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LANTERN WORK C. 1900

West Yorkshire, England, summer 1899 (date uncertain). A small group of people have gathered in a park to photograph a short comedy. The scenario they are shooting revolves around a familiar gag: A nursemaid, taking her charge for a walk in the park, places the baby carriage beside a bench, sits down, and starts to read a book. A policeman arrives, woos the nurse, and they stroll away, leaving the baby unattended. A tramp, who has been spying on the situation from a nearby hiding place, darts to the carriage, steals the baby's bottle, and drinks the milk. The nursemaid and the policeman rush back to the bench, and as the nurse runs to the baby, the policeman tussles with the tramp and hauls him off to jail.

Once the actors are in costume, the cameras are placed, and the scene is blocked, the short comedy is photographed in two ways: as a continuous take on motion picture film, and as a series of discrete images on glass plate negatives. Of the 1,158 pictures produced that day, 1,152 are distributed in a 72-foot, single-shot motion picture, and the remaining six in a Life Model lantern series. This moment of perfect synchrony between motion pictures and lantern slides raises the question: Where is the new in the old and the old in the new? Lantern-film production demands to be investigated.

This scene at the park bench really happened, as evidenced by the motion picture and the slide series themselves, which are identical in nearly all respects, from the tramp, to the park, to the nursemaid, pram, bench, policeman, baby, and bottle. Who made them? Who exhibited them? Who saw them? I want to consider these questions. But I also want to explore a different

set of questions, about the history of media change and the relationship between technology, culture, and style--questions important to ask within our own rapidly changing mediascape. To explore these broader questions, I'm going to start with something narrow, something really small, a little scene at a park bench.

The lantern-film production *Bobby's Flirtation* and *The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle* was made by Bamforth and Company, a lead producer of Life Model lantern slides. And yet *Bobby's Flirtation*, the lantern half, signals a certain departure from Bamforth's standard slide production. Up to this point, most of their Life Models—photographic tableaux of models posed in settings to illustrate narratives—had been produced in the studio with props and painted backdrops and depicted sentimental, temperance, and religious subjects. *Bobby's Flirtation*, by contrast, is a comedy made on location and in tandem with *The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle*. But what makes *Bobby's Flirtation* a singularity is the fact that it integrates aspects of newer media into its older form: It repurposes the ha'penny character, *Chokee Bill*; It refashions the film, *A Tramp's Dinner*; and it recycles aspects of the popular vaudeville song sketch**,** *On the Benches in the Park* and the comic, "The Reward of Virtue." One could even argue that it remediates its own motion-picture companion.

Curiously, *Bobby's Flirtation* has been entirely overlooked, or rather not-looked-for. Instead, the historiography has focused on *The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle* as one of a dozen or so films produced by Bamforth, in partnership with Riley Brothers of Bradford, between 1898 and 1901. These "RAB" films are typically described in linear terms, as the natural, obvious, and immediate "next step" for Riley and Bamforth. The former had been distributing their own motion picture projectors since 1896 and their own movie cameras since 1897; the latter had been producing fictional lantern narratives for over fifteen years. Combining Riley's apparatus

and Bamforth's expertise, as traditional histories recount, these "Yorkshire Pioneers" made an experimental move, producing motion pictures that are both significant for their innovative use of framing and editing, and distinct from Bamforth's lantern-slide manufacture.

This narrative, in fact, chimes with the two main tendencies in understandings of the lantern-film relation: that the lantern reached its zenith just before the arrival of motion pictures and that its influence on early film was not felt until after 1900, when multi-shot films were produced with greater regularity. If necessarily so, Bamforth's Life Models would have plateaued around 1888, when fellow Yorkshire Pioneer Louis LePrince filmed *Roundhay Garden Scene*, and *Bobby's Flirtation* would have remained an unflirtability—unimaginable in 1899 and unthinkable one hundred and twenty years later.

Up to now, the lantern-film relation has been viewed as a one-way street, with motion pictures benefiting from and improving on lantern practices. This view has been reinforced, somewhat paradoxically, by the vigorous critical reevaluation of early cinema sparked by the 1978 FIAF Conference. To be sure, the ongoing study of early cinema's multiple "origins" and its reliance on preexisting entertainments has enriched understandings of early film's sophistication, self-awareness, and difference. However, as one of early cinema's so-called origins and a member of its broader media network, the lantern has remained understood, rather narrowly, as a medium that aspired to the representational completeness of motion pictures and was absorbed and superseded by them.

At Brighton, both Charles Musser and Tom Gunning, among others, called attention to early fictional film's inheritance of the magic lantern tradition, albeit with different emphases. Musser traced the lantern's influence on motion picture practice from 1900 to 1903-- the point, when "the limitations of the magic lantern show were felt and exceeded"—and thus a major

transformation within his diachronic framework of screen practice. Gunning, on the other hand, adopted a more synchronic orientation, describing the correspondence between motion pictures, lantern series, and other forms such as comics and vaudeville as showing a "strong symbiotic relation." While he stressed that these interconnections necessitate further research, he suggested that they formed the basis of a non-continuous style of early motion pictures--what he would conceptualize as the cinema of attractions—many aspects of which relate to the narrative style of the lantern.

In this presentation, I wish to reassess the lantern-film relation. Responding to Gunning's call for further research into the symbiosis between early film and the lantern, I will take a close look at *Bobby* and *The Tramp*--a brief, bright blip on Musser's screen of screen history—and explore its historical, cultural and aesthetic specificity. It may or may not clear up unanswered questions concerning early cinema's lantern inheritance. But it will, I hope, raise new ones about the possibilities of the lantern at the turn of the twentieth century.

Let's begin with the trade papers. These seemingly unrelated announcements published in *The Photographic Dealer* and *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal* in October 1899 constitute the publicity lantern-film production received at its debut, and the reference is oblique—very oblique. For among Bamforth's new "life-model slides of a humorous nature" and Riley's new "Chokee Bill series of cinematographic film pictures" was our lantern-film production: an unprecedented joint creation based on the same gag, featuring the same cast, and shot in the same location. But the connection between *Bobby* and *The Tramp* was not mentioned in the trades, advertisements, or catalogues. How are we to understand this omission?

A likely if general explanation is that lantern-film production would not have stood out in the screen world of c. 1900, a world typified by lantern-film hybridity. During the brief

prehistory of lantern-film production in Great Britain, where the lantern industry was arguably most developed, this hybridity characterized nearly every aspect of Lantern Work, from technology, to personnel, to exhibition, to "content." Here we have an ad for Riley's combined slide-cinematograph magic lantern and an article by lanternist and early lantern historian T.C. Hepworth, describing motion pictures as the latest aspect of lantern exhibition. He's pictured here acting in his son, Cecil's film. Around the time this article was published, Cecil was combining his own slides with Robert Pauls' discarded films to create hybrid screen narratives.

For the Bamforths, lantern work involved a wide range of activity, from painting backdrops to giving motion picture exhibitions.

Lantern series and motion pictures shared a number of narratives, like these variations on the black and white gag. Note their Life Model and motion picture updates, both produced in 1897.

We've already looked at some variations on the park bench gag, but here we have a few others, including this unidentified *flirtation* from Eastman that Paolo Cherchi Usai sent to the Domitor list for help with identification a few years ago, which generated a lively thread.

Clockwise from upper left: someone guessed *The Tramp's Surprise*, another identified the man on the bench as Walter Haggar, William Haggar's son—though it looks like he could have also played the woman. Someone thought the main character resembled music hall comedian Harry Ford, and someone wondered about Bamforth… the tramp actually does look a little like the Chokee Bill character but the action doesn't match any of the Bamforth films. And here's my belated guess: *On the Benches in the Park* by Haydon & Urry, as listed in Denis Gifford's British Film Catalogue.

It also happens to be the title of one of several Biograph films with the same scenario as *Bobby/Tramp*. There were also versions by Edison and William Haggar.

As those of you who were in Stockholm in 2016 already know from my presentation, *Anatomy of Lantern Gag*, gag recycling–the imaginative reworking of familiar jokes, the promiscuous borrowings from adjacent media--was also a characteristic of lantern work. The lantern gag I anatomized was a previously unrecognized lantern source for *L'Arroseur arrose*--Bamforth's comic series, *The Mischievous Boy*. And here is its source, Hans Schliessman's wordless comic, Ein Bubenstreich.

In Stockholm I showed how each image of a lantern gag represents a phase of comic action, with the transitions between images representing entrances, exits and other movements. Both the lantern and film versions represent the hose gag as a continuous on-screen event, only their means are inverted: *L'Arroseur arrosé* blocks and stages the four phases of action and joins them in cinematography and *The Mischievous Boy* distributes the four phases of action across four images and joins them in projection. *The Mischievous Boy* thus helps to clarify some misconceptions concerning the lantern-film relation. It shows that continuity of action was well developed in lantern gags, and that the narrative codes of comics had a significant impact on lantern work.

Here is Bamforth's 1898 film, *Weary Willie* and another previously unrecognized source, a wordless comic by E. M Howarth, "The Reward of Enterprise." James Bamforth, who is generally assumed to have directed the RAB films, may have chosen the comic, but the production was probably directed by his son, Frank Bamforth and photographed by Clemence Winterman. Frank's sister, Jane Bamforth, handled costumes, props and continuity and her sister,

Lizzie, who posed in many of Bamforths' Life Model series and who married Winterman in 1899, may have played a role as well.

A close look at the pair reveals that they employed the comic strip as the *shooting plan*. Indeed, the film goes to somewhat unusual lengths to realize *The Reward of Enterprise*'s design. For instance, in order to replicate the tramp's approach in the first panel of the comic, the bench is cheated camera right, so that its left end extends into a perpendicular path.*Weary Willie* conforms to and indeed exemplifies lantern gag logic—the way it handles the phases of comic action--and lantern gag style, with its horizontal and frontal composition.

With that in mind, let us return to *Bobby* and *The Tramp*, our main comic event. While the title slide and published reading are not necessarily noteworthy, the images deserve our special attention. They reveal the startling fact that lantern and motion picture narration could and briefly did evolve in tandem and through a similar process of continuity and change: on the one hand, they are undergirded by the logic of lantern gags; on the other hand, they are marked by a number of formal and stylistic departures that represent something of a threshold for the lantern—a break with established models of slide set production, a response to motion pictures, and an exploration of new spatio-temporal relationships.

Let's take a look at both versions together.

Lantern-film production recasts the lantern-film relation as a dynamic two-way street of reciprocal interchange, with vast implications. It provides a fresh perspective from which to revisit the dialectics of attractions and narrative in early cinema studies. By shedding light on the coexistence of storytelling and display in gag lantern series and films, it suggests that determinations of either/or might be fruitfully reconsidered through a logic of both/and. Further, it reopens the question of early cinema's "intermediality"—its multiple, hybrid identity shaped

by connections to other fin-de-siècle entertainments—by offering a more nuanced and detailed picture of the back-and-forth movement between lantern series and motion pictures. Finally, lantern-film production challenges us to radically rethink old-new media relations, and to replace the specter-like models of supercession and linearity with models of *superposition* and *reciprocity*. From a *longue durée* perspective, it does more than suggest "it could have been otherwise;" lantern-film production upsets the established order to insist that, however fleetingly, it *was* otherwise.

West Yorkshire, England, summer 1899. The young men and women in the Bamforth crew have returned to the park. Last summer, they filmed one of their first motion pictures at this location—their single-shot bench gag, *Weary Willie in the Park/An Overfull Seat*. This summer, they are stepping up production, creating a number of comical motion picture subjects for Riley to sell to customers of their Kineoptoscope projectors, and some new humorous Life Model series for their own catalogue.

Here in the park, the Bamforths photograph three comedies: the motion picture, *The Biter Bit*, a remake of their lantern series, *The Mischievous Boy*; a Life Model series, *Wet Paint*; and *Bobby* and *The Tramp*. For all three, they place their cameras near the same intersecting paths and move them as desired for each setup. They also experiment with a new stylistic approach, which allows them to create a sense of depth and breadth within and without the images--to open up the gags to their worlds.

For *The Tramp and the Baby's Bottle*, they frame the action on a diagonal and stage it in three distinct planes with multiple character entrances and exits at both sides of the frame. For *Bobby's Flirtation*, they employ a different camera setup for each image: a slightly high angle shot centered on the nurse and the baby in the first image, a subtle reframe to

accommodate the Bobby in the second. For the third image, they walk the camera back, turn it 45 degrees to the right, and cheat the edge of the bench and the baby/pram into the right corner of the frame. For the fourth image, they turn the camera slightly to the left and walk it a few feet toward the pram. For the fifth image, they move the bench back to the edge of the grass, and turn the camera 45 degrees to the left.

In lieu of concluding with the nursemaid seated on the bench beside the baby and pram as they do for the motion picture half of the production, the Bamforths come up with a new device: an emblematic shot of Bobby, presented in a distinctly different space/time than that of the scene at the park bench. For this final image, they photograph Bobby standing in front of a brick wall, proudly displaying his new sergeant's stripe, presumably awarded for his derring-do. Ending on the portrait of Bobby has the same effect as will the emblematic shots that will begin appearing in motion pictures around 1903. It provides a kind of narrative closure, albeit tinged with irony; it was Bobby, after all, who led the nursemaid away from her charge, creating the tramp's opportunity. The final image of Bobby, then, turns the gag into a little story that increases the narrativity of the series while also lessening its comic punch.

The next year, the Bamforths will make several motion pictures—mostly comic regional subjects, depicting real-life mischievous boys at play—and a half dozen humorous Life Model series. And in 1901, they will "pick-up" a couple of Life Model companions for their motion picture comedies, such as *The Tramp and the Nurse*, which corresponds with *The Nursemaid's Surprise* (1898).

After the 1901–1902 Lantern Season, Bamforth and Co. will jettison their production of humorous Life Model series and motion pictures and will focus on song slides and postcard publishing. Among the first negatives that will be repurposed for Bamforth's new "Life Model

Series" picture postcards are those from *Bobby's Flirtation, Wet Paint,* and *Gossips and Eavesdroppers*.

The films and slides will continue to circulate for a few more years. The motion pictures will be offered in the 1903 Hepwix Catalogue, and the Life Models will remain in Riley's stock until 1914. However, the 1899-1900 Lantern Season will be the first and last season of true lantern-film production—motion pictures and Life Model series showing the same comic events with the same characters in the same locations.

Yet while these bold experiments will come to an end, they will leave us with a legacy: the legacy of a new paradigm for the exploration of old-new media relations based on reciprocal influence and mutual transformation. Lantern-film production demands to be recognized.