Animation: A Brief History’, *Film Ireland* 87, July/August 2002, pp 12-13; Steve Woods, ‘Drawing the Line’, *Film Ireland* 43, October/November 1994, pp 24-25; Cashell Horgan, ‘The Hard Cel’, *Film Base News* 10, July/August 1991, pp 8-11.

¹⁰ This text, entitled ‘Irish Animation: A Brief History’ was published on the Digital Hub website in December 2003 and can now be accessed at

Industrial Development Authority (IDA) offered American animation studios, such as Murakami Wolf and Sullivan Bluth, tax incentives and facilities to locate in Ireland. The arrival of these companies provided the impetus for various educational initiatives, at Ballyfermot Senior College and later at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (then Dun Laoghaire College of Art). Many international studios had abandoned their Irish ventures by the mid 1990s, but their highly trained Irish personnel flourished, forming new companies such as Magma, Monster and Terragraph.

The Digital Hub seems to present Irish animation as the product of commercial initiatives and state investment in enterprise and education. A somewhat different narrative of origins has, however, been advanced in the articles and film retrospectives produced by practitioners. In 2002, a retrospective of Irish animation was held at the Galway Film Fleadh and it opened with a three minute work depicting a moving clock tower, dating from the 1910s. Entitled *Clock Gate Youghal*, this film was made by cinema owner James Horgan and defined in the Fleadh programme by Steve Woods as ‘a pioneering piece in world animation’.¹¹ Woods acknowledges, however, that it represented a false dawn in terms of indigenous production, and in fact the only other early work included in the retrospective was a 1928 animated advertisement for soap. Woods is not the only Irish animator keen to reinstate a lost history of production. For example, in ‘A Brief History of Animation’ (published in *Film Ireland*) filmmaker and writer Paul Farren admits that there is little record of animation production during the 1930s.¹² But he states that the celebrated German animator Lotte Reiniger (the director of the first ever animated feature) produced a series of

http://www.thedigitalhub.com/digital_media/sectors_animation.asp?S=1

¹¹ Steve Woods, ‘Irish Animation Retrospective’, 14th Galway Film Fleadh (programme), 2002.

¹² Farren, ‘Irish Animation: A Brief History’, p.12.

Irish language fairy tales for the National Film Institute during the 1940s. In fact, Reiniger's films appear to have been simply purchased from the Canadian Film Board for dubbing and distribution in Irish.¹³

Irish animation did not re-emerge until 1956, with the production of a Bord Fáilte short entitled *Beau Geste*, which according to the Fleadh programme 'encourages us all to welcome foreigners'. The establishment of Telefís Éireann, at the beginning of the 1960s, also created new opportunities for animation in advertising and educational programming and a brief account of this period has been provided by filmmaker Cashell Horgan.¹⁴ He notes that a number of international filmmakers relocated to Ireland at this point, including Gunter Wolf (director of the Lyons Minstrel TV ads) and the American Harry Hess. Hess had worked on UPA projects as such *Gerald McBoingBoing* and *Mister Magoo* and he began teaching graphic design and animation at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s. Horgan notes that this period witnessed the rise of a new generation of independent animators including Aidan Hickey, Tim Booth, and Steve Woods, a development that pre-dated the intervention of the IDA.¹⁵

By the mid-1990s, this independent culture had given rise to short-lived but significant initiatives such as Irish Animation Festival, and the Anamu lobby group led by filmmakers Steve Woods and Cathal Gaffney. Anamu was instrumental in extending Film Board support for animation, in the form of the Frameworks initiative established in 1995, and subsequent

¹³ I am indebted to Sunniva O'Flynn of the Irish Film Archive for providing details on the National Film Institute's commissioning and dubbing of Reiniger's work.

¹⁴ Horgan, 'The Hard Cel', p.10

¹⁵ Horgan, 'The Hard Cel', p.10.

schemes such as Short Shorts and Irish Flash.¹⁶ During this period the Film Board also funded various one-off projects, including Edith Pieperhoff's *An Bonnán Bui* (1995), and Steve Wood's *Ireland 1848* (1997). This latter film differs from the vast majority of Irish animated shorts in that it does not use either digital media or traditional techniques such as cel or clay animation. Instead it is produced through the animation of photographic stills, which have been photocopied and interspersed with intertitles to suggest early film footage. As such it invites comparison with a number of avant-garde film narratives, which employ photography to explore the theme of memory.¹⁷

In the opening title, *Ireland 1848* is presented as the work of one 'Lucien P. Horgan Esq.' and his revolutionary 'portable artistic camera', a piece of equipment that is capable of producing moving images forty years before the invention of cinema. This imaginary invention is used to 'record' the suffering and destitution associated with the Great Famine, and the measures instituted in response to this suffering. Several scenes featuring groups of women and children dressed in rags seem to have been modelled upon other images of the Famine, such as those produced to accompany reports in the *London Illustrated News*. These images flicker continually, suggesting a static newsreel shot, but there is very little action in many of the group scenes. The static quality may be a function of budgetary constraints, or limitations intrinsic to the process of production, but it also suggests a certain refusal to animate images with such strong documentary associations. Other sequences, such as those depicting the ladling of soup into bowls, are more overtly animated seem to reference early cinema rather than nineteenth century portraiture.

¹⁶ Clancy, 'Animation in Ireland', p. 22.

¹⁷ It can be compared to Kieran Hickey's *Faithful Departed* (1966), a key early work in Irish independent cinema, and also Chris Marker's *La Jétee* (1962).

These references to early cinema, illustration and photographic portraiture in *Ireland 1848* suggest a self-reflexive exploration of animation practice, and this project is echoed in recent animation studies. Paul Ward has noted that, although it is a relatively new field of academic inquiry, animation studies encompasses two quite distinct models.¹⁸ One adheres closely to the film studies paradigms established in the 1970s, while the other is characterised by a more overtly interdisciplinary engagement with moving image culture. The latter approach, which seems to be in the ascendant, is highly attuned to the diffuse character of contemporary animation practice. Lev Manovich and Andrew Darley are among those who have drawn upon computer science and visual studies to theorise the emergent field of digital media production, situating animation in relation to gaming, the web, music video and virtual reality.¹⁹ Even though these accounts of new media practice are not directly concerned with key issues in national cinema studies (concerning history, memory, identity etc) they offer a critical perspective from which to engage with developments in policy and education, which are of particular relevance to the national context.

As noted already, academic analysis of Irish animation remains underdeveloped and at this point it is perhaps useful to acknowledge some of the factors that may have shaped its occlusion within academic discourse. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the history of production is clearly characterised by discontinuity, to the extent that a critical mass of work simply did not come into being until the mid 1990s, and was not well catalogued until

¹⁸ Paul Ward, 'Animation Studies, Disciplinarity, and Discursivity', *Reconstruction* Volume 3, Number 2, Spring 2003, (<http://www.reconstruction.ws/032/ward.htm>)

¹⁹ See Lev Manovich, "'Reality" Effects in Computer Animation', in J. Pilling (ed.) *A Reader in Animation Studies*, (London: John Libbey, 1997), pp. 5-14 and Andrew Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

relatively recently.²⁰ A second factor, which complicates critical analysis of Irish animation and necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, is the gradual transformation of animation practice over the past two decades. Prior to the 1990s, the Irish context of production seems to have been structured around two opposing (although necessarily interdependent) models. An indigenous artisanal tradition, characterised by a degree of experimentation, functioned as the alternative to the international industrial model. During the 1990s, however, artisanal experimentation has given way to new forms of entrepreneurialism, leading to the formation of a host of small companies engaged in various different forms of production, from Frameworks-funded shorts to educational programming and advertising. This transformation of indigenous animation parallels other developments within film and the arts, and can be considered within the context of a broader process of cultural and economic ‘reinvention’.²¹

History, Heritage and Irish Animation

As already noted, the complex relationship between heritage and enterprise in British national culture during the 1980s has been theorised by Corner and Harvey. Informed by some of the same concerns, Ruth Barton has developed parallel critiques of heritage discourse in Irish cinema, focusing specifically on a cycle of period dramas produced during the 1980s and 90s.²² She situates these narratives in relation to Irish tourism imagery, which

²⁰ Kevin Rockett has provided the first comprehensive survey of animated films funded by the Board in *Ten Years After: The Irish Film Board 1993-2003*, (Galway: Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board, 2003). Information on projects currently in development is now also available on the Board’s website (www.filmboard.ie).

²¹ For a discussion of the reinvention of Irish cinema during this period see Debbie Ging, ‘Screening the Green: Cinema under the Celtic Tiger’ in M. Cronin, L. Gibbons and P. Kirby (eds) *Reinventing Ireland: Culture and the Celtic Tiger*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp. 177-196.

²² See Ruth Barton, ‘From History to Heritage: Some Recent Developments in Irish Cinema’, *The Irish Review* 21, Autumn/Winter 1997, pp. 41-56 and *Irish National Cinema*, pp. 130-147.

has tended to promote Ireland as a ‘feel good’ location and suggests that, through its cinematic and literary period dramas, Ireland has fashioned itself (and been fashioned) as a ‘symbol of a living imagined history, a country hanging suspended in a pure and permanent past’.²³ Some of Barton’s key points are specific to live action cinema and photographic media. For example, she suggests that *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan, 1996) is characterised by a kind of ‘history effect’ both because it echoes the lengthy running time, high production values of Hollywood epics and because its process of production involved the restaging of historical events with large numbers of extras. This restaging, which was itself the subject of considerable media attention, worked to incorporate the audience into the narrative.

Given her attention to the place of *live action* within period drama, Barton’s critique does not seem readily applicable to animation at present.²⁴ Yet her analysis of the interplay between film and other media highlights the way in which heritage imagery circulates across multiple channels. One obvious site of circulation, within the Irish context, is the television ident or logo. Although lacking the cultural prestige of literary adaptations or historical drama, animated sequences have long been characterised by high production values and a pronounced investment in technological innovation. Since the 1960s, Radio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ) logos have drawn heavily upon the iconography of folk craft and celtic myth. Many of the early idents were limited to static representations of the St. Brigid’s cross but more complex animated sequences have developed since the early 1990s. These sequences often employed new technologies to represent a journey through a mystical rural landscape, complete with Neolithic burial monuments, swirling mist and (in the case of the ‘millennium

²³ Barton, ‘From History to Heritage’, 54.

²⁴ It is worth noting, however, that computer generated imagery and visual effects – forming part of the field of animation practice - are widely used in historical epics, such as *Gladiator*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbour*.

ident') spectral female figures.²⁵ Most recently, however, RTÉ has sought to articulate a more self-consciously 'modern' identity through a series of idents incorporating urban landmarks. One actually articulates the process of 'modernisation' through the computer-generated transformation of Nelson's monument into its millennial counterpart – the Spire.

It is also possible to identify a new emphasis on the construction, and transformation, of images of the past in another key site of Irish heritage discourse – the literary film. As Ruth Barton notes, adaptation from a literary (or theatrical) original has occupied a central role in Irish film production since the 1980s. In her most recent analysis of Irish period drama, she suggests that one set of source texts has gradually given way to another – signalling a wider shift in cultural discourse. It seems that, for the filmmakers of the 1980s, the 'Big House' novels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries functioned as the principal literary source texts. These narratives often deal specifically with the experiences of the Protestant ascendancy; many explore the theme of traumatic memory - familiar from Gothic literature. In contrast, many of the period dramas produced in the 1990s are adapted from a more recent series of novels, set in the 1950s and 1960s, and explicitly concerned with male subjectivity and national identity.²⁶ This second wave of film narratives, which includes *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1998) and *Korea* (Cathal Black, 1995), are often characterised by a self-conscious reworking of personal and cultural memory, and by the subversion of traditional nationalist iconography. Even though they return repeatedly to an earlier moment, Barton suggests that these narratives display 'an increasing confidence that the past can be overcome'.²⁷

²⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of Irish television idents see Maeve Connolly, 'Between the Seasons', in M. Connolly and O. Ryan (eds.) *The Glass Eye: Artists and Television*, (Dublin: Project Press, 2000), pp. 42-53.

²⁶ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p.134.

²⁷ Barton, *Irish National Cinema*, p. 139.

Irish animators also seem to have engaged quite directly with the discourses shaping the representation of the national past, and some have examined themes of literary heritage and political struggle through processes of adaptation. As already noted, adaptation from an original text is a widely prevalent process in Irish animation production. In fact at least a third of the (forty) short films funded under the Frameworks scheme since 1995 are adaptations of one form or another. Developed in partnership with the Arts Council and RTÉ, Frameworks offers animators the opportunity to develop ‘personal and creative projects’²⁸ and many adaptations are characterised by innovation and experimentation, rather than by fidelity to an original text. This is particularly true of *From an Evil Cradling* (Andrew Kavanagh/Moving Still Productions, 1998) a work that employs a number of different stylistic registers, both figurative and abstract, to articulate Brian Keenan’s traumatic experience as a hostage.

While *From an Evil Cradling* displays a profound sensitivity to the source text, some animated adaptations are distinctly irreverent. For example, *Ulys* by Tim Booth (1997) makes reference to the form and content of Joyce’s novel but is far more directly concerned to lampoon the myth of Joyce’s ‘genius’ through caricature than to transpose the novel into film. *Ulys* is just one of a number of Film Board funded animations that seems to propose a critique of Irish heritage culture. *Celtic Maidens* (Cartoon Saloon, 2003) is a three-minute work funded under the Short Shorts scheme, one of a number of pieces intended for theatrical screening prior to a Film Board feature. Taking the form of a fake advertisement, it pokes fun at the history of the ‘Rose of Tralee’ contest and its place within the wider context of national and

²⁸ Rockett, *Ten Years After*, p. 134.

diasporic culture. The Rose of Tralee is clearly an easy target but *Celtic Maidens* sharply identifies it as a point of convergence for a set of enduring myths concerning Irish emigration, feminine purity and rural identity. In one scene, for example, a 'maiden' trembles as she reads a highly sentimental account of emigrant hardship and triumph over adversity.

Much of *Celtic Maidens* is characterised by the linear aesthetic of cel animation and graphic caricature but the opening sequence employs photographic landscape imagery, evoking an array of cinematic and photographic texts, from *The Quiet Man* to the postcards of John Hinde and photomontage pastiches of Sean Hillen. This short film clearly articulates a certain scepticism with regard to the cultural, economic and political discourses shaping Irish media production. It is, however, produced by Cartoon Saloon, a company that is responsible for a feature project that is steeped in 'heritage' imagery. For several years, Cartoon Saloon has been developing a classically animated feature that seeks to capitalise on the fame of the Book of Kells. Originally called *Rebel*, now re-titled *Brendan and the Book of Kells*, the film tells the story of a young monk who must save the illuminated manuscript from marauding invaders. While the project has gone through a number of stylistic changes, the original showreel situates the production within the context of an indigenous artistic tradition that, by implication, can be traced back to the Book of Kells itself. It would seem that, although short animation may offer opportunities for satire, feature production is more constrained by the conventions of heritage discourse.

Conclusion: Authorship, Entrepreneurialism and Criticism

Ulys, *Celtic Maidens*, *Brendan and the Book of Kells* all reference Irish traditions of representation (albeit in very different ways) but many recent Irish animations borrow from more international sources. *Ship of Fools* (Moving Still Productions, 1998) is an allegory of sectarian conflict and political intransigency in the North, and funded by the Film Board in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Arts Council and the Community Relations Council. The script was written by Airt O'Briain in collaboration with broadcaster (and narrator) John Kelly and, although the film is not identified explicitly as an adaptation, it borrows from the *Odyssey*. In visual terms the piece is characterised by constant motion and transformation but the plot is minimal, and centres on a ship's journey across a dark ocean, during which the vessel is repeatedly beset by a mythic creature. At various points, graphic references to the political landscape are interspersed with overtly fantastical images, ostensibly underlining the mythic character of political discourse in the North. In some respects this piece suggests a self-conscious reworking of images of the past, echoing that noted by Barton in live action literary adaptations of the 1990s. But while narratives such as *The Butcher Boy* and *Korea* hint at the possibility of recovery *Ship of Fools* seems to suggest an inability to escape from the past.

Ship of Fools is just one of a number of works to reference graphic and literary traditions beyond the national canon and Andrew Kavanagh (of Kavaleer Films) has repeatedly borrowed from Eastern European sources. Intriguingly, although Kavanagh has claimed the quality of 'literateness' for Irish animation, his own work is characterised by an absence of spoken dialogue or commentary and seems to be very clearly oriented towards an international audience. *The Depository* (2002), adapted from the graphic novel by Andrzej Klimowski, is a fantastical narrative that can be read as a dream or an allegory. It explores a

conflict between a group of angelic figures, whose wings recall the opened leaves of a book, and who seem to function as emblems of the imagination. The conclusion of the piece is ambiguous, but an ongoing struggle against authority.

Similar themes are explored in *The Milliner* (2003), also written and directed by Kavanagh. Although this piece is not identified as an adaptation its plot clearly echoes that of Jiri Trnka's 1965 film *The Hand*. In Trnka's allegorical work, produced through stop motion animation, a sculptor is forced to take orders from a dictatorial power, represented by a gesticulating human hand. Ultimately, the sculptor loses all control over his art.²⁹ *The Milliner* employs computer-generated imagery and echoes the *Matrix* cycle of science fiction films in its exploration of technologically mediated homogeneity and utopian revolution. At the same time, however, it functions as highly stylised allegory set in an invented world where individuals are represented by jigsaw puzzle pieces. These pieces fit together into a homogenous whole, primarily because they are created according to a standard design that includes a machine-made bowler hat. Following an industrial accident, in which a number of faulty hats are produced, one individual begins to create new designs, disrupting the jigsaw pattern and sparking the collapse of the dominant social order.

The Milliner is set in a world that appears to be dominated by *corporate* homogeneity, as symbolised by the bowler hat. In contrast, *The Hand* evolved in response to the restrictions of a socialist system. Yet both films could perhaps be seen to explore the theme of state intervention in the arts, albeit from different perspectives. As already noted, the Frameworks scheme provides an opportunity to develop 'personal and creative projects', implying a particular emphasis on individual experimentation and artistry. Yet the recipients of this

²⁹ For a discussion of Trnka's film see Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 84-88.

funding are, for the most part, production companies engaged in a range of commercial projects, ranging from advertising to educational programming. Within this context, Frameworks supports a mode of production in which the aesthetic preferences of animators and other authors can take precedence over the considerations of clients. Inevitably, however, these projects remain constrained by the (perceived) priorities of the funding agency. The oblique referencing of Trnka's work in *The Milliner* could then be read as a commentary on the political and cultural factors that serve to structure the development of Irish animation.

An in-depth analysis of Irish animation practice is clearly long overdue and this article has simply sketched some possible starting points for further research. It would seem that many practitioners have attempted to counter the 'marginal' status of animation, by seeking to recover a lost history of production. Others have embraced interdisciplinary approaches to imagine an alternative point of origin, countering a tendency by state agencies to locate the roots of Irish animation in the commercial initiatives of the 1980s. For all its marginal status, Irish animation offers clear parallels with live action cinema in the 1990s, not least because of the prevalence of adaptation as a mode of production. By contrast with many of their counterparts in live action production, however, Irish animators have often looked beyond the Irish canon or subverted aspects of Irish heritage discourse. This article has also identified several works, such as *The Ship of Fools* and *The Milliner*, which borrow from established international traditions of allegory and satire to explore the relationship between representation and ideology. Perhaps more than any other work mentioned, *The Milliner* suggests the emergence of self-reflexive mode of practice, informed by a critical analysis of

the position of Irish animation in relation to the intertwining discourses of heritage and enterprise.