

The NEW MAGIC LANTERN JOURNAL

Volume 11, Number 1



A NEW LOOK ON A NEW TALE OF A TUB

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THE STORY 'THE NEW TALE OF A TUB', also known as 'Tiger and Tub', is one of the magic lantern's best-known yarns. The story has a well-known plot: two men, leaning against a large tub, are having a picnic in a desert-like landscape when a tiger appears. The men run around the tub, chased by the tiger. Eventually the men throw the tub over the tiger. While the tiger tries to escape, the men see the tiger's tail protruding from a hole in the tub. They tie a knot in the tail and the tiger runs off dragging the tub on its tail. When the men return the following year, they see the tiger's cubs, every one of them dragging a little tub behind it.

When talking with others, I raised the topic of these slides a number of times. Due to the style of the drawings, some people wondered whether Wilhelm Busch might not be involved in the making of 'Tiger and Tub'. However, the perennial question was: how does the tub come into the story? The readings of the slide sets have not been able to provide us with an unequivocal answer.

Over the years, I have collected various slide sets and some individual slides. In the meantime, I have also been able to lay my hands on the original story from *The New Tale of a Tub* (1867 edition), a book with a Dutch adaptation of the story, four penny prints depicting stories derived from the Tiger and Tub story, and, finally, a wooden Tiger and Tub puzzle.

THE BOOK

The original story 'The New Tale of a Tub' was written by journalist and author Frederick William Naylor Bayley (1808–53). Bayley wrote several books, the first in 1829, the last in 1852. He became the first editor of the *Illustrated London News*, which first appeared on 14 May 1842.

'*The New Tale of a Tub*' was first published in 1841 by Colnaghi & Puckle, London. Subsequent editions were published in 1847 by W.S. Orr, London; in 1854 by J. Wiley, New York; and in 1867 by R. Routledge & Co, London and New York.

The illustrations were designed by Lieutenant J.S. Cotton and drawn by Aubry. I have been unable to find much information about J.S. Cotton, except that a Captain J.S. Cotton of the 7th L.C. died in Madras in 1843. The identity of Aubry is even less clear: it seemed likely that he was one of two French lithographers who were active in the 19th century, but one of them had disappeared already by 1837 and the other died in 1877, while Bayley had noted earlier in his second introduction that 'he is no more'.

The book opens with a long introduction in verse. Bayley adapted the introduction later. The American edition of 1854 even lacks the introduction; apparently it was too British. The introduction is followed by the story in seven chapters, each of them in verse as well. Every chapter centres around an image, which is placed at the beginning of the chapter or on the adjacent page.

This connection between image and text seems to bring the story within the scope of the prototype definition of a comic, as formulated in *Forging a New Medium, The Comic Strip in the Nineteenth Century*, Dierick and Lefèvre (eds.):

The juxtaposition of fixed (mostly drawn) pictures on support as communicative act.

- juxtaposition: different pictures are placed together.
- fixed: the pictures (or element in the pictures) are not made to move (but they can suggest a movement).



Carpenter & Westley



York



Briggs Co



Long slide (anon.)

- pictures: commonly images in comics are drawn, but they can consist also of paintings, retouched photographs, mixed images, etc. Usually the pictures also contain texts, mainly in the form of balloons or captions. (The plural, 'pictures', excludes also the one panel picture, which we commonly describe as a cartoon.)
- support: although 99% of all comics are printed on paper (albums, magazines, papers), other supports exist: T-shirts, murals, television or computer-screens, etc. But for the time being, the publication of a comic in a periodical or as an album/comic book is still the predominant format.
- communicative act: someone (a receiver) understands the juxtaposition of pictures on a support as a 'message' and not just as a meaningless coincidence.

Admittedly, most people would perhaps not think of a comic when reading 'New Tale of a Tub', especially when it is in the form of a book in which the text is relatively long. However, as opposed to an illustrated book, the story of 'Tale of a Tub' seems unthinkable without the images.

I think that the magic lantern slide sets of the Tiger and Tub story are nowadays far better known than the book. That the book is little known probably accounts for the fact that it was never included in the lists of early 19th-century comics.

THE SLIDE SETS

The 'New Tale of a Tub' sets consist of 6, 7, 8, 10 or 12 slides or two long slides with 6 or 8 images. The 6- and 7-slide sets are hand-painted or hand-coloured, the 8- and 12-slide sets are hand-coloured or transfers. The slides are wood-framed, 8.3 x 8.3 cm or 10 x 8.3 cm or 'long' slide. The longest 'long' slide I have is 35 cm.

The makers and/or dealers of the sets are, as far as I know, Carpenter & Westley; Newton; Baker; Millikin & Lawley; York; W. Butcher & Sons; Primus JLS; Ernst Planck; Theobald; Brodie & Middleton; Alfred Pumphrey; Merkelbach and Briggs Co. A number of sets have no indication at all of either their maker or dealer.

The slide sets can be divided into two groups. The first and oldest group contains images derived from the original story, but with some changes. The readings show a lot of differences. The second group uses parts of the original story but provides a new beginning by dropping the first image of the sleeping tiger and adding an ending with the image that shows the tiger's cubs, each dragging a little tub by its tail. York sold both types of series: a version of 7 slides based upon the original story (with only York indicating Bayley as the original author) and a version of 12 slides in the new version. There must also be a 10-slide set of York, but I have no information about that.

THE ORIGINAL STORY

The introduction

Bayley is quick to prevent any confusion with the satire *The Tale of a Tub* of Jonathan Swift, by expressly referring to that work in the introduction:

The 'New Tale of a Tub' made thrift;
And tho'not 'by the Dean', its sale was Swift!

The story in seven chapters

The story has a few interesting aspects.

The location: a very warm countryside, in this case in Bengal.
Where waters bubble as boiled in a pot,

And the gold of the sun spreads melting hot,
And there's hardly a breath of wind to be got
At any price at all!"

The images in the book show a desolate, desert-like landscape with a few palm trees. Only the Carpenter & Westley magic lantern slides provide in no. 1 a fairly precise rendition of the original image in the book. In the other sets some details were changed in order to convey the impression that there was no copying involved. For instance the two palm trees are changed repeatedly.



A Tiger

This can be no other than the Bengal tiger, so it is easy to identify. *Panthera tigris tigris* is a tiger subspecies, native to the Indian subcontinent; it was classified as endangered by IUCN in 2010 (Wikipedia). Male Bengal tigers have a total length, including the tail, from 270 to 310 cm (110 to 120 inches), while females range from 240 to 265 cm (94 to 104 inches). Not unimportant to know, because the tiger needs to fit in the tub. In the penny prints the animal is not a tiger but a lion and the story is situated in Africa (more logical since tigers do not live in Africa). One of the prints can be seen on page 18 of the *Ten Year Book*.



Two Men

The book does not provide much of a description, but only states:
 Two Bengalese
 Resolved to seize

The balmy chance of that cool-winged weather,
 To revel in Bengal ease together.
 One was tall, the other was stout,
 They were natives both of the glorious East.

The two men in the original story and in images in the slide sets can hardly be regarded as 'native Bengalis'. No lantern slide based upon the original story or an image of the book itself even attempts to picture any of the men as Indians. The men may look like explorers or sailors; they always are clearly Britons.



Theobald's reading suffices to identify the two men as gentlemen from the Presidency of Bengal: What their baptismal appellations were has never become public property, but the names by which they were known in the neighbourhood were Mr Long and Mr Short, presumably so called on account of the great stature of the one, and the diminutiveness of the other.

In two penny prints they are clearly identified as sailors in both story and images.

The Tub

This is the most intriguing part of the story. What explains the presence of the tub in the desert-like environment? According to the book, the two men are having a picnic. And their food and drink? They find that in the tub that they encounter on the way. What a coincidence. Did they not take anything along? Moreover, this is not a little tub, but one that apparently can hold a large Bengal tiger. One of the mysteries of India, no doubt ...

The readings show that the presence of the tub is difficult to explain.

- In Theobald's reading the two men start their trip with a basket full of food and drink. After walking a few miles they seek the shady shelter of a tub, which apparently was just standing there. The Primus JLS set offers no explanation at all: the tub just stands there.
- In York's reading for the set of 7 slides the two men instruct their servant to place a tub containing the provisions in a pleasant nook by the jungle.
- In two of the penny prints, as a vessel is passing near the coast two sailors are sent ashore to take on a barrel of fresh water.

- In York's reading for the set of 12 slides a ship foundered in a gale. The captain of the ship sees a tub floating. He and a member of his crew manage to reach the shore on the tub, though perhaps the hole in the tub would normally reduce its capacity to float.

That hole in the tub has been the object of some thinking. Normally a tub or barrel will have a bung-hole close to the bottom to allow discharging fluids. The lantern slides show that this bung-hole – sometimes now in the middle of the tub – is not closed with a cork or tap. However, it is far less logical for some sets to show two holes, one bung-hole and another hole in the bottom, as in Theobald's set. Two of the penny prints show the bung-hole closed with a cork, while the bottom shows a second hole. This is strange because the two sailors were sent ashore to fetch a barrel of fresh water.

No explanation is provided for how the hungry and angry tiger has managed to get its tail to protrude through the hole so that the men can knot it. Bayley will clearly not let the facts or the laws of probability get in the way of a good story...

As mentioned earlier, some slide makers have even extended the story: the two men go out again the following summer and to their surprise meet the same tiger, still with the tub on its tail, with a number of cubs gambolling about, all with miniature tubs on their tails. All the brewers in the neighbourhood gave up making barrels: when they wanted a barrel, they simply went out and shot a tiger and thus got one free.



Whether this delighted the Victorian audience, I do not know, but it could at least explain why the Bengal tiger is almost extinct.

