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Cynicus
(Martin Anderson)
about 1902

Fig. 1 Martin Anderson – Cynicus

CYNICUS SLIDES

Lester Smith

IN NEWSLETTER 107, I wrote an article about the comic slipping slides of W. Watson and compared their later designs to the artwork and imagery of the artist 'Cynicus'. This was the pseudonym of Martin Anderson, a Scot (1854–1932) born in Leuchars, Fife (fig. 1). He was a strikingly good-looking gentleman, and perhaps a little vain, but as a talented artist he had the ability to sketch quickly with a flair for portraying the 'funny side' of life and using the human archetypes he encountered. He spent his early years sending sketches to a comic magazine called *Quiz*, followed by offerings to local papers, often as many as three a week.

The Victorians loved 'puns' and his drawings were not only amusing but, with a few words added or a quotation from Burns, Longfellow or Shakespeare, the image was enhanced even further. His success grew slowly and he decided he needed to be 'in the centre of things' so in the early 1890s he opened a studio/workshop at 59 Drury Lane, London, selling his paintings, satirical books and cartoons.

Seven years later, by which time he had become well known, he returned to Tayport in Fife with all his gained experience and many folios of previous work. In 1902 he set up the Cynicus



Fig. 2 The Tylar Catalogue



Fig. 3 The Tylar Catalogue

Publishing Company to produce his postcards, realising that this was the obvious outlet for his humour.

His output was prolific and many of his postcards were made available as lantern slides. I believe William Tylar of 41 High

Street, Aston, Birmingham, to be the first to publish the slides, as my Tylar catalogue published in 1903 (figs 2 & 3) gives a list of 146 slides at 1/6 each (7½p), suggestions for a packet of six postcards for 6p (2½ p), and coloured cartoons mounted on card 12 x 9½ins at 1/- (5p) each. It should be noted that a 'pasted-in' page (figs 4 & 5) shows a price increase to 2/- (10p), due to 'entirely new style'. However, the best-painted examples I have in my collection bear the label W.C. Hughes and are the best-painted examples I've seen (figs 6 & 7). Looking through the only complete run of *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, now available on disc¹, the only advertisement I can find for Cynicus is (fig. 8) which was used in the five editions between October 1902 and February 1903.

For a while his postcard and cartoon business did extremely well and was a major employer for the town, but towards the end of the decade the business began to tire and by 1911 he faced financial ruin. His home, known locally as 'Castle Cynicus' at Balmullo, Fife, was built on the proceeds of his postcard business (maybe a case of too much too soon). He lived there with his sister, apparently in near poverty, but he enjoyed being surrounded by people and the ballroom was used as a dance studio for friends to play and people could stay for as long as they wished. It was perhaps a bit like a commune. He lived there until he died, on his 78th birthday in 1932.

Two of his most common sayings were 'Brevity is the soul of wit' and 'The best is now, the best is yet to be'. He was buried in an unmarked grave and his grand but neglected home was demolished some seven years later. A very sad end indeed.

However, his genius lives on amongst us lantern slide collectors. I have about 40 examples of his slides and I think you can see the similarity between his and those of W. Watson. How many of us have Cynicus slides, I wonder – and maybe postcards as well?



Fig. 4 The pasted-in page from the Tylar catalogue



Fig. 5 The other side of the pasted-in page



Fig. 6 A slide with the W.C. Hughes label



Fig. 7 Another slide with the W.C. Hughes label

Vol. 13.—No. 154 JANUARY, 1903. [Entered at Stationers' Hall.] Price 2d. Post Free, 3d.

The Dreadnought Generator

Produces the Brilliant Acetylene Flame Automatically and with perfect safety.

An ideal light for the lantern or for enlarging purposes. Under perfect control. Can be turned on and off like ordinary gas. Can be kept charged ready to light at any time. No escape of gas, hence **no smell.**

Everything complete for Lantern, £2 2s.

The 'CYNICUS' series of HUMOUROUS LANTERN SLIDES, each a sermon without words. Over 100 subjects, beautifully coloured. 18/- per dozen.

Try them on the sheet. 50 slides sent on hire for one night, post free, 4/-, to any part of the British Islands. If 24 are kept, no hire charges are made. Full particulars free.

W. TYLAR, 41, High St., Aston, BIRMINGHAM.

Come where thy love lies dreaming

Fig. 8 The advertisement in *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal*

A book covering his life and pictures was published in 1995, *Fortunes of Cynicus: Victorian Cartoonist and Postcard Designer*, by E. Reid and Flora Davidson (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fortunes-Cynicus-Victorian-Cartoonist-Postcard/dp/095259790X>).

1. From *Magic Lantern to Movies*, *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal* 1889–1903 (DVD).