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FOLK LIKE US: EMOTIONAL MOVEMENT FROM THE SCREEN AND THE PLATFORM IN BRITISH LIFE MODEL LANTERN SLIDE SETS 1880-1910*

Gente como nosotros: la corriente emocional transmitida en la pantalla a través de las series británicas de placas de linterna mágica denominadas 'Life Models', 1880-1910

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ABSTRACT

The turn of the Nineteenth Century was the golden age of the magic lantern, at least in terms of its popularity across the UK, as in much of Europe and the United States. This article argues that one of the chief reasons for its success in this period was that often it both represented and was presented by individuals similar to those in many of its audiences. Focusing on life model lantern slide series/sets, which were also at their most popular during this period, the article draws on two large datasets in order to consider aspects of screen practice associated with the slides themselves and with their conditions of performance. The article argues that slides and shows were designed to foster recognition and projection in their audiences, allowing them to compare the moral lessons conveyed by many life model sets with their own everyday experiences. The article thus seeks to explain the persuasiveness of many life model slide sets, showing that a form of entertainment which sometimes appears melodramatic or naïve to modern viewers, was in fact skilfully designed to fulfil such important objectives for countless local presenters and their audiences.

Keywords: magic lantern; Life Model; audience history; social welfare; performance history; photography.

RESUMEN

La edad de oro de la linterna mágica, sobre todo en términos de popularidad, se desarrolló durante las primeras décadas del siglo XIX, tanto en el Reino Unido como en gran parte de Europa y Estados Unidos. Este artículo mantiene que una de las principales razones de su éxito en este período fue que a menudo las funciones de linterna mágica se representaban y eran presentadas por individuos similares a los que se encontraban entre el público de sus espectáculos. Centrándose en los conjuntos de series de placas para linterna mágica denominadas 'Life Model', que

* This article draws from a conference paper delivered by Joe Kember and Richard Crangle at the Domitor 2016 conference in Stockholm, and has been re-written by Kember, extending from our original research.

también alcanzaron su máximo esplendor en esta época, el artículo se fundamenta en dos grandes bases de datos con el objetivo de examinar los aspectos prácticos del uso de las placas en la pantalla y sus condiciones de representación. El artículo analiza cómo las placas y los espectáculos fueron diseñados para fomentar el reconocimiento y la proyección en sus audiencias, permitiéndoles comparar las lecciones morales transmitidas por muchos de los conjuntos de placas 'Life Model' con sus propias experiencias cotidianas. También pretende explicar la capacidad de persuasión de muchas de estas colecciones de placas mostrándolas como una forma de entretenimiento, que a veces parece melodramática o ingenua para los espectadores modernos, y que fueron hábilmente diseñadas por incontables lanternistas locales para cumplir importantes fines entre sus audiencias.

Palabras clave: linterna mágica; 'life model'; Historia de las audiencias; bienestar social; Historia de las representaciones; fotografía.

1. INTRODUCTION

As work concerning the optical and magic lantern has proliferated across the past fifteen years, a number of key features have become increasingly apparent:

- Though the lantern persisted as a public entertainment for centuries in various forms, it was during the nineteenth century, and especially in the years from the mid-1870s to, at least, the 1920s, that it became a genuinely mass medium, one likely to have been seen by just about anyone, from all walks of life, and on a fairly regular basis (Crangle, et al., 2005; Vogl-Bienek & Crangle, 2014; Hartrick, 2017; Eifler, 2017).
- Throughout this long period, the lantern remained a mercurial technology, just as likely to be employed for enlightenment purposes of education or scientific instruction as it was for public entertainment, mystery, or public persuasion, though the range of functions it was called upon to play varied dramatically across the decades.
- These varied functions called upon very different responses from their audiences, with many exhibitors seeking to satisfy curiosity or disseminate knowledge, others seeking to entertain or distract, and still others promoting strongly emotional responses, often in order to champion causes, foster religious faith, or sustain charitable giving.

Given the variety and scale of activities uncovered within this research, much of the detailed work concerning the experience of varied forms of magic lantern show remains to be completed. This paper seeks to rethink and contribute to this ongoing work by considering a feature that to some extent was common to many types of show in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the idea that the person(s) on the platform or pulpit and the individuals depicted on the screen were organised in order to foster empathy and a sense of community amongst their audiences. That is, the lantern show, while it might also convey any number of exotic, outlandish, and spectacular representations and most certainly had other functions too, was often successful because it represented and was presented by 'folk like us'.

The scale of the lantern enterprise from the early 1880s goes some way towards explaining this feature. The development of industrialised processes of photographic slide manufacture during the 1870s and 1880s, followed by the rapid growth of slide rental practices from the late 1880s, meant that the costs of slides declined dramatically during this period, and also made it possible for relatively small-time exhibitors, in church and town halls, mission centres and schoolrooms to access a broad range of content. These included increasingly long slide sets which might be used to explain the complex phenomena often dealt with by instructive public lectures, or to tell stories equivalent to the narratives delivered in popular forms from parables to novels. Delivered in familiar surroundings often by local speakers, whether these were local reverends to their congregations, mission leaders to temperance groups, extension lecturers to their students, or citizen scientists to local societies, the popular appeal of local communities talking to and about themselves should not be underestimated,

and has been of increasing interest to historians of science and of film (Adelman, 2009; Finnegan, 2009; Naylor, 2010; Biltereyst, et al., 2012). In addition, the proliferation of photographic expertise, frequently fostered by the photographic societies that sprang up in every town and city during the 1880s and 1890s, meant that many local lanternists also produced their own slides, often dealing with matters of local interest, or perhaps presenting images gathered during foreign tours. Scientific and literary institutes as well as surviving Mechanics' Institutes increasingly called upon their own members, or other local worthies, to deliver such materials, making public exhibition a matter of local, collective concern. The British trade press for the magic lantern frequently denigrated such shows as amateurish, parochial, composed of inferior slides (The Showman, 1900) but this missed a significant point: part of the reason for the lantern's omnipresence in these years was its insertion into countless local and niche communities, where it gave individuals new methods of communicating their own messages or accomplishments to people they most often knew very well.

Emphasising the value of familiarity, this article will nonetheless avoid ideas of 'identification' with platform performers or individuals represented onscreen, whose torturous history in film studies could in any case only simplify the enormously complicated array of relationships conditioned by such diverse lantern shows¹. Instead, we draw upon two datasets which provide copious evidence of the range of ways in which audiences were addressed by individuals they knew or recognised. The first of these is the Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource (<www.slides.uni-trier.de>), an online database containing over 30,000 images of lantern slides and 275,000 slide records, which provides by far the largest sample in the world of such materials for analysis. Its resources include commercial slides, but also large numbers of slides produced by individuals, some of whom have been identified and described on Lucerna by Crangle, who is the chief architect of the site. The second dataset is the information gathered by Kember for the 'Moving and Projected Images in the South-West UK, 1820-1914' project, which includes thousands of newspaper reports of lantern and film exhibitions at different locations in the UK, with an emphasis on the South West of England in the period before 1914. As Kember, John Plunkett, and Jill Sullivan argue in a forthcoming book drawing from this project, local newspapers provide the best source of evidence for local shows of this kind since they, too, were designed primarily to serve local communities and frequently played a key role in promoting and reporting them.

Although both of these datasets confirm that the familiarity of performers and images were broadly of value across various genres of slides and show, the remainder of this article will focus upon a genre of slide sets that made very specific claims upon audience propensities for recognition and empathy. Most strongly associated with charitable, temperance and religious causes, and depending more than most other slide exhibitions on generating affective responses and emotional movement in audiences, Life Model slide sets became extremely popular in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, and remained in popular repertory at least into the 1940s. These slide sets and the written narratives that usually accompanied them were designed to deliver a powerful emotional charge, an effective strategy for fostering heartfelt commitment to a cause and therefore also for generating charitable income. As scholars such as Karen Eifler have shown, such strategies were commonplace during the last decades of the nineteenth century, with social welfare organisations proving especially adept at calling upon the tastes of audiences for participation in storytelling, singing, and even

¹ However, for a useful survey of ideas of identification in film studies, and also a proposal for a model of identification broadly sympathetic to the concerns of this article, see Jonathan Cohen (2001) *Defining Identification: A Theoretical Look at the Identification of Audiences with Media Characters*, *Mass Communication and Society* 4:3, 245-264.

provision of food and drink, in order to win over hearts, minds, and wallets (Eifler, 2010; Eifler, 2014; Vogl-Bioenek, 2016).

Potentially, there is an immense sample of reviews for Life Model lantern shows available in local newspapers. However, Lucerna provides a more workable but representative starting point, containing records for 1,544 Life Model sets, totalling 24,944 slides. These can be loosely categorised in relation to the types of written or oral text they accompanied:

- Story (358 sets, 7,214 slides).
- Service of song (203 sets, 6,029 slides).
- Recitation (273 sets, 3,436 slides).
- Songs and hymns (677 sets, 7,922 slides).
- Short comic sets and miscellaneous (33 sets, 343 slides).

In order to further sharpen our focus, we have discounted those sets illustrating songs or hymns and the short comic sets. Our emphasis is on sets with a fictional narrative or instructional function, so it is the first three of these categories that we are concerned with. This leaves us with 834 sets, 16,679 slides, first published between c. 1880 and 1914-15 by at least 22 British slide manufacturers. Most of these carry some form of social propaganda, particularly messages promoting alcohol temperance, a concern not always possible to gauge from the titles of sets, but which is often clarified by consulting scripts within the Magic Lantern Society's Slide Readings Library. Finally, for this study, we've only considered those sets for which we have digital images, so our final dataset is 4,518 slides from 245 sets – 27% of the total sample slides, 29% of the total sample sets.

The following section will initially employ this sample as a convenient source of images taken separately from their natural habitat, which is the cumulative experience of the show itself. Paying particular attention to the recurring tropes that appear in the ways that Life Model slides use the human figure, we will argue that this was a screen practice that encouraged specific types of empathy and fellow-feeling in audiences. Extending this argument, we will then argue that the overall text has to be imagined as a live performance, to which several other elements contribute as well as the still images – a narrator, hymns which the audience could join in singing, and perhaps most intangibly the presence of the audience themselves, offering a sort of visual comparison between the human figures seen on the screen and those sitting in the next row.

2. STAGING, GESTURE, AND EMOTION IN LIFE MODEL SLIDES

Life Model sets were sequences of photographic slides in which models would 'act out' the events described within the stories, recitations, and hymns that accompanied them, frequently in front of evidently artificial stage flats that depicted key scenes. As well as presenting arresting or pathetic scenes and a familiar iconography frequently centred on issues of deprivation, childhood, death, and redemption, the published scripts also carried highly emotive descriptions of these scenes, permitting readings to evoke psychological depth and complex motivations for characters that static images could not so easily convey. Though we will draw on examples across our sample, we have also identified a single set as a common point of reference for our thinking concerning the slides, scripts, and reviews of shows. *For the Master's Sake* (Bamforth, 1893) (henceforth *FitMS*) was a service of song Life Model sequence which usefully incorporates all of the major strategies we wish to discuss. Our methodology here implies something of a paradox: the set is unusual in deploying all of the interesting tropes in a single story; yet it is also typical in that everything it shows can be found in plenty of other places too. While cross-referencing similar features represented within other slide sets in our sample, we hope

that persistent reference to this single textual source will allow us to convey the emotional reach that thorough engagement with these affective narratives might have had.

FtMS was adapted from the 1885 novel *The Man with the White Hat* by Charles Parsons, a fairly common form of adaptation from novel to slide set in these years, with manufacturers readily exploiting existing literary properties of various kinds in order to reach diverse audiences. The outline narrative is fairly simple: a missionary (Mr Fraser, the ‘man in the white hat’) arrives in a ‘large city’ and rents a room; starting with his landlady Nancy and her granddaughter Lil he begins to spread the Christian gospel to a cast of working-class characters; he finds a room in which to hold meetings and builds a congregation; Lil dies, Nancy dies, several other minor characters die, each following their respective salvation, and finally Mr Fraser dies. In the meantime Mr Fraser has saved the entire community: «His one aim—his only aim», according to the reading, «was to glorify his Divine Master in the salvation of souls» (Tipton, c. 1893, p. 31). Narrative episodes of between one and five minutes are separated by 23 hymns, and the whole is illustrated by 38 slides.

Exemplifying the iconographies of deprivation, childhood, death, and redemption, the set remains unclear concerning the location in which the story takes place. Although the local press in Bristol had speculatively identified the city in the original novel as their own, suggesting that the story closely resembled Charles Parson’s own experiences as a missionary to the poor in that city (‘Our Library Table’, 1886, p. 6) it was important that the slide sequence remained ambiguous on this matter: the story’s universal relevance within cities across Britain (as well as potentially in other parts of Europe, the United States, and elsewhere), partly depended on lifting it from any one immediate regional context of action so that it could be inserted more easily into countless others. The implication of this deliberately open structure was that the set’s primary narrative, concerning the redemption that might be occasioned by missionary zeal, could also be transplanted to any location, and perhaps might also be embodied by any number of local men on local platforms, whose efforts, like those of Mr Fraser, were also dedicated to moral regeneration.

With the narrative framed in this way to enable easy recognition for almost any urban audience, it is also interesting to note that the composition of the images, particularly with reference to the representation of human figures, is similarly open. The term, ‘Life Model’ can be taken in different ways, but for us it especially emphasises the attempt to replicate ‘real life’ using ‘real people’ in demonstrative ways, so it is perhaps surprising to find that many slides tend to shy away from the most direct presentation of key protagonists. Far from the frontal presentation that we might expect, focussed on faces and key actions, protagonists can often be found turning their backs. Even in the first slide of the sequence, Mr Fraser is depicted walking away from the camera, though the image does much to characterise the city street he is walking through as a working-class area (figure 1). This strategy seems to be the opposite of stage blocking practices and the cinematic conventions which arose from these, where characters conventionally face the audience.

Figure 1. Key figures turned from the camera in *FAMS*



Private Collection. Digital image by David Evans. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, item 5000161.

This practice is echoed throughout our broader sample of Life Model slides. In the unattributed set, *Aaron the Woodman* (produced before 1913), the first two slides following the title depict children, key protagonists throughout the 26 slide sequence, turned away from the audience, a trend which persists throughout (figure 2). In this sequence, the children are listening to someone cutting a hedge, and their investigations eventually reveal the titular Aaron at work. In cases such as these, it seems more important to register the figure as a character described in the narrated story than to engage with the ‘real’ human being who is portraying him or her. Even the principal models are treated more or less as visual objects, not unlike items of scenery and furniture.

Figure 2. Key figures turned from the camera in *Aaron the Woodman*



Private Collection. Digital images by Richard Crangle. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, items 5034358, 5034359.

This point is extended on occasions when characters' faces are deliberately hidden, another trend found across our sample. In *F&MS*, this is sometimes accomplished with shawls, bonnets, hats, and handkerchiefs, which are used as markers of identity in place of faces (as was obviously the case for the 'man in the white hat', and less obviously for characters such as Nancy, who is depicted wearing a white bonnet) (figure 3). Possibly, in these cases, faces are hidden to avoid recognition of a model 'recycled' from another scene. It is also possible that over-familiarity with the performers may have been perceived as a problem when audiences were regularly presented with sets by the same producer – in this set the 'man in the white hat' is played by James Bamforth himself, a distinctive figure who appeared in many other sets made by his business.

Figure 3. Characters' faces are deliberately hidden in *F&MS*



Private Collection. Digital images by David Evans. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, items 5000178, 5000180.

But obscured faces played other functions, too, especially to indicate guilt, shame, and suffering, all common emotions requiring expression in temperance slide sets. *Christmas in Paradise* (Bamforth, 1893) tells the familiar story of a loving mother so overcome with drink that she can no longer care for her young son, who dutifully suffers and then dies. The tears he sheds while starving are explained in some detail in the reading (Colwell, c. 1893, p. 12), but carried visually in a simple gesture: he hides his face in his hands; meanwhile, on a mission to spend her remaining three pennies on sustenance for him, his mother proves unable to pass the Eden Arms, thus sealing her son's fate (figure 4). The attitudes expressed by the models in the Eden Arms slide are especially telling: this is a scene primarily connoting misery and shame and faces are directed to the street or the entrance to the pub, or are obscured by headwear.

Once again, here, there is some evidence of the use of individuals as props: the eloquent expression of suffering or guilt one might expect to read from their faces is carried instead by bodily comportment. The backdrops carry much of the burden of meaning in these scenes: the impoverished household and the drunken street scene are both easily identifiable for target audiences, as are the various other interior or external scenes depicted in other slides. Arguably, too, the self-evidently artificial backdrops tend to lift the significance of such shameful scenes out of any one local context, once again implying the universal significance of the emotions so clearly telegraphed by the models' gestures. The same point might be made of the faces obscured in various ways: the tendency of narratives such as these is not to individualise the main characters, but to have them serve as exemplars for the messages conveyed. How much more effective might the slide set become in converting wayward audiences if it was also possible to imagine the crying child in figure 4 as your own son?

Figure 4. Misery and Shame in *Christmas in Paradise*



University of Bristol Theatre Collection. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, items 5002190, 5002192.

In a similar way, one might argue that the extensive use of ‘extras’ in slides such as in figures 1 and 4 is also attempting to convey the everyday significance of the scenes depicted for audiences of these shows. In fact, very often the extras in a scene are presented more prominently than the principals. In addition to the street life depicted in street scenes such as figure 1, this occurs especially in *F&MS* during numerous slides in which Mr Fraser addresses his growing congregation of sinners (figure 5). The cast of the reading (and the novel) are here represented in full, alongside numerous others, a feature that is very important in such propagandist stories: while the narrative relates the experiences of certain named individuals, this is presented against a context of ‘ordinary people’ who may well have corresponded to those in the audience. The central aim was to engage the audience with the possibility that ‘this is like your life’, or perhaps, ‘this could happen in your life’.

Figure 5. ‘Folk like us’ in *F&MS*



Private Collection. Digital image by David Evans. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, item 5000184.

This type of reading of Life Model slides also offers a modified, and perhaps slightly generous, understanding of features such as the melodramatic rendering of gesture, the clichés attached to various types of bodily situation such as illness or death, and the tendency to depict frozen movements within images, each of which quite often stand out as ‘unrealistic’ for modern viewers. The slide in *FtMS* depicting the eventual death throes of Nancy carries all of these features (figure 6). The heightened degree of gesturing seems appropriate for the moment, but also owes quite a lot to stage melodrama, and hence to manuals of physical performance gesture. In semi-amateur productions like *For the Master's Sake*, perhaps gesturing like this was the natural attitude assumed by the model or the photographer rather than a conscious use of standard stage practice – simply what the individuals concerned would be used to seeing at their local repertory theatre – and one might think their audience would understand the same codes. Nonetheless this form of expression seems to run against attempts at realistic portrayal, as does the freezing of the various gestures adopted by different characters in the room.

Figure 6. Melodramatic gesture, cliché, and frozen movement in *FtMS*



Private Collection. Digital image by David Evans. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, item 5000197.

A very different slide from a later Bamforth set, *Riches and Rags* (1907), also depicts frozen movements, very typical of street scenes which depict characters posed as though walking through and beyond the frame (figure 7). A common way of doing this was to cut a character off at the edge of the scene, a situation perhaps familiar from ‘real’ street photos. Equally, however, it also seems apparent that these productions do not have to worry about (for example) having a model hold their arms in the correct angles to suggest walking movement. Of course, as semi-amateur performers, these models don’t necessarily have a sense of how they will be perceived if they hold a particular pose, and are most likely just following instructions; equally, they sometimes seem to become distracted, as in this scene in which the reading reveals that the two girls are simply walking home (Proctor, c. 1907, p. 5), but they glance at something mysterious left of frame.

Figure 7. Frozen movement in a street scene in *Riches and Rags*



Kirklees Museums and Galleries. Digital image by Ludwig Vogl-Bienek. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, item 5000442.

Instead of seeing such features necessarily as errors or weaknesses in attempts at realistic portrayal, we would argue that, like the obscuring of faces, the prominence of extras, and the artificiality of the sets, they might actually promote powerful forms of engagement from audiences. Regardless of how deliberate tendencies such as the use of melodramatic gesture were as aspects of life model screen practice, it is not necessarily the case that the application of an easily identifiable language of gesture, one that seems opposed to individualising modes of representation, stifled empathetic or emotional responses to these images. Rather, we might see such moments of clichéd expression as encouraging a form of empathy that depended on projection rather than detailed character reading. That is, audiences were encouraged to empathise with the situations in which characters found themselves, identifying these situations as being potentially pertinent to their own everyday lives, without necessarily being distracted by nuances of character psychology that might inevitably signal difference and therefore make distant and ‘safe’ such grim narratives of personal decline. Equally, the prominence of unconvincingly staged character movements, rather like the often beautiful but unrealistic sets against which they took place, might also be read in terms of this form of distanced engagement. After all, the ambitions of the death scene in figure 6 and of the street scene in figure 7 were not to convey the characteristics of this or that specific bedroom or street, nor did they need to provide a realistic impression of how individual characters might move in these circumstances. They only needed to provide versions of the world and of the individuals within it that might be recognised by almost anyone attending the lantern show: abstract representations of locations, characters, and movements were preferable, since these did not so easily yield up interpretations that were ‘just’ about somebody else.

3. CONTEXTS FOR PERFORMANCE OF LIFE MODEL SEQUENCES

If this seems, as already confessed, a generous or optimistic reading of features that can also be adequately explained by the repeated use of semi-amateur models, the necessity of using stage flats in order to create slide sequences quickly and efficiently, or the failure of manufacturers such as Bamforth to stage character movement effectively, this is perhaps because this article is more

concerned with the ways in which these images were received than in how they were produced. For example, while it is easy to pinpoint supposed deficiencies in expression within the slides of *FtMS*, these do not seem to have disturbed audiences, at least insofar as it is possible to discern these types of response within newspaper reviews. The sheer number of performances recorded of this and other Life Model sets, as well as their longevity well into the mid-twentieth century, points to the remarkable success of these slides in performance. Shifting attention away from the compositional elements of the slides, analysis of such exhibition histories reveals something about the local contexts of action in which the lantern was embedded, the community imperatives it served, and the experiences audiences took away with them. Thus, we will argue that while our reading of Life Model lantern slide tropes remains speculative, the exhibition patterns associated with these slides and the use made of them by many local communities give us further evidence for a form of emotional engagement founded substantially upon recognition and projection.

It is possible to identify many dozens of performances of *FtMS* within British newspapers, and there are good reasons to think that this only represents a tiny fraction of the total number of performances actually taking place: digital archives are far from complete, including only a selection of publications; most reviews have a casual, incidental tone, implying that such illustrated services of song were actually very commonplace and perhaps unlikely to be reported; more substantial reviews were uniformly positive, perhaps suggesting that those published were only the ones sent in to newspaper offices by the exhibitors themselves. Nonetheless, taken as a whole this fragmented record reveals some interesting trends. Performances of *FtMS* commenced in 1893, the year of the slide set's publication ('Lantern Mission', 1893), and lasted until at least 1934, at which point some of its original contexts of use amongst the slums of the inner cities had become less relevant, and the sequence had entered into different forms of use in environments such as Bible classes and Sunday schools ('Young People's Party', 1934). This longevity was not unusual. In fact, by comparison with other Life Model sets in our sample, this sequence appears to have been no more than moderately successful, with the most popular sets performed more regularly and enduring for longer. For example, the well-known temperance masterpiece, *Buy Your Own Cherries*, was produced as a Life Model sequence by at least three separate slide manufacturers, Bamforth & Co, York & Sons, and G. M. Mason, with York beginning manufacture in 1885, and reports of hundreds of British exhibitions can be located within digitised newspapers, appearing as late as 1947 ('My Notes', 1947). However, the bulk of slide exhibitions seem to have taken place during the heyday of the genre, between approximately 1890 and 1910. A less popular sequence, such as the aforementioned *Christmas in Paradise*, recurred occasionally as a (somewhat grim) Christmas treat within home missions into the mid-1930s ('Central Gospel Mission', 1935; 'Gospel Union (Commercial Street)', 1934) but the vast majority of reports relate to the earlier period, when such missions were more numerous and active and still recorded substantial audiences².

Life Model sequences dealing with religious and temperance themes were embraced by a wide range of home mission organisations during the 1890s and 1900s. In the case of *FtMS*, the slides were used in various formats by Protestant and interdenominational groups such as the Wesleyans, the Reformed Templars and the Christian Endeavour Society, as well as by Christian advocacy and charitable groups including the Band of Hope Union, the Salvation Army and many and various

² For a typical review of an earlier service of song using this set, with an audience of 250, see 'Honley' (1899) *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 28 January, 7. For a relevant account of the decline of congregational missions between 1895 and 1925, see Susan Thorne (1999) *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth Century England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 155-173.

representatives of the temperance movement. These groups represented varied doctrinal and moral positions and, importantly, had different target audiences requiring different models of exhibition. Some performances seem to have been driven most by a desire to prompt charitable giving from audiences that were already sympathetic to the cause. For example, an 1896 lantern service, including the singing of hymns, at the Wesleyan School Room in Bristol, was given primarily in aid of a local charity ('Lantern Service', 1896); on a much grander scale, over 200 «friends, neighbours and visitors from Bedford, Cranfield, Lidlington, and different villages» attended the Methodist Chapel at Marston Mortaine during 1894 in order to see and hear the full service of song, with music provided by a harmonium and a full choir, as well as a sequence of solos, duets and quartets and a reading given by a local man, primarily in order to acquire funds for the repair of the harmonium ('The Man with a White Hat', 1894). In cases such as these, one might suspect that the evangelical content of the show was moderated somewhat, with the slide set serving instead as a type of sacred service, with projected images added to spice things up.

More frequently, however, in the years before 1910, *FtMS* was employed explicitly in order to convert various types of unbelievers to religious and temperance causes. The British Women's Temperance Association used the slides and reading as part of their ongoing programme of entertainments given to invited audiences of women, encouraging them to 'sign the pledge' in school rooms and mission halls across Britain ('BWTA', 1897; 'British Women's Temperance Association', 1902). Mission-based entertainments such as these called upon a wide range of strategies to convince their audiences, sometimes relying on quiet, contemplative modes of engagement, and sometimes introducing forms of participation, such as collective singing. One show given to a «relatively large audience» at the Home Mission Hall in Jedburgh during 1897 was accompanied by a series of hymns, solo-performed songs, prayers and recitations, but the slides themselves were modestly accompanied by a reading from the Association's president ('BWTA', 1897). Such reviews suggest that the attractions of the entertainment were carefully varied as it progressed, with pleasure in singing interspersed with the narrative depicted by the slides, as well as admiration for accomplished singers, and quieter forms of contemplation associated with recitations. The 1893 performance by the local Lantern Mission at Dunstable Town Hall in 1893 was more tranquil, with readings from the scripture preceding a simple recitation of the slide sequence ('Lantern Mission', 1893). Such exhibitions, it should be remembered, were only a single component of the much more extensive operations at work in each of these local arenas. As the review for one 1895 performance by the Watford Lantern Mission suggests, the broader ambitions they supported were intended to have far reaching consequences:

The last of the series of meetings in connection with the Lantern Mission was held at the Clarendon Hall on Sunday evening. There was a large attendance, the body of the hall being well filled, while several found accommodation in the galleries. Judging from the orderly character of the audience, the promoters have every reason to congratulate themselves upon the fact the object of the mission has to a great extent been fulfilled. The meeting opened with singing a hymn, and then Mr Ellis read a portion of scripture and offered prayer. Mr G Oatley occupied the chair, and gave the descriptive readings, the subject being 'For the Master's Sake.' The solos sung by Miss F Eames were very effective. Special appeals were made to those who attended the mission to attach themselves to some place of worship ('Lantern Mission', 1895).

Accounts such as this suggest that the intentions of home missions were not solely to foster devotion and to grow local congregations, but also to create more «orderly» social environments and to lift communities out of perceived chaos (very much like the attentive congregation created from the slums by the man in the white hat). This type of ambition unifies most of the performances of *FtMS* we have identified, and is probably most apparent in the entertainments given by very active social agencies such as the Salvation Army ('Milborne Port', 1900) and the Band of Hope Union ('Local Brevities', 1895). The Christian Endeavour Society had similar ambitions, but were chiefly interested in changing the attitudes and prospects of children, and reportedly spelled out the moral lesson to be drawn from *FtMS* to a young audience in Kirkintilloch in 1896: «the story was illustrative of the good a humble individual could accomplish for his fellow creatures, who kept ever in his view as the motive and incentive of his every action of life» ('Kirkintilloch', 1896). Whether intended for adults or children, however, such exhibition contexts support a reading of the slides that emphasises their ability to influence audiences and, more importantly, to encourage them to apply the moral lessons depicted to their own circumstances.

Across these variant performances of *FtMS*, it is worth noting that the slides, the reading and the accompanying music were employed in very different ways. When the full service was given, with the songs, slides, and connective readings interspersed, it was a substantial enterprise that usually lasted about two hours, and which might be accompanied by different forms of music, from a single organist to a full choir, as in the case of the Edinburgh City Gospel Mission during 1907, which employed 100 children in the songs and recitation ('Song Service in Synod Hall', 1907). Among other variants are services of song followed by a brief presentation of the slides; the slides given as a lecture with the connective readings, but without the hymns (which happened most often in children's shows ['Yieldshields SS Soiree', 1918]); and even a number of services of song given without the slides (not every venue had access to a lantern and lanternist). Fundamental to every staging of the service we have found, though, was the connective reading: carrying the weight of the narrative, this anchored the hymns and/or the images, and the reciter was therefore usually named within reviews, with some providing detail on the quality of the reading. In one case, the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* noted that, though the views presented by the lantern during the service of song were deemed «magnificent», the breakdown of the lantern during the second half meant that the pictures «could scarcely be discerned on the screen», yet the quality of the choir and of the descriptive reading by «Mr Charles Duguid, Saltcoats» more than compensated for this difficulty ('Service of Song', 1899). On this occasion, as on most others, it remained significant that these compelling narratives were delivered by local men (and occasionally, as in the case of female temperance, by women), whose familiarity within communities was more likely to foster emulation and support. Sometimes, the quality of rapt attention inspired by such readings became the subject of newspaper reviews in itself: for example, in the case of a Scottish Coast Mission lantern reading of *Little Tiz* (York & Son, c.1883), another popular temperance story in our sample, the reviewer commented on the «remarkable quietness and close attention both amongst young and old, while Mr. Gillespie, missionary, explained the views, and read portions of the temperance stories» ('Scottish Coast Mission', 1886). The success of the speaker was judged on such occasions by their ability to entrance their audiences, evoking a mode of attention that might support the adoption of temperance principles.

Some further clues to the ideal mode of address for the speaker and for the contributions made by hymns and slides can also be drawn from surviving connective readings. In the case of *Little Tiz*, for example, the reading comprised a 24 page booklet published by Bayley and Ferguson, a regular producer of service of song texts which frequently linked their publications with slide sets (Lawson,

n.d.). Of these pages, approximately half of the space was occupied with scores for the eleven hymns, each described as a chorus, a solo, duet, or anthem, and half was dedicated to the connective readings, each passage lasting two to ten minutes. Across a ninety minute full service of song, one might expect approximately half of the period to be occupied with song, half with the narrative, and the slides, if they were being used, would have served primarily as illustration. This pattern of story, singing, and image meant that the experience of the full service may have been long, but it was also carefully modulated, with a rhythm varied in order to maintain attention. Moreover, where the narrative carried a typically dramatic tale of temperance decline, redemption, and the death of a child, the emotional pitch was matched by songs intended to bring the emotional message home. Thus, at the story's crucial turning point, when George Harrington, the story's drunk, commits to abstinence, the full choir (and perhaps the entire audience of potential pledgees) embark on the stirring anthem, 'I Will Arise'.

In the case of *FzMS*, also published by Bayley and Ferguson, there is a similar pattern of rising actions, once again matched by the emotional tenor of the hymns. For example, following the death of the child, Lil, the man in the white hat stumbles upon an unexpected scene of domestic devotion from her father, Tom, and her grandmother, Nancy, the first of several such redemptive scenes to be played out (figure 8).

Figure 8. Scene of redemption in *FzMS*

«His cries brought down his mother, and the old woman knelt down by his side and renewed her weeping. Soon after the missionary returned; he was astonished on opening the door to find that a prayer-meeting was going on in Nancy's room. In a moment he comprehended it all. Tom heeded not his presence, but continued in earnest prayer. One thought only filled his soul; he was a sinner and needed salvation.

But salvation was near—
yes, all the nearer because of the man who had just come in»
(Tipton, 1893, p. 24)



Private Collection. Digital image by David Evans. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, item 5000188.

The image itself seems expressively similar to others in the set: the action appears frozen; there is a tendency towards melodramatic gesture but staged within everyday, if artificial, scenes; key characters have their faces hidden or obscured. However, drawn word-for-word from descriptive prose in Charles Parsons' original novel, in the context of the slide reading the accompanying narrative has an instructive quality, giving audiences clear guidance on how complex character

interchanges should be read. Besides offering a clear interpretation for the relatively complex staging, here, there is also some guidance on how to read the emotional state of both Tom and the man with the white hat, and also for the look cast between him and one of the now repentant sinners, the child's grandmother. In this scene, as in several others, the audience is asked to share the man with the white hat's observations of the scene: what is revealed to all is an image of religious transformation. Tom's face is hidden, arguably because the point is really being made to audiences in mission halls across the country: «he was a sinner and needed salvation». As in the case of *Little Tiz*, immediately after this transformation scene, and with this image still on the screen, the full choir marked the emotional turn in the reading towards the salvation of the whole neighbourhood with an especially stirring hymn of celebration, 'Glory, Honour, Praise, and Power'.

This is one of a number of beautifully arranged moments in the service, where the bodies of the models on the screen and the bodies and voices of the reciter, choir, and audience, are employed in service of a key emotional hook. Such moments imply the skilful manner in which the compilers of slide readings adapted existing texts like *The Man with the White Hat* to very specific live exhibition contexts. In this case, James Tipton had reduced the page count from 211 to about 15 pages of prose, removing extraneous characters and plot points in order to bring home the central persuasive message; he was also responsible for the judicious selection of hymns, intended to bring emotional resonance to key scenes. If the craftsmanship and creativity of Life Model slide manufacturers such as James Bamforth have largely been overlooked, then so too have the skills of compilers like Tipton, yet it was the complex and layered range of appeals permitted by the interactions of photographic slide composition, reading, and song that led so many home mission organisations to adopt Life Model sets. Of course, during performance, these organisations introduced any number of new adaptations to this composite of visual, written, and musical texts, a form of flexibility that was essential to them, since this enabled them to address their very different audiences, parish to parish, with equal efficacy.

4. TEMPERATE TEMPERANCE

One reason for our ignorance concerning the craftsmanship of Life Model sets and their readings is perhaps related to the propagandistic purposes they often served. Our caricatures of religious and temperance zealotry may remain valid to some extent, but they most certainly tend to obscure the ingenuity of the home missions and the complexity of the texts they employed at so many, such widely varied, locations. This casting of temperance work as, at best, naïve, and at worst, peevish or splenetic, is nothing new. Indeed, one last reading of *FtMS* is that it is working quite hard to imbue the bodies of city missionaries, temperance lecturers, and Christian evangelists with attractive, congenial, community-friendly features, characteristics intended to dispel another prevailing late nineteenth-century stereotype: that of 'intemperate temperance'. Typified by an 1898 image of a temperance lecturer published in *The Western Figaro* (figure 9), a weekly liberal newspaper from Plymouth, this stereotype tended to mark the lecturer's body with an angular, restless, and feverish quality suggesting zealotry rather than zeal, with the firebrand he carried enacting the violence of his message, to «lay a train of gunpowder under all the distilleries and public houses of the country and then set fire to it, and shake the whole earth with the explosion of the monstrous iniquity».

Figure 9. Intemperate Temperance



Western Figaro (1 April 1898), p. 7.

This type of imagery was even picked up in at least one Life Model lantern set, *Adventures of a Temperance Lecturer* (W. Rider and Co, c. 1900), in which the gesticulations of a temperance lecturer prove so aggressive and melodramatic that he upsets an ink-pot, to comic effect (figure 10).

Figure 10. Melodramatic lecturing in *Adventures of a Temperance Lecturer*



Hecht Collection, Screen Archive South East (University of Brighton). Digital images by Ludwig Vogl-Bienek. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, items 5020615, 5020617, 5020621.

In relation to images of this kind and to the public perceptions they might engender, the presentation of the missionary, Mr Fraser, in *FtMS* as a neighbourly, comforting presence, whose body is still, undemonstrative, and mostly inexpressive, presents an alternative vision of mission work, and one certainly more likely to find favour with mission audiences. Moreover, the verbal descriptions of this figure, again drawn directly from the novel, emphasise the «winsomeness» in his features: «Had you met this man in one of his rounds», the reading carefully explains, «you would have been struck with the calm placidity of his face» (Parsons, 1885, p. 12; Tipton, 1893, p. 2).

We have argued in this article that the composition of Life Model lantern slides, in conjunction with readings and other features of live performance, tended to foster recognition and projection in audiences, a quality which, in the case of the home missions, could usefully be employed to persuade

audiences to adopt the moral imperatives presented to them. In addition, the presentation of missionary figures such as the man in the white hat as humble, well-meaning, and thoroughly embedded in a local community carried further implications within the missions. When such tales and images were delivered by urban missionaries, they inevitably provided a flattering parallel for the bodies of these reciters, also present on the platform in front of the audience, and also seeking to provide, in face and voice, models of the good Christian missionary. In other words, this slide set and its reading directly modelled an ideal relationship to be fostered between home missionaries and their communities, and allowed for this model to be transplanted into countless local contexts. In doing so, it not only provided ideals of redemption for the sinners in the mission hall, but also sought to endow the speakers on platform and pulpit, individuals that the audiences usually knew well, with the moral authority to conduct these crusades.

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