ABSTRACT

Cave: An Animated Short Film

Philip Heinrich

Director: Christopher J. Hansen

The allegory of the cave from Plato's *Republic* is one of the most famous and influential ideas from ancient philosophy. In my thesis, a fictional narrative, I have created a fantasy story that examines the theme of humanity's separation from transcendent reality in the Platonic sense, while ultimately leading to a different set of conclusions than Plato. In addition to Plato, the story draws on ideas from many sources, including the Bible, The Divine Comedy, the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, and contemporary philosophy such as C.S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* and other modern views on the question of objective truth. All of the film's visuals are drawn by my own hand, with artistic influence from the work of Alfons Mucha and Charles Rennie Mackintosh among others. In pulling from many influences, I aim to synthesize something memorable and new.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

_____

Mr. Christopher J. Hansen, Film and Digital Media

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

_____

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: _____

CAVE: AN ANIMATED SHORT FILM

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

Philip Heinrich

Waco, Texas

May 2012

CAVE: AN ANIMATED FILM

A Written Reflection

Because my thesis is a creative project, the central component of my thesis is the film itself. This written component serves as a reflection on the value that creating the film held for me on an artistic and intellectual level, and provides some insight into the process and intent of the film. In this paper, I will examine the philosophical and theological concepts that drive the narrative, the argument of the narrative, and the manner in which I aim to communicate these elements in the film. I will also provide some explanation of the production process and considerations involved in the creation of the film.

Myth and Fairy Stories

In this film, I have endeavored to create a story with a mythic sensibility to it like that of what I feel are the best in myth and fantasy based works. I do not mean to suggest that myth and fairy tales are the same thing. In general, however, the fairy tales that resonate with me most are ones that strive to create, imitate or build on myth; the work of J.R.R. Tolkien is one example of this.

Other works that built on preexisting myth, such as *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* are also relevant to the discussion. They are distinct from fantasy stories like Tolkien's in that they tend to be more directly allegorical in their approach, and based more directly on preexisting myth and theology, though these works synthesize new sets of ideas as well.

In *Tremendous Trifles*, G.K. Chesterton famously wrote on the way in which fairy tales can convey truth:

Fairy tales do not give a child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon. (XVII)

By developing a world of fantastical creatures, characters, and settings, fairy tales create a heightened sense of reality that allows the truth they convey to be clear, universal, and powerful.

In my film, I sought to incorporate inspiration from myth and fantasy stories. Dragons are an elemental, fantastical symbol of the power of the natural, or at times supernatural, in many cultures, and I wanted to play on that convention in this film. The setting of the film calls to mind both traditional depictions of Hell, and Limbo as it is portrayed in Dante's *Inferno*: the height of human achievement, a thing which still falls short.

Philosophy and Theology

The film's title is a reference to Plato's allegory of the cave in *Republic*, as is much of the story's framework. I have deliberately left the film's presentation of its "argument" open-ended, and an attempt on my part to fully explain the metaphor and allegory present in the film would undermine that. However, there is a Christological underpinning to the story's conflict and resolution, which rejects Plato's proposal of philosophy as the solution to the shortcomings of human perception. Light is not brought into the cave by man on his own; revelation and a recognition of God are a foundational part of this. Anthropolis is both literally and figuratively a city without a foundation.

The character of Mr. Norwood recognizes this foundational problem. However, he falls into a situation like the one C.S. Lewis presents in *The Abolition of Man:* "If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see" (Lewis 81). The

2

point is not that seeking scientific understanding is a bad thing; Dennison was a scientist, and Phoebe spends much of the film asking questions about how things work, but there is a consideration of wrongly ordered goods at play in the case of Mr. Norwood.

Production

One of my goals with the film was to incorporate what I have learned in multiple disciplines during my time as an undergraduate. Classes in which I read and studied a number of ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy and literature texts were a crucial part of this preparation. I also prepared more directly for making the film by taking two art courses, one in drawing and one in art history, in order to expand my familiarity with traditional two-dimensional art and improve my technique. I also completed a list of readings on filmmaking, storytelling, and animation.

Research was an ongoing process for the duration of pre-production and production; in particular, I was frequently turning to references for the architecture and design of the environments and costumes in the film. I chose to build the visual style of the film primarily on the Art Nouveau movement, because its almost frivolously ornate, and largely secular tendencies reflect the nature of the society in the story.

This film is the first time I have attempted hand-drawn animation; I have extensive experience with stop motion animation and I have made some live action films in the past, but I felt that the hand-made, visceral nature of traditional animation would be better suited to this story. I drew all of the artwork in the film, using a digital drawing tablet and the software Adobe Photoshop, Corel Painter, and Toon Boom Animate.

I did not want to simply re-tread things I have done before, so on a technical level there was a great deal of new ground for me on this film. The film is mastered in 2K

resolution (a standard used in commercial theaters for digital cinema) and the audio is mixed in 5.1 surround sound. In a 5.1 theater environment, the surround sound element can enhance the feeling of a believable, encompassing environment and this was important to me given the fantastical, world-building nature of the setting.

Unity of the Creative Process

Though I have broken down the process of creating this film for the purpose of writing about it, I think that the entirety of the process forms a whole. I did not come up with all the ideas for the film first, then execute them. The process of making the film changes what the film will be, even as it is happening. As I was working to finish animation in the final weeks and days, I continued to develop new ideas that I integrated into the visuals and sound design. The large number of allusions and metaphors in this film led me to continue generating new ideas as I worked, rather than simply executing something envisioned fully in my mind's eye from the beginning.

This unity of the creative process is part of why I believe the thesis film is best viewed with minimal explanatory context. I view the film as a complete work, and while background information about an art object can be enlightening, I do not want to provide meaning for the work, externally, that could not be discerned from the work itself. If I were to try to fully explain in writing the meaning of the story and the ideas behind it, this would be a disservice to the film. The film contains deliberate ambiguities and questions that a more thorough written explanation of the narrative could stifle.

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chesterton, G.K. *Tremendous Trifles. Project Gutenberg.* Web. 1 May 2004.

Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man.* New York: Harper Collins, 2001.