

PROFESSOR SUZIE HANNA

The Blue from Heaven: a legend of King Arthur of Britain

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Output Reference: NUA-SJH-02

Output Date: 2019

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1. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Output title	The Blue from Heaven: a legend of King Arthur of Britain
Output type	Q - Visual Media
Output date	2019

Suzie Hanna's collaborations with poets and scholars of literature led her to animate Stevie Smith's drawing to accompany her poem 'Childe Rolandine' to help advertise Smith researcher Dr Noreen Masud's conference on the poet. Hanna's research into Smith's life and poetry eventually resulted in an animation and reading of the poet's 'The Blue from Heaven' using Smith's drawings and drawing style.

The film is part of Hanna's ongoing research and practice of poetry animation that makes an innovative contribution to interdisciplinary research into representations of poems. Hanna identified over 70 of Smith's drawings that she considered appropriate for the animation. She adapted Smith's drawing style and animated Smith's drawings, such as the poet's drawings of birds and women. Similarly, she took colour and texture references from this and other poems to develop the animation.

Hanna used unpublished drawings Smith made to accompany the poem held in the Stevie Smith Archive at the University of Tulsa. She secured permission to use and animate Smith's drawings from the poet's Estate. She approached Glenda Jackson to read the poem informed by the actor's research and understanding of Smith's life and work as she had played the poet in the 1978 feature film *Stevie*.

Hanna identified a range of character stereotypes to express the way that divergent male and female aspirations and attitudes to relationships are explored in Smith's poetry and in her drawings. Moreover, Smith's drawings often suggest different readings of the text than the tone or content of the poem itself. The film reflects the rhetorical nature of the structure of Smith's poem.

For Hanna, Smith's drawings and poems are deceptively simple, with simplicity being the essence rather than the opposite of complexity.

The Blue from Heaven premiered at the Athens Animfest in March 2019 and won an award in 2020.



Fig.1 Poster for the animated film

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

Hanna's research into Stevie's Smith's life and work included primary and secondary sources as well as discussions with Smith scholars, including Masud, who was selected as an AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker in 2020. Hanna selected over 70 of Smith's drawings as source material, from *The Collected Poems and Drawings of Stevie Smith* (Faber, 2015) edited by Will May. For example, in the animated film she uses the cat drawing from 'The Galloping Cat', parrot from 'Parrot', and Smith's princess drawing that accompanies 'The Forlorn Sea'. Frances Spalding's *Stevie Smith, A Biography* (Norton, 2002) was a key text for the background of Smith's life. Other influences included the work of David Shrigley, James Thurber and Saul Steinberg.

Through Will May at Faber, Hanna contacted Hamish MacGibbon of the Estate of Stevie Smith, and secured permission to use the drawings in her work. MacGibbon was enthusiastic about the project and the outcome: "Congratulations for your enterprise. I think Stevie would have approved."

Through Masud, Hanna also accessed unpublished drawings related to the poem held in the Stevie Smith archive held in the McFarlin Library at The University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Glenda Jackson played the part of the poet in the stage play and the feature film *Stevie* (1978) and accepted Hanna's invitation to read the poem for the animation, which was recorded in a studio in London. In collaboration with sound designer Dr Phil Archer, Hanna developed a range of original sonic metaphor and audio-spatial contexts to develop the poetic world of the film.



Fig.2 Stevie Smith unpublished drawing of King Arthur (© Tulsa University)



Fig.3 Stevie Smith unpublished drawing (© Tulsa University)

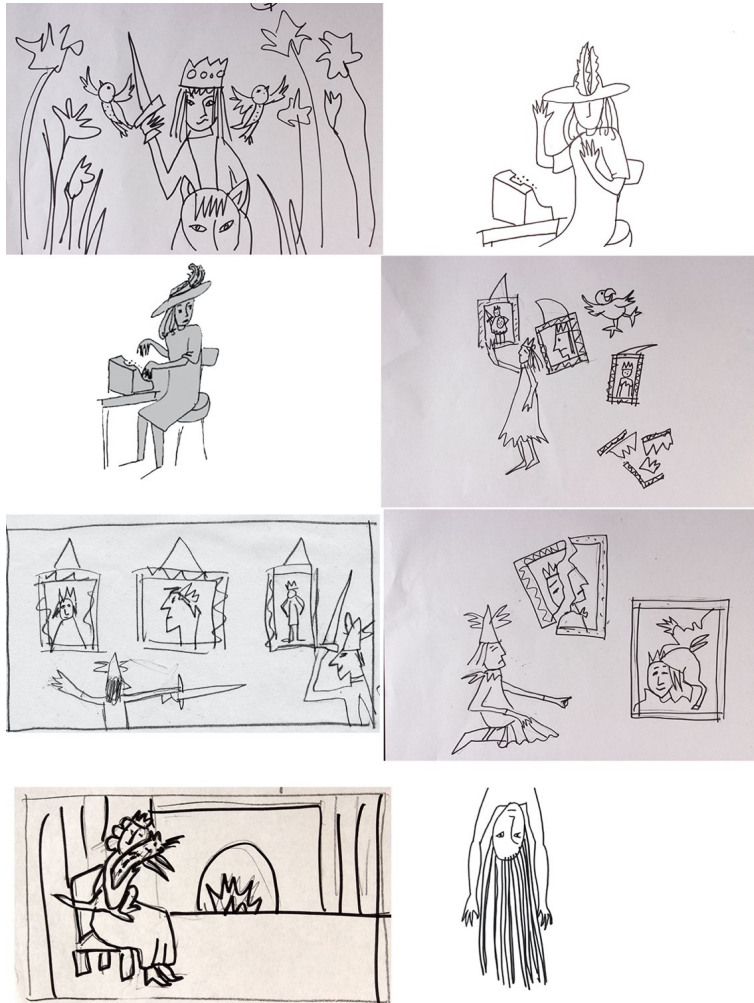


Fig.4 Draft Shot Compositions 1



Fig.5 Draft Shot Compositions 2



Fig.6 Shot Compositions

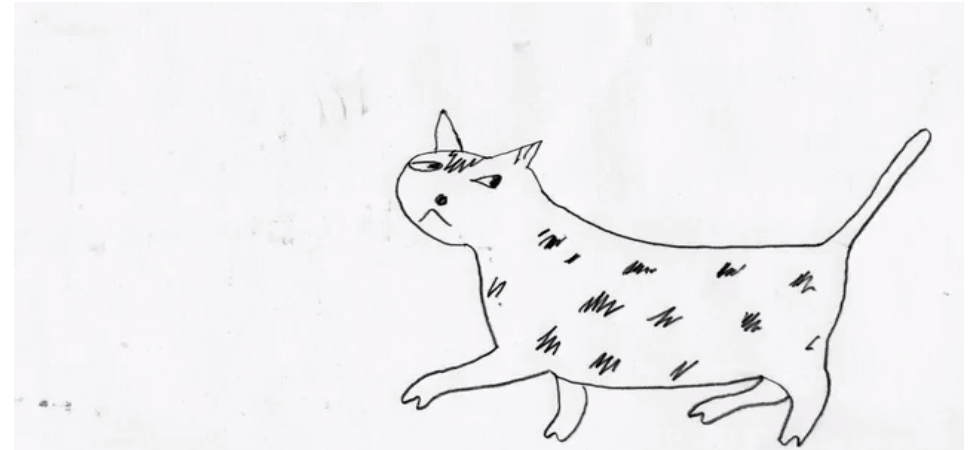


Fig.7 Cat test ([embedded mp4 file](#))

3. RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The Blue from Heaven is a further development of Suzie Hanna's poetry animation, creative responses to the lives and works of poets: *The Girl Who Would Be God* (Silvia Plath) 2007; *Proem- To Brooklyn Bridge* (Hart Crane), 2013; *In Other Motes of Other Myths* (Emily Dickenson) 2017 and collaborations with contemporary poets: *The Lines* (Andrew Motion) 2001, *Landing Under Water I See Roots* (Annie Finch) 2013, *Known Unto God* (Bill Manhire) 2016. This work continues longstanding collaborations with scholars and writers, including Sally Bayley (*The Girl Who Would Be God/Proem/ In Other Motes*), who was adviser on this project. Hannah animated a trailer for Bayley's book *No Boys Play Here* (Harper Collins, 2021).

Hanna has written: 'In creating animated poetry films there is an initial expansion or decompression of the poem as close reading of the text reveals the "pattern of resolved stresses". Transferring those revelations into equivalent non-literal temporal visual and sonic experience requires recompression for which the art of animation is particularly suited. As a dynamic tool for reframing and representing the poem, animation can challenge, educate and inspire specialist and non-specialist audiences.'

In *The Blue from Heaven* she orchestrates Smith's drawings and drawing style to interpret the rueful, wistful, comic and melancholic themes of the poem, integrating numerous examples of Smith's characters and environments into a work that interrogates and celebrates the tropes of Smith's textual and graphic expression, and brings the poet's work to new audiences.

The outcome of Hannah's research and response to Stevie Smith's poem is the animated film *The Blue from Heaven: a legend of King Arthur of Britain* (3'39")

Directed and Animated by Suzie Hanna
Poem by Stevie Smith
Poem read by Glenda Jackson
Sound Design by Dr Phil Archer

The film can be viewed at:
<https://vimeo.com/483091691/8b3617691e>

4. DISSEMINATION

The Blue from Heaven was premiered in Athens at the Animfest in March 2019

Screenings: *The Blue from Heaven* was competitively selected for screening at the following festivals:

2019

Athens Animfest

The Equinox Film Festival in Palmer, Alaska

Newlyn International Film Festival

Kinodrome at Folk East Festival

Strand X Nitehawk Lit on film festival, New York (winner of the best-edited film award)

Celtic Animation Film Festival, FACT Liverpool (finalist, special mention)

Gibraltar Literary Festival

2020

Oxford Literary Festival

Love Story Film Festival London

ReelPoetry TX Festival Houston

Cadence Video Poetry Festival Seattle

Manchester Lift-Off Film festival

High Peak Independent Film Festival (finalist in two categories, short film and animation)

Zebra Poetry Film Festival, Berlin

Reviews

FAD magazine February 2019

<https://fadmagazine.com/2019/02/19/the-blue-from-heaven-2019/>

Awards

2020: Winner of the best-edited film award at the Strand X Nitehawk Lit on Film Festival, New York

Professor Suzie Hanna

Presentations

Suzie Hanna conference presentation of research and initial work in progress on *The Blue From Heaven* at 'We All Have These Thoughts Sometimes- A conference on the work of Stevie Smith', Jesus College Oxford March 2016

Suzie Hanna Summer School workshop for the Re-Lit Bibliotherapy Foundation, Worcester College, Oxford University, *Stevie Smith: Characters Captured in Time* August 2017



Fig.8 Winner's Laurels Strand X Nitehawk Lit on Film Festival 2019



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