

The Magic Lantern

'THE COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE'

Charles H. Bennett, the 'New Magic Lantern' and the 'Eidolographic Process'

Dick Moore



1. 'The Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before' (Carpenter & Westley)

"Let there be light: and there was light."² And there were also shadows – as they appeared on cave walls they became the first projected images. Our shadow is always with us, wherever we go. We laugh at them, we shudder and run from them, we create them, we anthropomorphize them. They are part of our language – for example, in describing a 'shadowy character', in the phrases 'beyond a shadow of doubt' and 'a shadow of one's former self'. One of the most popular American radio shows in history, *The Shadow* (1930-54), had the opening line: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!" There is even the well-known song *Me and My Shadow* (Al Jolson, Billy Rose and Dave Dreyer, 1927).

Artists whose illustrations feature in magic lantern slides, such as G. Cruikshank, J. Boggs Beale and J. Tenniel, have used shadows effectively to enhance their images, giving added dimension and depth, creating a mood, or drawing the viewer to a particular part of the image. Another of these artists is Charles Henry Bennett (1828-67), a prolific Victorian illustrator, caricaturist, satirist and author. He illustrated numerous children's books.^{3,4} His sketches appeared in, among others, the comic magazine *Diogenes* (briefly a rival to the satirical magazine *Punch*) in 1855, *Comic News*, *The Illustrated London News* and he contributed



2. 'A Prowling Cat' (Carpenter & Westley)



3. 'Alderman Turtle' (Carpenter & Westley)

around 200 drawings and cartoons to *Punch* from 1865 until his early death in 1867.^{5,6}

Among Bennett's best-known drawings was his shadow series which first appeared in *The Illustrated Times* in 1853. His book *Shadows* was published in 1856.⁷ This contained 24 coloured lithographic images, without text, depicting people in innocuous activities casting humorous shadows behind them that 'revealed' their inner personality. Two additional images appeared on the cover and frontispiece. Under both these images is a quotation from Shakespeare: "Where's Shadow?"



4. 'A Donkey', from cover image on *Shadows* (Carpenter & Westley)



5. 'The Mushroom', from frontispiece in *Shadows* (Carpenter & Westley)

Here, Sir. Shadow" (*King Henry IV pt II*, Act III Scene 2 – an exchange between Shallow, Shadow and Falstaff).

Between 1858 and 1859 more of Bennett's shadow images, with wood engravings by Joseph Swain (1820-1909), were issued in ten parts by William Kent, matched with poetry and prose by Robert Barnabas Brough.⁸ In 1860 they were published collectively as a book under the title *Shadow and Substance* (referred to as S&S in this article) with a total of 30 shadow images.⁹

Robert Barnabas Brough (1828-60) was a poet, novelist, playwright and journalist who contributed to many periodicals including Charles Dickens's *Household Words*. Like Bennett he was well known for his comedy and satire,

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6. 'A Little Duck' (Carpenter & Westley)



7. 'Our Old Friend Punch' (Carpenter & Westley)



8. 'Greedy Pig' (Carpenter & Westley)

and was a popular member of a bohemian circle of writers and artists. In 1857 Brough was a founding member of the Savage Club, a gentleman's club in London, whose membership were "connected with literature and the fine arts".¹⁰ Bennett was also a member.

For centuries philosophers have mused about shadows. Does our shadow have meaning or reveal something about our personality? Bennett and Brough's book, with its combination of images, prose and poetry, describes a fantastical context for unmasking this mystery. In the

book Bennett claims to have devised a means to divulge the 'real' meaning of people's shadows using his 'New Magic Lantern' combined with an 'Eidolographic Process'. This process he described as: "A novel application of luminous rays to portraiture, which, by exhibiting human beings in an entirely new light, will enable the spectator to judge a sitter's character by the development of his shadow." (S&S, p. 4)

The 'Eidolographic Process' was the overall means for capturing these images. Its root is the Greek word 'eidolon', defined as "an unsubstantial image or phantom." Bennett mentions consulting a Greek lexicon when formulating this idea (S&S, p.6). While Bennett

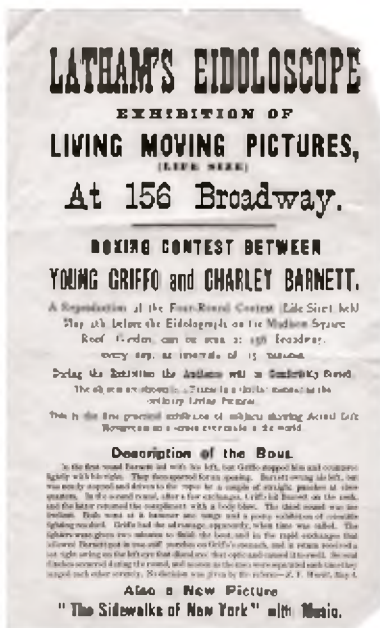
referred to the magical use of an eidolographic process, 35 years later an 'Eidoloscope' did come into being (Fig. 9). The Latham Brothers of New York City, being fascinated by the Kinetoscope, but also aware of its limitations in film length and time, formed the Lambda Company and created a device they named the Eidoloscope. In 1895 it became the first film projector on public display in America when showing a boxing match filmed on the rooftop of Madison Square Garden with a running time of about eight minutes – one reel per round.¹¹

When describing his eidolographic process Bennett states: "If it comes out as promised, it will, in the first place, have the glorious effect of depriving thousands of the means of a livelihood, by shutting up the Photograph, as a drawing room amusement, it will force the Stereoscope itself to give up the Ghost. It will also infallibly prove a death blow to the sciences of Physiognomy, Phrenology and Graphiology." (S&S, p.4)

Bennett also indicates, as one can predict, that not every sitter would be pleased with the outcome. In these cases it would be explained to the sitter that the outcome was a failure as the result of 'technical issues'. As that individual views the outcomes for their associates: "He will be flattered by the reflection that he alone has proved too much for our powers" (S&S, p.4).

It seems that because Bennett's books and publications, including *Shadows and Shadows and Substance*, were popular and well used but not robustly constructed, few original copies survive today. But fortunately many of the shadow images exist as magic lantern slides.

A series of 12 lantern slides was issued by Carpenter & Westley. Two of the slides in my collection have mahogany frames (e.g. Fig. 5) but the rest are made from pine and stained red to resemble mahogany. Each slide measures, in imperial, 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, which in metric equates to a simple 17.5 x 9.5 cm. This raises the question – are these of British origin, or possibly German slides made for the export



9. Flyer for Latham's Eidoloscope, dated May 1895 (courtesy of National Museum of American History – Smithsonian Institution)



10. 'A Sheep'



11. 'Quack'



12. 'A Bear'

market? This set of slides (in both the Martin Gilbert and Dick Moore collections) are stamped 'Carpenter & Westley, 24 Regent St, London'. However in Martin Gilbert's collection one slide (identical to Fig. 8) is stamped 'G.W. Dixie, Opticians to the Queen, 3 New Bond Street, London' (the company traded at that address between 1777 and 1929). Eight of the twelve slide images are from Bennett's publication *Shadows*.

Martin Gilbert has 42 later Bennett slides in standard 3¼ inch square format (most with a 'CHB' monogram visible). Of these 18 match the 30 images published in *Shadows and Substance* (see Figs 13-17) but they are probably from different sets – four slides are black and white and 14 in colour. One appears to be marked 'Fred V.A. Lloyd, Liverpool' – they issued a known set of Bennett slides.⁸

The artwork on the slides is exquisite, reflecting Bennett's artistic talent, and in each case the title refers to the shadow cast by the figure.¹² His comic and satirical message in the caricatures can be quickly appreciated and understood, no doubt to the great pleasure and amusement of any magic lantern show audience. The power and message of each image, however, is greatly enhanced by the prose and poetry provided by Brough's accompanying text. Each character or topic is introduced by their fanciful name, sometimes more easily understood by saying it out loud. Their role and actions in society are presented, exhibiting their 'outer' character. Then, having sat in front of the 'New Magic Lantern' and having their shadow captured by the 'Eidolographic Process', the 'true substance' of the person is revealed and shown to the observers via the shadow. The examples here are highly abridged with paraphrased descriptions and quotations from the lengthy text in *Shadows and Substance* that accompanied each image.

Curzon Whey Esq.¹³
(S&S, pp. 86-92)



13. 'A Spoon'

He resides in Clapham, permanently in the custody of his mother Mrs Whey. Six detailed pages are based on a conversation with his mother, in which she focusses on her goal of Curzon becoming a gentleman. When he strayed, coming home "as late as half past eleven or a quarter to twelve" or "when copies of cheap publications were found in his pockets" or when he "proclaimed himself in love with Jones's sister" Mrs Whey would "step in and break off the connection, which she, of course, did easily." Curzon was observed "starting with horror at the performance of any original act, or at the expression of any unconventional opinion: glancing to his terrible bewigged mother for permission to attempt anything whatsoever, and in whatever light he might be viewed, casting upon the colourless wall of the society in which we found him, the shadow of a spoon. The Eidolograph confirms our impression."

Rapid Major
(S&S, pp. 101-06)



14. 'The Snail' ('Creeping like a Snail')

This is a student at a boarding school whose treatment as a snail was hailed with shouts of approving laughter by all in which "a mooned face, beef witted, good-natured boy, tardily but heartily joined." The text contrasts him with his younger brother Rapid Minor whose eidolographic image showed him as a puppy and, in contrast to Rapid Major, is very active with puppy-like energy levels. Rapid Major is known as "old rapid [...]" He sticks to all the mustiest traditions of boyhood. [...] He is not brave; but if we were called upon to pronounce what he is more frightened of than anything else, we should unhesitatingly fix upon – new clothes. [...] He goes to parties on account of the refreshments [...] The terrors of female society, make it scarcely worth the sacrifice." In summary: "Altogether, he is a slow boy and deplorably behind his age."

Boanerges Mowther Esq.¹⁴
(S&S pp. 181-85)



15. 'The Windbag'

A member of the Society of Demosthenic Dodgers held at the Blue Pig Tavern. "He has from time to time contributed to the discussion, if not the solution, of the most important problems connected with the Universal Destinies. [...] The Main business of Mr Mowther's public life (an expression which is capable of a twofold interpretation) is to talk." After several pages of discourse: "We may yet add that he is acknowledged to possess greater powers of expanding an utterly insignificant subject to an inordinate length of words than any man living. As we do not happen to possess the faculty ourselves, we will bring our notice of Mr Mowther to a close. Mr Mowther's shadow may be left to speak for itself, which is of the wind – windy."

Claude Mayne Tawney Esq.
(S&S, pp. 93-96)



16. 'A Lion'

The discussion here centres on the idea of having an eidolographic calling card bearing one's shadow portrait – in this case revealing a lion that might be quite helpful in gaining acquaintances. "He is not a lion A-1. But there are lions and lions." In fact: "He is as ugly as sin [...]" His prevailing expression of countenance is one of indignant protest – at something or other." The text explains: "He is under a cloud"

at present, and not able to keep a single jackal. He has been mixed up with some carrion transactions [...] and yet there are parties who would jump at Mayne if they knew of his existence, with the fact that at present he is going about vainly seeking who he may devour. Mrs Leo Hunter for instance. [...] Now it's a pity these persons cannot be brought together. Some delicate means of introduction, such as the Eidolographic visiting cards, is wanted for that purpose. If Mayne were provided with one of these, just gracefully showing forth that he is a lion, and would slip one of them into Mrs Hunter's letterbox, with his address pencilled in the corner, he would in all probability receive an invitation by the next post to the lady's first 'Wednesday evening'."

Cats – Miss Jenny
(S&S, pp. 57-66)



17. 'Feline'

This is a compelling ten-page humorous discourse on cats. "We English admire the French and like them" (many reasons why are then mentioned). "But, it will be found impossible, to the end of time, to establish anything like a perfect sympathy between two peoples holding diametrically opposite opinions as those of the French and the English upon the vitally important question – Cats." It goes on to explain: "In France the cat is the conventional type of gracefulness [...] A French lover will call his mistress 'ma chatte'. Let an English lover make the same experiment of calling the idol of his affection a cat. It is probable that he would speedily have ocular and angular demonstration of the fitness of his comparison in a manner more startling than agreeable! [...] With us the cat is merely the type of all that is treacherous, selfish and cruel. [...] There are thousands of reason why Britons, of all people, should dislike cats." Turning to the image: "The cat-woman, Jenny, came over to London, hoping to purr herself into the good graces of the English. [...] The idea of a man liking a woman because she disguises herself as a cat! [...] Miss

Jenny speedily appreciated the English preference for women over cats, and lost no time in appearing in the more desired character." Yet, of course, the shadow reveals her true feline status.

These five selected slides and their condensed overviews give a flavour of Bennett's images and Brough's humorous and satirical prose. All of the other slides in the set have equally entertaining stories as the shadow of the subject is exposed.

Shadows are an important part of the magic lantern world – within scenes, as static silhouette images and as articulated mechanical silhouette slides. Without a shadow of doubt, Bennett with his 'New Magic Lantern' and 'Eidoloscopic Process' and the resulting images has shown that shadows have meaning – whether real, satirical or humorous.

A cautionary note: When you are projecting, do not stand in front of your lantern when the lamp is on – unless you are prepared for your eidoloscopic shadow to reveal your 'inner character'.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The title of Fig. 1 – and this article – is a quotation from Thomas Campbell's *Lochiel's Warning* (1802). A wizard warns Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel of the coming victory of the English over the Scots at Culloden in 1746 (the Jacobite uprising of 1745). If we can interpret the 'shadows' we may be better able to influence what is to come.
2. Book of *Genesis* in the Bible, chapter 1, v. 3
3. Margaret Crawford Maloney (ed.), *English Illustrated Books for Children*, The Bodley Head, London, 1981. See www.nocloo.com/charles-henry-bennett-biography/
4. Books illustrated by Charles H. Bennett include: *Fables of Aesop* (1857), *Old Nurse's Book of Rhymes, Jingles and Ditties* (1858), *The Faithless Parrot* (1858), *Proverbs with Pictures* (1859), *The Nine Lives of a Cat* (1860), *Pilgrim's Progress* (1860), *Little Breeches* (1863), *The Frog Who Would A-Wooing Go* (1864) and *The Sorrowful Ending of Noodledeo* (1865)
5. Simon Cooke, "The Pinch of Poverty": The life and art of Charles Henry Bennett (1828-67)', victorianweb.org/art/illustration/bennett/bio.html
6. Open University Digital Archive, 'Charles H. Bennett', www.open.ac.uk/library/digital-archive/person/per:SLP013
7. Charles H. Bennett, *Shadows*, D. Bogue, London, 1856 (the same publisher, a bookseller, as *The Illustrated Times*)
8. Princeton University, Special Collections Dept. blog www.graphicarts.princeton.edu/2014/11/18/shadow-and-substance
9. Charles H. Bennett and Robert B. Brough, *Shadows and Substance*, W. Kent & Co (late D. Bogue), 86 Fleet Street and [23] Paternoster Row, London, 1860
10. The Savage Club (extant), www.savageclub.com
11. Ethan Gates, Cine-GT 2920, 'The Latham Eidoloscope: A Cautionary Tale in Primacy', New York University
12. The title on the wood mounted slides is handwritten on the slide frame and on the 3¼-inch slides it is part of the image (e.g. see Fig. 2).
13. "Curds and whey", by-products of cheese-making, are best known from the nursery rhyme *Little Miss Muffet*, first published in 1805. 'Spoon' or 'spooney' in 19th-century British slang meant a simpleton or foolish person.
14. Boanerges – defined as a powerful preacher or orator with strongly held opinions



18. 'Beef, John Bull' (Carpenter & Westley)



19. 'A Great Goose' (Carpenter & Westley)



20. 'Queer Fish' (Carpenter & Westley)



21. 'Pump' (Carpenter & Westley)

The author would like to acknowledge the help of **Martin Gilbert** in both contributing ideas and allowing the use of slides from his collection (Figs 10-19) in this article. Martin is working on a TML article about another type of shadow slide – articulated mechanical silhouette slides.