

Archaic Torso of Gumby is a series of interlinked stories by Geoffrey D. Morrison and Matthew Tomkinson that explore the uncanny materials of late-capitalist pop culture, from video games to claymation to children's picture-books commissioned by oil and gas companies. Each story reveals unlikely connections between subjects as different as a sentient wallet, a gathering of headless saints, a sixteenth-century courtier who thinks he's a horse, and an ice cream vendor from Denver.

By turns cerebral, goofy, and heartfelt, *Archaic Torso of Gumby* is a delirious rabbit hole for the adventurous reader.

PRAISE FOR ARCHAIC TORSO OF GUMBY

"*Archaic Torso of Gumby* is a strange, experimental, hybrid collection that is by turns powerfully imaginative, wickedly surprising, and totally hilarious."

– David Huebert for *Canadian Literature*

"*Archaic Torso of Gumby* mobilizes a kaleidoscope of influences, histories, and literary styles, not to mention a bifurcated, symbiotic authorship."

– Peter Szuban for *The Temz Review*

"If I were to venture a single-word summary of *Archaic Torso of Gumby*, I might, in the end, land on joyful. There is a palpable glee about the vagaries of literature."

– Max Karpinski for *PRISM International*



25-MINUTE ANIMATED SHORT

Adapted from

Archaic Torso of Gumby

by Matthew Tomkinson and Geoffrey D. Morrison

pp. 26-32

Logline

In the year 1342, a group of headless saints come together for one final dance party before departing to the Hereafter. But when one of these misfit martyrs ventures off on a transformative quest, driven by an insatiable spiritual hunger, he encounters some unlikely friends who teach him how to finally let go of that heavy head he's been carrying.

Plot Summary

Within the depths of a hermit's cave, a group of headless saints gather for a lavish feast and an epic dance-off. Here, in this strange purgatory, the saints show off their best moves, except for St. Ginés, who is reluctant to leave this world behind once and for all, and too self-conscious to really let loose. Anxious and socially awkward, he withdraws from the festivities and embarks on a solitary journey through the labyrinthine tunnels of the cave. But before long he loses his way and, quite literally, his decapitated head, which rolls off into the darkness. In a stroke of serendipity, two mischievous guides come to his aid: Mago, a quick-witted cave salamander, and Bronagh, a half-witted brown bat. Together, they set out to reunite the saint's body with his head, which they eventually discover beside a shimmering green pool. At the water's edge, the three wanderers have a heartfelt conversation about the burdens of life and the finality of death. After contemplating their options, the search party makes their way back to the festivities. In a moment of profound clarity, St. Ginés announces that he has decided upon his final resting place, here in this very cave. Overjoyed, the revellers hoist their friend up and carry him back to the reflection pool. There, he makes one last speech, says his goodbyes, and tosses his head into the water, watching his own torso hug his friends before stepping into the water, and his destiny, at last.

Core Themes

Self-acceptance: despite their sainthood, these congregants still struggle to fit in and embrace their brokenness.

Mortality: though they have already died once, some of the saints are reluctant to move on with the second phase of their transition into the afterlife.

Existentialism: the saints must come to grips with the comic absurdity of their situation, including a sense of eternal hunger and an inability to speak above a harsh whisper.

Companionship: accompanied by two guides, the protagonist finds emotional connection and comic relief in the midst of his ordeals.

AUDIENCE

The Cephalophores would be a hand-drawn animation for a wide audience of 20 to 40-year-olds interested in transportative folkloric fantasy, poetic storytelling, irreverent Christian mythology, and enchanting visuals. Given these themes, we anticipate a significant overlap with the audience of Tomm Moore's award-winning Irish Folklore Trilogy (*The Secret of Kells*, *Song of the Sea*, and *Wolfwalkers*). We see a viable marketing approach by way of participating in international film festivals and online animation awards, along with creating a website to represent the film, sharing behind-the-scenes featurettes about the making of the animation, releasing trailers, participating in podcasts, putting together a comprehensive press kit, and developing a robust social media campaign.

Principal Characters



St. Ginés

Ideal voice casting:

[Javier Bardem](#) or [Antonio Banderas](#)

Visage: a headless saint with flowing robes and a melancholy face

Character Specs: 67 years old, grey hair, short

Description: a conflicted and introspective man who struggles to fit in and let go



Mago

Ideal voice casting:

[Maria Bamford](#) or [Jenny Slate](#)

Visage: a white cave lizard, speckled with silver

Character Specs: a quasi-mystical being, thousands of years old

Description: a wise-cracking fool who shares wisdom through clever, brash comedy



Bronagh

Ideal voice casting:

[Patton Oswalt](#) or [Peter Serafinowicz](#)

Visage: an ancient ancestor of the brown bat

Character Specs: like Mago, is from a different era

Description: the straight man in the double act, the gentle and earnest voice of reason

MONOLOGUES

St. Ginés

“Everyone wonders: was it painful? Go ahead and ask St. Cecilia: her executioner didn’t get it right until the third try. I can tell you that the actual beheading isn’t the most painful part. It’s the afterache: every morning upon waking and every evening before bed. And don’t get me started on the dreams! But I must admit, there have been some unexpected benefits. How great it would have been as a child, this ability to peek around corners! Yet, I would not have traded my breath for it. I miss the air too much. The way it used to circulate inside us, stirring our spirit. The way it would course through both nostrils, twenty and sometimes forty thousand times a day! The way that those breaths came in cold and left warm — just the opposite of a human life.”

Mago

“Alright Bronagh, we need to have a little chat. I love you, I really do, but you can’t keep swooping up on me like that. Picture this: I’m trying to camouflage myself against this rock here, and you come flying at me like some kind of caffeinated squirrel. It’s like you’ve mistaken me for a nut or something, and you’re determined to snatch me up. I know you’ve got that bat’s-eye view of the world, and it must be tempting to see everything as a potential meal. But let’s clarify something: I am not a delicious white moth. I am a salamander, with dreams of regenerating her stubby little arm, and I can’t do that while you’re always watching. This rock is now officially a *swooping-free zone*.”

Bronagh

“There are castle bats and there are cave bats. And let me tell you, I’m no fancy Fledermaus from Heidelberg. You won’t find me hanging from a chandelier. They may have their cozy dungeons and their torch-lit libraries, but they don’t know a thing about the real world. They’re used to eating from the bug buffet. I mean, have you ever seen a castle bat try to navigate a tectonic fissure in total darkness? It’s not pretty, folks. It’s not pretty at all.”

Key Scenes

1. A congress of headless saints gathers at a hermit's cave for a party. The hermit invites them inside and they bring food and drinks which they cannot actually consume.
2. The headless choir warms up their breathy voices, accompanied by the hermit's instruments. The choir's music fills the cave, and all the saints start dancing.
3. Different saints showcase their dancing styles, some better than others. Most of the dances involve innovative choreography involving their decapitated heads rolling, spinning, tossing, juggling.
4. St. Denis catches the attention of St. Valerie and starts dancing more freely. Everyone in the room imitates Denis' dance, even the timid dancers. St. Bertran de Born performs a daring act by tossing his head high in the air and licking a stalactite. St. Felix and St. Regula captivate the audience with wild convulsions.
5. St. Ginés, feeling out of place, wanders away from the festivities and gets lost in the tunnels.
6. The lizard Mago and Bronagh the bat appear. Together, they walk and talk (with St. Ginés unable to communicate) and eventually stumble upon a green reflection pool, beside which lies the saint's head.
7. Back in the chamber, the hermit invites the guests to sit and share stories. St. Quiteria eulogizes her sister Eumelia's heroic escape from Roman officers. Eumelia chose to jump off a cliff rather than be captured, and she was swallowed by a rock.
8. The three wanderers talk about life and death. Moved by this conversation, St. Ginés resolves to be buried at the bottom of the green pool.
9. They return to the party, where St. Ginés announces his plans.
10. The partygoers carry St. Ginés on their headless shoulders, back to the pool. There he makes one final speech and says his goodbyes. He then tosses his head into the water and watches as his own torso goes around hugging his friends. Finally, both halves of himself rejoin at the bottom of the pool and turn to stone.

Comparisons

Setting/location:

A candlelit cave in the mountains.

Tonally similar films:

Wolfwalkers (2020)

Onward (2020)

Disenchantment (TV series, 2018)

Song of the Sea (2014)

The Secret of Kells (2009)

Tale of Tales (1979)

The Lord of the Rings (1978)

The Sword in the Stone (1963)

Tonally similar music

Meredith Monk's [*Book of Days*](#) (1988)

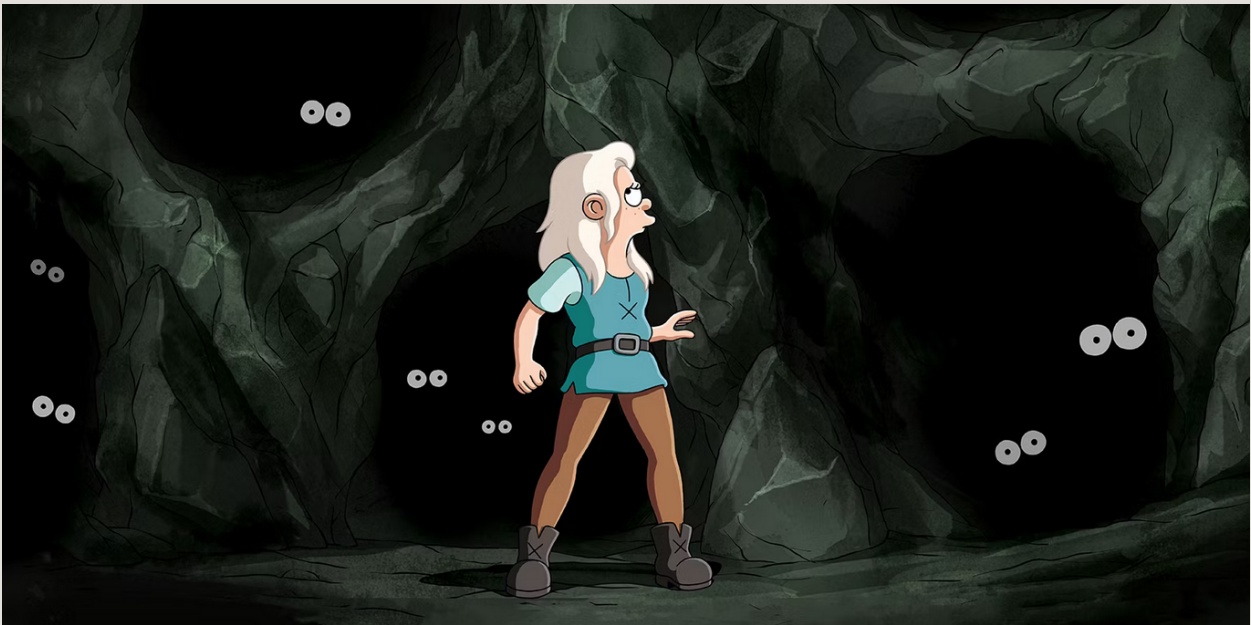
(experimental vocal album)

Tonally similar visuals

Giovanni Bellini's "Saint Francis in the Desert" (1480)



Disenchantment (2018)



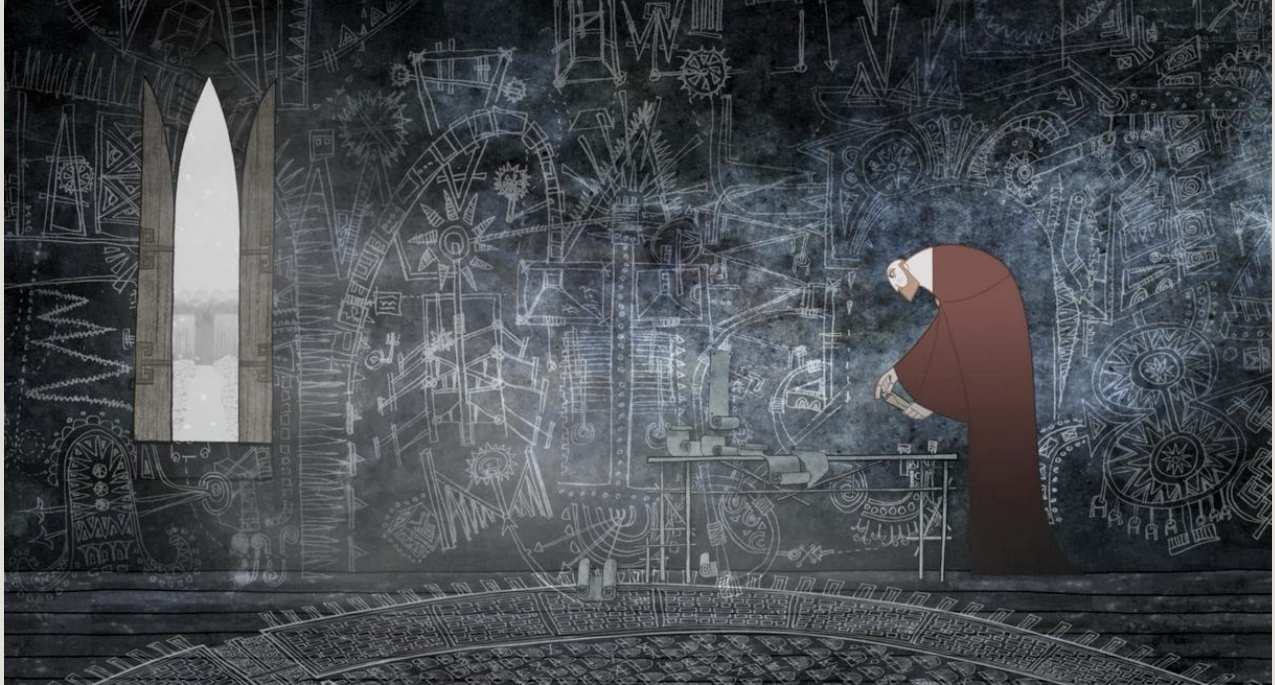
David Teniers, “The Temptation of St. Anthony” (17th c.)



The Lord of the Rings (1978)



The Secret of Kells (2009)



The Sword in the Stone (1963)



Pentiment (video game, 2022)



Labyrinth ("Don't Lose Your Head" 1986)



FINAL PITCH

The cephalophores, a group of loveable eccentrics, would make for the perfect ensemble cast. Their riveting tales remain untapped on screen, presenting us with a treasure trove of story ideas and visual humour to play with.

With the right treatment, this narrative would make for an attention-grabbing animated short, while also being a rich enough world to sustain a limited series, following the exploits of different saints.

Because the characters and their stories are grounded in historical narratives (albeit seen through a contemporary lens), the audience will be able to connect on a real emotional level.

With the help of a strong animation team and cast of voice actors, we hope to create memorable scenes, dialogues, dance moves, and lasting images that reverberate in the audience's imagination.

Bios

Matthew Tomkinson is a writer, composer, and researcher based in Vancouver. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *oems* (Guernica Editions, 2022), *Paroxysms* (Paper View Books, 2022), *For a Long Time* (Frog Hollow Press, 2019), and *Archaic Torso of Gumby* (Gordon Hill Press, 2020), co-authored with Geoffrey D. Morrison. His shorter work has appeared in venues such as *Minor Literature[s]*, *Exacting Clam*, Anthem Press, *The Town Crier*, *Performance Matters*, *Sonic Scope*, and more. Matthew lives on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the q'^wa:há'əh' (Kwantlen), q'ícəy' (Katzie), SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), and scəwaθən məsteyəx (Tsawwassen) Nations.

Geoffrey D. Morrison is the author of *Falling Hour* (Coach House Books, 2023), the poetry chapbook *Blood-Brain Barrier* (Frog Hollow Press, 2019) and co-author, with Matthew Tomkinson, of the experimental short fiction collection *Archaic Torso of Gumby* (Gordon Hill Press, 2020). He was a finalist in both the poetry and fiction categories of the 2020 Malahat Review Open Season Awards and a nominee for the 2020 Journey Prize. He lives on unceded Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territory (Vancouver).

Gordon Hill Press is a publisher of poetry and stylistically innovative fiction, non-fiction, and literary criticism (especially concerning poetry). We strive to publish exemplary writing by a diversity of writers, particularly writers living with invisible disability.

Extraliterary Liaison Kevin Andrew Heslop is an up-and-coming Canadian filmmaker whose practice connects theatre, poetry, film, art criticism, journalism, and the visual arts. In 2021, he published *the correct fury of your why is a mountain* (Gordon Hill Press, 2021); in 2022, he founded Astoria Pictures, an independent film production and distribution company; and in 2023, he released his directorial debut, [mo\(u\)vements](#). (Astoria Pictures, 2023). In addition to active practices in the visual, literary, and performing arts, Kevin works as a producer representing titles from award-winning publishing houses towards their adaptation to the stage and screen.

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