

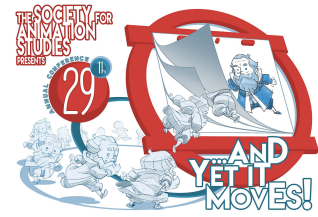
Panel B4

Sala Emiciclo

National Experiences in Animation II

Steve Henderson

Special and Earnest – What makes Ethel & Ernest the archetypical British Animated Feature?



This talk will examine the recent British Animated Feature Film *Ethel & Ernest* (2016) including its origins as a graphic novel, its film lineage, and how social themes in the narrative echo work composed by earlier directors. It will place *Ethel & Ernest* in context as the latest offering in the sparse catalogue of British animated feature films.

A historiographical and critical examination of the pedigree of the film will be explored, as the film's background involves some of UK's animation leading talents, many responsible for not only producing long form television and cinema releases, but also short form and series work. The legacy of Channel Four, a major financier and distributor of UK animation talent is something that resonates within the credits of this film. The feature is based on the semi-autobiographical work by Raymond Briggs, an illustrator who has produced work that has played a huge role in the history of British animation, often linked with Channel Four.

Briggs' work has been long championed by John Coates of TVC (Television Cartoons), a producer who produced *Yellow Submarine* (1968) before *The Snowman* (1982), based on the book by Briggs. The book and the film are different to one another, with the film expanding upon the story, taking the child to meet Santa and in doing so creating the definitive Christmas tale whilst retaining Briggs' original intentions of a childhood tale of loss. After the success of *The Snowman*, Coates would produce *When the Wind Blows* (1986) a film which predated *Ethel and Ernest* but shared many of its themes, given that the main characters were based on Briggs' own parents. *When the Wind Blows* centered around a couple who have to cope with the fallout of an atomic explosion and is a film that dealt with the anxiety of a potential Nuclear War which engrossed the age.

Briggs released *Ethel & Ernest* as a graphic novel in 1998. It's a story that veers away from the allegorical approach his books usually take and is a straight story of a couple and their lives from the day they meet, a personal and tender story, without much glitz and glamour provides a fascinating "fly on the wall" look at the lives of this couple as they traverse the mid 20th century. Since the book's publication in 1998, John Coates began persuading Briggs to allow him to translate the book into an animated film which Briggs refused to do so due to the personal nature of the story.

TVC closed in 1998, but Coates continued to produce works, including the sequel to the *Snowman* – *The Snowman and the Snowdog*, a film which demonstrates the relationship he shared with Briggs as the author entrusted Coates to create a sequel to his work. Coates died in 2012 after getting Briggs to agree with adapting *Ethel and Ernest* but had passed the film onto Camilla Deakin and Ruth Fielding at Lupus Films who he had previously produced *The Snowman and the Snowdog* with.

Ethel & Ernest was released in 2016 and directed by Roger Mainwood. As a translation from a graphic novel to a feature film, the film has to deal with the literal passage of time that is limited within its runtime as the consumer does not have the luxury of passing between chapters or enjoying the film in portions like one may do with a book. This passage of time is a strength in the film as the film becomes about progression, the progression of the couple's relationship (as with the book) but also about social progression and the progression of the UK on the world stage between 1928 and 1972. This presentation of social themes, of class, hierarchy and a vision of community is a theme within all UK produced feature films, often present from the original source material (*Animal Farm* (1954) *Watership Down* (1978)) or in original works created for screen (*Chicken Run* (2001) *Valiant* (2005)).

This presentation will address the historiographic, artistic and social themes mentioned above as well as presenting a critical response to the film and addressing its legacy as a film on both the British and international animation worlds stage. What equates *Ethel & Ernest* and other films of its kind as British, by genre or by trope will be presented.

Biography

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Steve Henderson is a lecturer of animation at both Leeds College of Art and Manchester Metropolitan University. In 2016 he handed in his PhD thesis on Animation and Archiving which had been undertaken at Loughborough University.

Henderson is also the owner and editor of Skwigly.com the UK's largest online animation magazine, where he oversees the site, writes and presents podcasts and video content. In 2015 the site curated This Is Not A Cartoon, a touring programme of international animated short films that invited directors along to discuss their work alongside screenings to audiences which would not have had the opportunity to do so otherwise.

Henderson co-founded the Manchester Animation Festival and is the festivals co-director. Henderson and his team host the UK's largest dedicated animation festival, which for the 2016 edition comprised of 60 events over a three day period including an international short film competition and numerous panel discussions and retrospectives.

In 2016 he curated his first exhibition at the Arts University Bournemouth "Re-animating the Snowman" which examined the history of *The Snowman* and its sequel *The Snowman and the Snowdog*. comprising of items from the Universities collection of material from Lupus Films,

His scholarly interests include Archiving Animation, Children's television and the history of Animation in the UK.