

Re-animating the Past: An Irish Animation History

*Tom Walsh**

Arts University Bournemouth, UK

* Address correspondence to Dr. Tom Walsh, Arts University Bournemouth, Wallisdown, Poole, Dorset, BH12 5HH, UK. Email: twalsh@aub.ac.uk.

Abstract: In the late 1980s and early 1990s the presence of a large American animation studio in Ireland, under the stewardship of ex-Disney animation director Don Bluth, played a pivotal role in the development of the indigenous Irish animation industry, and constituted a colonial moment in Irish animation history. This paper aims to discuss the nascent Irish animation industry prior to the arrival of the Don Bluth studio, and to consider aspects of indigenous production onto which a global North American industrial model was imposed. Aspects of postcolonial theory are used as a method of describing the historical circumstances that have determined the emergence of an indigenous Irish animation industry in the late 20th century, and also deployed to illustrate how the social and historical aspects of animation production in Ireland reflect the postcolonial conditions of Irish society itself. In considering the pre- Bluth period of animation production in Ireland this paper offers insights into models of production, aesthetic expression and processes of cultural transmission, and provides commentaries on work of Irish animators overlooked by Irish film studies.

Keywords: animation, postcolonialism, Modernism, film studies, identity.

The prominence of orthodox commercial animation emerging from an American source throughout the 20th century, has dominated public perceptions of the form.¹ Equally, indigenous animators outside the Hollywood system have had to contend with this perception in generating their own national animated cinemas,² and this has also been the case for Irish animated cinema. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s animation practitioners in Ireland came under a heightened pressure to conform to a commercial American form due to the presence of a large American studio, the Don Bluth studio, in Dublin during this period. This perception of the orthodox commercial form as the consummate form of animation practice in Ireland is demonstrated by Martin McLoone's single-sentence assessment of Ireland's animation industry where he states: 'A short-lived but vibrant animation industry flourished between 1987 and

1992 and the slowly evolving European production funds under the MEDIA rubric began to have an impact'.³

McLoone's brief Irish animation history coincides with the presence of the Bluth studio in the country and does not address an indigenous animation industry before or after the Bluth presence. Thereby, his assessment alludes to a persistent marginalisation of animation practice in Irish film studies, and demonstrates a concept of the animated form as primarily commercial and destined for a North American marketplace.

Elsewhere, journalist Sheila Johnston's article on Bluth raises the question of the Bluth studio's status as a 'colonial outpost: a sealed off American enclave turning out perfectly-cloned American product'.⁴ This erasure of indigenous practices in the face of an imported American commercialism has interesting parallels to a broader colonial discourse, where cultural identity can be compromised by the dismissal of indigenous history, as Memmi states,

The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community. Colonization usurps any free role in [...] every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility [...] He is in no way a subject of history any more.⁵

Arguably, part of a decolonising process involves the reassertion of indigenous history as a legitimate historical discourse, and the same might be said in relation to an indigenous Irish animation history emerging from the long-term effects of the Bluth studio's presence. In a broader cultural context, the Republic of Ireland's status as a postcolonial nation-state is a recurrent issue in the analysis of representations of Irishness in media forms such as television and cinema. Colin Graham regards developments in postcolonial theory that consider cultural exchanges between colonizer and colonised as most useful in an Irish context, ascribing a 'liminality' to Irish cultural identity, and placing questions of authenticity as central to discourses of Irish culture.⁶

John Cleary formulates a concise discussion of Ireland's status as a colony of the British Empire up until the separation of the country into Northern and Southern regions. The colonizing process for Cleary was part of a movement towards Ireland's integration into a global capitalist system,⁷ and considering acts of colonization as aspects of capitalist expansion is another way of understanding the 'colonial' nature of the Bluth studio's move to Dublin. Bluth and Goldman explain the financial reasons behind their move to Dublin in an interview with Jean Marie Ward

& Teri Smith.⁸ It must be recognised that there were animation practices in Ireland before and during the Bluth presence, which did not conform to the paradigm of commercial industrial production. These animation practices might be termed ‘indigenous’ in the sense that they are connected to the performative experiences of Irish life underlying pedagogical aspects of national identity, a duality in the concept of nationhood identified by Homi Bhabha, where the everyday, performative aspects of people’s lives problematise the pedagogical and unifying myth of nationhood.⁹

Irish animation culture was not a blank slate onto which commercial American animation aesthetics were inscribed. Elements of an Irish visual arts tradition, drawn from Celtic artefacts rather than a fine art tradition, are evident in more contemporary Irish animated texts such as *Brendan and the Secret of Kells* (2009) and *Song of the Sea* (2014), that seek to evoke a particular sense of ‘Irishness’. However, a visual arts tradition had a limited effect on determining concepts of an Irish cultural identity, as de Breffny explains:

During most of the 19th Century Irish artists were forced to make their careers abroad, usually in England. The bulk of the work they produced had nothing to distinguish its nationality. Any that did manifested it in the choice of subject-matter, or in the revival of ancient Celtic art, rather than in any distinctly Irish style [...] it is difficult to distinguish between those artists whose choice of Irish subjects, contemporary or ancient, was prompted by a search for the romantic or the picturesque, and those who were looking for a national identity.¹⁰

With a limited visual arts tradition it fell to a literary tradition to consolidate notions of Irish nationhood and identity throughout the 19th and 20th Century, and it is from this literary heritage, and its relationship to Ireland’s pre-Christian oral folk traditions, that contemporary representations of Irishness are formulated. Also, it is the Modernist underpinnings of this literary tradition that resonates with the animated form’s emergence as a Modernist art form at the turn of the 20th Century.

In his analysis of Irish live-action cinema, Lance Pettit recognises Ireland’s postcolonial status, and this contributes to his description of Irish culture and identity as being ‘indeterminate’ and ‘in-between’. Pettit states;

[...] Ireland may be located historically and culturally as an ‘in-between’ country and that this is due to the nature of its economic and political past. Intimately connected to the British Empire and the United States of America, through waves of permanent immigration

and more transitory back-and-forth migrations, Ireland and Irish identities exemplify all the contradiction and possibilities of postcolonial and postmodern development in a century dominated by the political ideology of nationalism.¹¹

And just as this concept of in-betweenness informs representations of Irishness in live-action cinema, it might also inform such representations in animated forms. This state of 'in-betweenness' suggests an ambiguity, hybridity and fragmentation at the heart of Irish identity, and it is this sense of disintegration and fragmentation which is taken up by Gibbons as markers of a modernity experienced by Irish culture before the advent of the Modernist period.¹² It also suggests the appropriateness of the animated form, a Modernist form of cultural production that excels in depicting hybridity, instability and ambiguity, as a vehicle for representing Irish culture.

As noted by Sean Cubitt, the animated form can be seen to address the anxieties generated by modernism by effacing the difference between living and non-living states through technological processes.¹³ The inherent instability of the animated form, its slippage between Cartesian and Euclidean geometry used by Deleuze to define cinema forms, its incremental deconstructive processes, and ability to interrogate subjective human experiences, aligns the form to Modernist discourses and other modernist artefacts such as the realist novel. The animated form shares the Modernist underpinnings of Ireland's seminal writers W. B. Yeats and James Joyce, which have had a considerable influence in generating an Irish cultural hegemony, and therefore we might consider how the Irish animated text might reflect the literary discourses of a Yeatsian and Joycean Modernism, which continue to inflect representations of Irish culture.

An examination of Ireland's indigenous animation heritage can help in an understanding of how Modernist forms effect representations of traditional Irish culture, and how these forms can be used to understand the historical context of their production. The focus of this paper is not to supply an exhaustive list of indigenous Irish animated productions, but to identify texts for analysis which demonstrate a particular capacity to generate ambiguity and a sense of the 'in-between'; both in their representation of history, identity and in their use of the animated form itself.

We shall therefore consider the development of indigenous Irish animation production at two key points in Irish social history: the struggle

for a national hegemony in the early 20th century and a gradual emergence into global capitalist modernity, as David Lloyd explains:

The question of the past in Ireland informs the emergence of future possibilities that are continually narrowed and occluded by an historical consciousness that seeks to write the complexities of Irish history into a narrative of modernization and the emergence of a well-regulated civil society. That narrative [...] celebrates the passage from Ireland's domination by British colonial capital to its domination by and participation in the neo-colonial circuits of global capitalism.¹⁴

This paper will focus respectively on the work of James Horgan, Aidan Hickey and Tim Booth. Horgan's early experimental footage can be read as an allegory for a disruptive Irish history that resists closure. Hickey's development of a commercially viable form of animation practice reflects Ireland's gradual entry into flows of international capitalism and its impact on Irish identity. And finally Booth's use of metamorphosis and symbolism is used to critique the terms of an Irish modernity emergent in the 1980s.

James Horgan: Early Experimentation

James Horgan, a photographer and newsreel filmmaker from the turn of the 20th century, has been credited as producing Ireland's first piece of animation.¹⁵ Using model-making and stop-frame techniques Horgan recreated Youghal's main street, and shows its prominent landmark, the clocktower, walking around and engaging in some simple acrobatic feats. The small piece of film has yet to be definitively dated, but independent animator Steve Woods, who brought the film to the attention of Ireland's animation community as part of the 2002 Galway film festival's Irish animation retrospective, suggests the film might be as early as 1907, making it contemporary with the work of Stuart Blackton and Emile Cohl, and one of the earliest pieces of animation on film ever produced.¹⁶

It is in the tradition of eclectic news reel film production where Ruth Barton positions the work of the Horgan brothers, James, Thomas and Phillip, who established a regular local news reel programme called *The Youghal Gazette*.¹⁷ The brothers were originally apprenticed as shoemakers, but an initial interest in photography led to the production of postcards, magic lantern shows and eventually film exhibition and production.¹⁸ Receiving the first licence to exhibit films by Cork County Council following the Cinematograph Act of 1903, and constructing their own 35mm camera from a converted projector in 1898, they also developed a Polaroid-type process which allowed for the rapid recording and printing of film.¹⁹

It is unclear whether or not James Horgan had been aware of Blackton's *The Haunted Hotel* (1907) or Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908), but Horgan's early film of the Youghal clocktower can be viewed as being similar in kind to Blackton's *The Haunted Hotel*, or as a descendent of George Melier's films, that is as a trick film. As such it is connected to concepts of the early cinematic medium as purveying optical illusions, with early animators following a tradition of the magician or lightning sketch artist performing parlour tricks. Although in itself the footage essentially portrays the personal inventiveness and playfulness of Horgan as an early filmmaker, it also shares the concerns of a much broader and significant movement in the development of cinematic forms.

As Donald Crafton points out, few of these early animations were concerned with narrative, but rather the realisation of movement was seen as an entertainment in its own right. Crafton connects this interest in pure movement to a Romantic and Gothic tradition that was obsessed with the mechanism of life, as well as the technological and scientific interest in propulsion.²⁰ Horgan's film can easily be seen as a similar moment of experimentation with the cinematic medium, as well as indulging in the delight of disrupting footage of a static Youghal main street, which must have been familiar to regular viewers of The Youghal Gazette newsreel.

Crafton's linking of early animation to a tradition of Romantic and Gothic authors, who he argues 'were writing metaphorically of the scientific revolution and its positivist implications for civilisation',²¹ suggested that early animators, in their engagement with the new technology of cinema, shared similar concerns. It is a point equally made by Wells when he positions animation as an art-form emerging from the Modernist period of the early 20th Century, where increased urbanisation of society and mechanisation of work practices had a profound effect on Western social structures.²²

Horgan's cinematic practices can be regarded as part of greater technological and industrial processes altering the fabric of Irish society during the period. Horgan's film is also evidence of the effects wrought by technology on his own business practices; illustrating a progression from still photography to moving pictures, with a talent for retouching photographs finding its cinematic equivalent in the illusion of animation. Ultimately what Horgan has produced is a moment of 'meta-reality', a term used by Wells in describing the animation of real-world objects.²³

Horgan, in his meticulous re-creation of Youghal's main street using photographs and models, as well as playing on the Horgan brothers reputation for local, documentary newsreel footage, establishes an everyday world, which is then disrupted by the movement of the

clocktower, offering ‘an alternative version of material existence’ as postulated by Wells in relation to stop-motion animation.²⁴ This alternate reality thrives on the ambiguity between a sense of realism generated by Horgan’s practice as a newsreel filmmaker, and the illusionism of his activities as an animator in this instance.

Crafton’s use of the word ‘haunted’ seems particularly apt in describing the autokinesis of such early animated films where the apparent life of objects carries with it a Derridean supplement of death; and in the particular case of Horgan’s animated landmark, this might be read as signifying the actual impermanence of human society over time, which undercuts the illusion of permanent structures imposed by civilisation on a natural landscape. In an Irish context, Gibbons argues that public monuments can be seen as ‘expressions of official memory’, the state legitimizing its ‘triumphant version of the past’.²⁵ However, Gibbons points out that Irish history is fragmented and chaotic, a continual play of invasions and colonial incursions, thereby denying myths of nationhood an ‘originary plenitude’.²⁶ In Horgan’s film, the clocktower of Youghal’s main street is the public monument that might be regarded as an allegory for a legitimizing state history, which is disrupted by the unfinished business of Irish history that refuses to be contained in static commemorative objects, remaining ambiguous and contingent as the animated form suggests.

As noted above, the instability offered by the animated form, which can be seen as a particular quality of a radical Modernist aesthetics, suggests the contingency of human history that attempts to stabilise itself in the form of concrete monuments, such as Youghal’s clocktower, and this might point to what Lukács regarded as the formalism of Joyce. This formalism for Lukács signified the advent of bourgeois control over Western European society and the decline of any resistance to capitalist economic and social models. Terry Eagleton explains in relation to Lukács that

In the alienated words of Kafka, Musil, Joyce, Beckett, Camus, man is stripped of his history and has no reality beyond the self; character is dissolved to mental states, objective reality reduced to unintelligible chaos[...]. Individuals are gripped by despair and *angst*, robbed of social relations and so of authentic selfhood; history becomes pointless or cyclical, dwindled to mere duration. Objects lack significance and become merely contingent [...].²⁷

The liveliness of the clocktower might thereby imply the chaos of a contemporary Modernist society, which has no recourse to a stable history. The kineticism of Horgan’s text, facilitated by Modernist technology of

film and processes of animation, transfigures a Joycean aesthetics that embraces modernity in the face of a fragmented and dissolute sense of history – a chaotic history that cannot be contained in monolithic static forms but can be represented in animated forms.

Although a critique of history is not at the forefront of Horgan's experimental film, as an historical document itself it transfigures the impermanence wrought by technological progress on the Irish landscape, and also shows evidence of the potentially radical effects that cinematic practices might have on cultural representations. These radical effects can be read as signifying the transience of human society, the contingency of Irish history, and the 'abstract subjectivity'²⁸ of a Joycean formalism.

Aidan Hickey: Emerging Commercialism

Aidan Hickey was trained as a secondary school art teacher at the National College of Art (NCA), but as he explains, he left his 'good pensionable job'²⁹ to pursue his interest in animation, supporting himself through teaching and free-lance illustration work. In 1972, due to the lack of any provision for animation training in Ireland, Hickey was forced to take a post-graduate course 'Film and Television in Education' at Hornsey College of Art in London, specialising in animation. Hickey's work, alongside the stop-motion techniques practiced at Jimmy Quinn's Baile Beag Films from 1974 onwards, is notable for its attempt to develop an indigenous, commercially viable animation practice in a climate that lacked training and resources for large scale studio productions. Hickey's cut-out process emerged as one indigenous alternative to the orthodox, hand-drawn and cel-traced aesthetic that signified the commercial cartoon of this period.

In his film *An Inside Job* (1987), while still utilising his cut-out technique, Hickey also demonstrates his skills as an independent filmmaker, actively exploring the contact between Ireland's traditional oral storytelling culture and a cinema of modernity imported from Hollywood. The film consists of a single close-up of an open mouth, with teeth full of gold fillings, which are subsequently stolen by a criminal masquerading as a dentist. As the robbery takes place, the villain recounts the tale of a fictional Hollywood film 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre', starring Humphrey Bogart, Jack Nicholson and Orson Welles, playing each of the principal roles himself.

Hickey's career in the 1970s and 1980s occurred during a dynamic period in Irish social and film history; during this period an increasingly liberalist social consensus was followed fast by a deep economic recession and the resurgence of conservative elements in Irish society, resulting in

critical and avant-garde film works such as Peter Lennon's *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968), Joe Comerford's *Traveller* (1982) and Cathal Black's *Our Boys* (1981). These works interrogated the effects of an ascetic, 'Irish-Ireland' nationalism that sought to preserve the myth of a traditional Irish culture in the face of a corrupt Anglophonic modernity: part of this insular government policy was suspicious of filmmaking practices,³⁰ resulting in what McLoone calls 'the most punitive censorship regime in Europe'³¹ in the mid-20th century. Despite James Horgan's auspicious beginning, there were no indigenous Irish animated films produced in the post-independence period, although Maeve Connolly recognizes the purchasing and dubbing into Irish of Lotte Reiniger's Irish fairy-tale films in the 1940s.³²

It was not until after 1950 that was an interest in developing an Irish film culture³³ aided by the efforts of archivist George Morrison, who experimented with animation aesthetics, if not actual animation processes, in his film *Tá na Báid* (1958). The gradual recognition of film as a legitimate form of Irish cultural production coincided with broader moves towards modernisation, initiated by T. K. Whittaker's 1959 economic report. The inauguration of Ireland's national radio and television service Radio Teilifís Eireann (RTE) in 1961 would offer a domestic outlet for Irish filmmakers and animators such as Hickey, who initially produced some animated graphics for Eamon de Buitlear's nature documentary series *Amuigh Faoin Spéir*, before being commissioned in 1978 to produce three five-minute films, which were to become a sixteen episode children's series *An Saol ag dul Thart*.³⁴

The rise of television broadcasting had significant effects on Irish culture as pointed out by Pettit; there was an overspill from Britain's own domestic broadcasting service, and the importing of American television programming which resulted in an increased exposure to Anglophonic cultures external to the Irish state. This exposure to foreign Anglophonic culture through media forms such as cinema and television, had both positive and negative potentials according to McLoone, who explains in relation to American cultural imports:

The problem with American popular culture is that its dominant position in Irish culture can be read in either two ways [...] On one hand it can be seen to represent a form of cultural imperialism that thwarts the development of indigenous culture [...] On the other hand, the essentialist identity proposed by Catholic nationalism and the Gaelic revival was so insular and stifling that the greater encroachment of American popular culture has been positively liberating.³⁵

For Gibbons, there is potential for positive social transformation as a result of contact with modern media forms such as television and cinema. This potential does not come at the expense of indigenous traditional culture, but rather re-activates radical potentials already inherent in traditional practices themselves, and it is the re-configuration of modern genre forms in more localized contexts that can create transgressive effects.³⁶ It is this transgressive potential that we can identify in Hickey's *An Inside Job*, where the animated form is used to facilitate contact between an Irish oral storytelling culture, an element recognised as part of Ireland's live-action cinema of the 1970s,³⁷ with the cinematic storytelling culture of Hollywood. This also acts as an allegory for the broader social and economic changes in Ireland during this period, resulting from what Kevin Whelan identifies as 'the internationalization of capital' and 'the impact of global communications'.³⁸

In *An Inside Job*, Hickey initially generates audience identification through the familiarity with the physical discomfort of dental work, transfigured by the detailed rendering of his cut-out technique. It depicts the abject nature of dentistry, the invasive pricking of syringes and whining of drills, with sadistic delight, bringing the procedure to a literally explosive climax when the gold fillings are blasted from the patient's teeth using plastic explosives wired to a suitably tiny plunge-detonator.

Cut-out methods have an advantage over the cel-based technique easily identified with the hyper-realist work of feature studios such as Disney, in that both character and background can be rendered in a single style, creating a more homogeneous final image. This is opposed to the plasticized form of animated figures traced onto cel-acetates and placed over hand-painted backgrounds, commonly identified with the orthodox Disney form from this period.

However, the movement of cut-out figures, being more akin to flat, hinged puppets, does not allow for the squash and stretch principles of hand-drawn, cel-traced animation, and therefore experiences greater difficulties in conveying a realistic sense of weight and volume, and the illusion of three-dimensional space. The representation of physical mass in space and time is a key aspect of the animated form as pointed out by Halas and Manvel, who suggest that the audience of an animated film relates to its characters primarily through bodily movement, and a recognition of the physicality of being.³⁹

This disjuncture between detailed cut-out figures and their limited movement creates an interesting dilemma for filmmakers like Hickey who have attempted to create a commercial character animation that strives for audience identification using the limited movements of cut-out techniques.

To resolve this disjuncture, and overcome the limited animation available to its figures, Hickey's film relies heavily on the strength of its dialogue. And the importance placed on script and voiceover, makes it possible to describe Hickey's film in the terms Morrison used to criticise Irish film's dependency on the literary voiceover in the 1960s; i.e. as 'illustrated radio'.⁴⁰

The act of storytelling, and the unreliability of the narrator, is at the forefront of the text; it's maniacal impostor-dentist displaying the resurgence of an Irish oral storytelling tradition, impersonating the voices of American actors Humphrey Bogart, Orson Welles and Jack Nicholson as part of his rendition of a fictional Hollywood film. This storytelling tradition has been infected by an American cinematic culture, on one hand abandoning Yeatsian tales of a romanticised Celticism in favour of a Hollywood Western, while on the other radicalising a Modernist myth of the isolated anti-hero through its schizoid, composite re-telling.

Berresford Ellis' analysis of pre-Christian, pre-feudal Celtic society points out the oral nature of this culture, and how its laws, histories and folktales 'were committed to memory by druids and bards'.⁴¹ A romanticized view of this Celtic culture was used to construct nationalist myths of Irish antiquity by writers such as Yeats at the turn of the 20th century. However, as Richard Kearney points out, this society of *tuath* (tribes) was antagonistic towards centralized forms of government, thereby enshrining 'an indigenous tradition of political disunity',⁴² at the heart of Irish culture and identity, which problematises both monolithic myths of nation and cultural authenticity.

Lloyd notes how such 'non-modern social formations',⁴³ ultimately resist incorporation into 19th century notions of the modern nation-state; just as a communal oral culture is antagonistic towards the individualistic, literary culture of bourgeois nationalism identified by Anderson.⁴⁴ Just as oral storytelling culture resurfaces in the Modernist writing of Joyce, permitting a radical memory of traditional practices according to Gibbons,⁴⁵ a non-modern, oral culture returns in Hickey's Modernist animated form, which brings us back to the contradictory, in-between nature of Irish cultural identity. The radical nature of traditional storytelling practices – the ability to collapse boundaries and disrupt identities prescribed by dualistic systems of Occidental thought,⁴⁶ are manifested in the ambiguity inherent in the animated form, which makes the play of multiple identities possible.

It is in this polyphony of voices where we might locate a Joycean aesthetics, not unlike the multiple-persona narration of *Ulysses* (1922). Once again, the Modernist form of cinema encroaches on a traditional form

of storytelling, both celebrating and criticising the myth of a modern, American anti-hero. The use of this multiple voice, emerging from a Modernist cinema, suggests Joyce's strategy of problematising romantic myths of cultural identity in the face of a dehistoricised modernity.

Tim Booth: An Indigenous Avant-Garde

Tim Booth's *The Prisoner* is an adaptation of W.B. Yeats' poem 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', where Yeats dreams of a secluded rural idyll, which, in the final lines of the poem, he claims exists in the heart's core despite an urban environment of roads and grey paving stones.⁴⁷

Booth takes the central dialectic between idealised rural living and grim urban existence, and uses it to both satirize Yeats' romantic pastoralism, and also to criticise Ireland's urban modernity, using the transformative nature of the animated form to capture the daydream-like quality of the original text. Booth's main strategy is to juxtapose image and text; the high culture of Ireland's 19th century Literary Revival, represented by Yeats' poem, is brought into a critical relationship with the pop-culture aesthetic of a science-fiction comic book. Another juxtaposition resides in the film's soundtrack, where the recital of Yeats' words is accompanied by contemporary rock music performed by Booth's own rock band Dr. Strangely Strange and guitarist Gary Moore from rock-group Thin Lizzy. Although Moore is not depicted in the film, the iconic figure of Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott is used as a sign of a liberatory Irish modernity.

Connolly points out how literary adaptation emerges as a frequent mode of production adopted by Irish animation practitioners during the 1990s, and this can be connected to an Irish heritage cinema that generates romantic and nostalgic views of the past.⁴⁸ An engagement with Ireland's literary tradition in the animated form might also demonstrate the dominant role played by literature in the construction of Irish identity, as opposed to other forms of representation such as painting, sculpture or architecture. And the connections made by Wells between animated forms and literary forms⁴⁹ can be used to understand animation in an Irish context as being more closely related to a literary tradition as opposed to a visual arts tradition. *The Prisoner* can be viewed as a precursor to the animated literary adaptation of the post-Bluth period, but rather than referencing the past to generate nostalgia, Booth uses the past to interrogate contemporary social and political conditions in Ireland in the latter half of the 20th century.

The 1980s in Ireland was a decade of conservative gloom, as McLoone illustrates with reference to Sweeney; it was a period marked by increased emigration and a heightened urban/rural divide exacerbated by

the shift from an agricultural to an industrial-based economy.⁵⁰ As stated previously, this period produced some of the most critical moments in Irish live-action filmmaking, which finally gave voice to an underrepresented urban underclass, and delivering a damning polemic against the failure of the State's romantic nationalism and its institutionalised Catholicism. It is in the midst of these debates, where we can locate Booth's film and place it alongside the critical social commentaries offered by live-action directors such as Comerford and Black.

Although *The Prisoner* is one of the earliest indigenous animated films to use hand-drawn techniques, Booth was not trained as a 'classical' animator, but was originally an illustrator, and his earliest professional animation experience was in using cut-out techniques on the film *Snow White and the Seven Perverts* (1973). Booth learned his animation techniques during this production by working alongside Marcus Parker-Rhodes, who had worked with Terry Gilliam producing animated inserts for British TV series *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Booth's lifelong interest in the comic book form, and his experience as a comic book artist are key elements in *The Prisoner's* aesthetic and he cites Frank Hampson's work on comic book *Dan Dare* as an early influence (Dan Dare's arch nemesis The Mekon appears briefly in *The Prisoner*). The mixture of high and low cultural forms create an avant-garde cinema that, in a similar way to Yeats' Literary Revival, borrows from populist forms (for Yeats it was peasant tradition and myth, for Booth it is the comic book) to create a critical text. Also Booth's own professional experience as a comic book artist for *Jackie* magazine, and what he calls '64 pagers', violent war comics, obviously informs the images of soldiers and depictions of the female form.

The imagery employed in *The Prisoner* brings a masculine technology into contact with sexualised female forms; most strikingly is the suggestively undulating, rural landscape, that later becomes a sexualised, urban technoscape of female bodies, which serves as an analogy for a natural Mother Ireland turned into a machinic sex-object by capitalist modernity. Arguably, the transfiguration of woman as 'motherland' or as reproductive machine are both emanations from a male-dominated culture, and Booth's film might be read as being both cynical in regarding Yeats' romanticism as well as critical of a modern urban reality.

Writers such as Marina Warner⁵¹ and Klaus Theweleit⁵² suggest that in a regressive patriarchal society, the dangerous flood of female sexuality must be policed, and Booth's film displays a certain degree of anxiety over the domain of women's bodies, an anxiety echoed in wider social debates that gripped Irish society during the 1980s over abortion legislation.⁵³

A key element in both Yeats' poem and Booth's filmic adaptation is an articulation of the difference between a rural utopia and the dystopia of an urban modernity: to illustrate the shortcomings of nationalist romanticism embodied in Yeats' text, Booth juxtaposes the pastoral imagery of the poem with the grim imagery of futurity. For Yeats the process of modernisation, with its encroaching roadways and pavements, is the enemy of a traditional rural Ireland. For Booth this modernising process also comes in the form of a cultural and corporate imperialism; the huts of Yeats' isle are replaced by a city sculpted by hands wearing Mickey Mouse gloves, which points to the artifice of the animated form being employed by Booth – they are the hands of corporate America restructuring Ireland, but also Booth's hands sculpting his dystopic animated world.

Through a series of juxtapositions and the transmutable essence of the animated form itself, which operates in the radically Modernist mode celebrated by Eisenstein and Benjamin,⁵⁴ Booth creates a constant stream of images which are highly charged with meaning, and he explains his own delight at this technique, stating; 'I have always liked juxtaposition and messing with emotional causality[...]'.⁵⁵

The Modernist credentials of cinema, and the radically Modernist potentials of animation, allow Booth to form an effective critique of modern Ireland's shortcomings. This critique becomes particularly lucid when he clearly comments on the resurgence of militant Catholicism during the 1980s in his depiction of Yeats facing a firing squad being led by the Pope. Simultaneously, Booth depicts the soldiers wearing bowler hats - the bowler hat carrying connotations of Britishness, and being worn in Northern Ireland by members of the Protestant Orange Order, thereby offering commentary on the sectarian militarism of the Northern Ireland conflict (Yeats' romantic secular Ireland destroyed by a firing squad of Protestant Orangemen led by the Roman Catholic pontiff).

Booth, in his use of animation in its most radical mode, depicts a brutal, vertiginous modernity that captures the alienation of Joyce, but does not celebrate it. It might be argued that the prisoner of the title is trapped in a Joycean world of allegory, and laments the loss of Yeats' naïve romanticism, whilst recognising the lie at the heart of Yeats' ideology; one possible reality of Yeats' Aryan Celticism is the fascist firing squad that murders Yeats himself.

Conclusion

The aesthetics of pre-Bluth Irish animation were affected by the limited (and in some cases lack of) formal animation training of the artists involved. This lack of training prompted experimentation, producing

processes of fabrication⁵⁶ as seen in the work of James Horgan, and later in the cut-out aesthetics seen in Aidan Hickey's work, and notable as part of the genesis of Tim Booth's films. The use of these methods to produce indigenous films was more suited to a small cottage industry, and were effective in a political and economic climate that limited funding for filmmaking practices, and in which filmmaking practices were at first viewed with suspicion, and later as an industrial process rather than as a form of legitimate artistic expression or method of cultural representation.

Quinn and Rockett have criticised developments in Irish live-action film during the 1990s, noting an increase in technical proficiency, but an unquestioning embrace of commercial Hollywood forms.⁵⁷ Hickey has raised similar concerns over Irish animation during the same period.⁵⁸ Arguably, this movement towards a Hollywood-style cinema can also be seen as the propagation of a First Cinema, which does not engage its audience socially or politically, but interpellates its viewers as passive consumers, distracting them narcissistically or appeasing them cathartically, selling them a 'movie-life'.⁵⁹

The more experimental aspects of Ireland's indigenous animation production, notable in the early experimentation of Horgan's footage, the overcoming of technical limitations in Hickey's work and the use of animation aesthetics as part of a social critique by Booth, can be seen to have given way to more popular and commercial forms animation practice. Although animation in Ireland might be seen as part of a linear movement towards a purely commercial cinema with little social or political consciousness, a greater awareness of its development demonstrates a frequent and vigorous use of the animated form to interrogate notions of contemporary Irish identity and the relationship between history, tradition and a modern Irish hegemony.

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