

Research Notes on Anthony Jarvis Moran
by Robert Hax

Anthony Jarvis Moran was completely unknown and has only come to light as a result of the research done by independent Rotterdam-based academic Norbert Hax into the post-career of noted '60s rogue psychiatrist Robert Bremen who had an obscure association with Moran in late life. This story is a grim tale of woe but also of one of the most remarkable and extreme films never made in Ireland. Had it been made, it would undoubtedly change the way Irish experimental cinema was regarded. Indeed, Hax found the story of Moran so fascinating that he became distracted from his research into Bremen to research Moran. These are Hax's notes, roughly pieced together.

He was born in 1947; it is possible that he was adopted and he used to claim that he was the son of a priest who gave him up to a farming couple in the town of Clonhack, Co Limerick. This was a horse breeding area and he grew up working around horses. He was obsessed with American B-movies, especially sci-fi, and was a keen amateur boxer.

He had to leave the country in a hurry after he and his girlfriend at the time tried to organize a failed kidnapping of a thoroughbred horse. Rumour has it that they wanted to hold the horse to ransom on the eve of it being sent to an important race and use the money to leave the country. There was an accident in the barn that they were keeping the horse in and it was severely burned, to the point that it had to be put down. The girlfriend refused to flee with him on the grounds of having ailing parents to look after. Less than a year later, she died in a gruesome farming accident that led to rumours of a retribution killing.

He fled to London, penniless. He worked for a short time as a labourer before finding a more congenial job as a gardener and graveyard attendant, notably at the all but ruined Highgate Cemetery in the late '60s when it was a centre of occult rumour and activity. This allowed him time to think and read, which he did voraciously. He was, however, living in considerable poverty. His increasing engagement with cinema at the time is hard to document, although he wrote a review of a club event featuring Kenneth Anger for an underground magazine at this time and seems to have had some contact with the London Filmmakers Co-Op.

He began working on an epic science-fiction project about life on an earth colonised by aliens. He seems to have described this to some as a comic book project and to some as a film but the scope of it and the special effects that would have been required would have made it too expensive even for Hollywood. It had a dense plot and many esoteric asides, and seems to have not got beyond the level of several densely written notebooks. He also started a flea-pit cinema called the Phoenix that specialized in art and experimental films mixed with repertory fare as a rival and companion venue to The Electric on Portobello Rd but also mixing in horror and B-movie fare like another filmmaker-run cinema, Antony Balch's Jacey in Piccadilly. However, the Phoenix was incompetently run and seemed mainly Moran's way of giving himself a good film education - his love of cinema was unquestionable. How it managed to stay open with its clientele of stoned weirdos and creeps is hard to know but there is a persistent rumour that it was also used for occult rituals, some of which Moran not only participated in but also devised. It is also rumoured that one of these private sessions got out of control, which is why it closed down. Still another rumour is that he was actually shooting scenes for his film - whether a version of the science fiction idea, a variation on it or something else - which is what these bizarre goings on in the cinema really were. He left the country very suddenly and one persistent rumour is that he was filming a ritual scene in his cinema that involved indecent or even sadistic acts involving a horse.

He moved first briefly to Paris and then to New York where he became obsessed with the idea of making his films by any means necessary. Although he seemed to have the highest artistic intentions for it, he was not well received in New York and ended up eking out a desperate existence, often in extreme poverty. He was cameraman on a number of porn reels in the early 80s, some of which he is rumoured to have directed. This was apparently not only out of financial desperation but to educate himself in zero budget filmmaking when it at last became apparent that the large budget he dreamt of would never manifest. In the end, he again had to flee the country after becoming involved in a dubious plot to steal and resell a large amount of heroin to fund his film.

We have a better sense of his ideas for his film at this time thanks to his attempts to get the film financed, which led to him circulating proposals in the hope of getting financing, some of which are quite vividly remembered. Although he seldom, if ever, visited Ireland,

he remained in close contact with many people either living there or frequently visiting, and closely followed the latest Irish news. He was obsessed with the idea of Ireland and was determined to return to make his film there. In fact, in the opinion of more than one person who knew him, he could have managed to make his film in New York if he had chosen to do so. It was his insistence on making it in Ireland that made the project impossible. Yet the details of his vision of Ireland were very personal and some felt that it had become a repository for all his paranoid feelings, a dystopian fantasy country of his imagination. He had a story for his film, a scaled down and more hard-edged version of his earlier science fiction epic. It involved a slime-based alien entity that could exist as one creature or be split into many doing battle with evil priests for the control of the people and, specifically, control of human reproduction. The church also has a sideline in selling fallen women to horse feed manufacturers to be illegally ground up and put in a popular new variety of horse feed. It turns out that this horse food has powerful narcotic properties and becomes the drug of choice for wealthy foreigners who bring a great deal of money to Ireland by visiting to indulge. The aliens start selling it but also become hooked on it. Rather than a straightforward narrative, this film was planned as a highly experimental work that would proceed through several styles including minimalist structuralist deconstructions of the illusion of narrative as a 'drug' in itself and some passages of pure visual abstraction representing the world as pure blissful sensation before the arrival of the human race. There is a rumour that some sequences were shot in New York involving a well-known actor delivering a long monologue to a horse but this footage has not survived or never existed.

When he returned to Ireland it was as a fugitive from the gangsters he had tried to steal from who were intending to kill him. He moved into a caravan and drifted around for several months, always trying to cover his tracks. Under unknown circumstances, he ended up moving into an abandoned farm in a very remote part of Kerry with a sinister and obscure character known as Michael Bremen. Bremen lived there under conditions of extreme self-imposed poverty (although he was said to be rich) with a girlfriend and another woman who might or might not have been his daughter. A gifted and highly qualified psychologist in the '60s, Bremen's researches had veered towards the occult and he dropped out of mainstream therapy. The source of much rumour and speculation, very little is known for sure about him and his ultimate fate

remains completely unknown. The woman he claimed as his daughter was found in the late '80s wandering around the streets of Kenmare in a state of deep shock and died eight months later without ever speaking again. It was rumoured that Moran was working for Bremen, driving around the country for him. Perhaps dealing drugs, perhaps involved in work of a more occult nature or perhaps both. In any case, he was soon rumoured to have bought a video camera.

A man answering his description came to the attention of the Gardai in Dublin as a mysterious figure, only seen at night, who was reportedly approaching heroin addicts and convincing them to play out bizarre scenes for his camera in return for drugs. None of these tapes have ever surfaced, however, and no one has ever reported seeing one. He did show some tapes to visitors and contacts in film abroad which, in their own way, are reportedly as disturbing as the alleged addict videos: endless shots wandering around Bremen's ruined farm senselessly filming the buildings and, very occasionally, catching sight of Bremen or one of the two women. Moran seemed to ascribe great artistic importance to this messy and pointless documentation which caused some who saw it to doubt his sanity. None of these tapes have been found. In the winter of 1986, Moran's small van went over the edge of a steep narrow road overlooking the sea and he died in the accident. Only one of his tapes remains. It was found in his caravan and it is quite different from any descriptions of the other material he was allegedly shooting at the time. Is it enough to convince us that had circumstances been otherwise, he could have made a major contribution to experimental film in Ireland?