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Soldiers of the Cross: Time, narrative and affect

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The Salvation Army lecture *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) is famous in Australia for incorporating some of the earliest fiction film shot in Australia into an integrated ‘feature-length’ production. However, it was predominantly a life-model lantern-slide lecture; and a close analysis of the slides in sequence, correlated with contemporaneous reports, indicates that it made significant innovations on nineteenth-century modes of narrative, and deployed different modalities of time and realism into a highly affective whole. *Soldiers of the Cross* was therefore an even more important event in Australia’s media history than has been perceived hitherto.

Keywords: magic lantern slide shows; pre-cinema; early cinema; colonial visual culture; evangelism

Introduction

On 13 September 1900, a reported 2000 people attended Melbourne Town Hall for the premiere of the Salvation Army’s evangelical lecture *Soldiers of the Cross*. The two-hour production was enormous, consisting of some 200 hand-coloured lantern-slides and 15 one-minute cinematographic films, most of which were produced in Melbourne using elaborately costumed members of the Salvation Army to re-enact the martyrdom of Christians in ancient Rome against vividly painted canvas backdrops.

Australian historians have long recognized such an important event. Some have even extravagantly claimed that it was ‘the world’s first motion picture play, drama or story’ (Cato 1955, 118). With the resurgence of the Australian movie industry in the 1970s and a burgeoning of interest in the history of Australian cinema, the event began to be widely touted in the press as Australia’s, and even the world’s, first feature film premiere. While in 1980 the authoritative encyclopaedia, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, acknowledged but refuted those claims, *Soldiers of the Cross* was nonetheless the very first entry in its list of 488 subsequent Australian feature films up until 1977 (Pike and Cooper 1980, 5). It wasn’t until the early 1990s that the complex multimedia composition of the production was comprehensively explored (Long and Sowry 1994a, 1994b; Shirley 1994, 6). But, because the Australian-produced films and the lecture’s script had not survived, the production was allowed to remain a largely misunderstood legend and a convenient originary myth for Australian cinema.

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However, the lantern-slides, which comprised the bulk of the lecture, *have* survived (in the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, Canberra); combined with published contemporary accounts of the experience of the lecture during its various iterations, and the scripts from similar productions (held in the collection of the Salvation Army Heritage Centre in Melbourne and the National Film and Sound Archive), they offer the opportunity to identify and analyse the affective power of the lecture, as well as the significant innovations it made on established nineteenth-century modes for telling stories and immersing audiences in spectacle.

Recent international scholarship also invites us to put *Soldiers of the Cross* in a wider frame than just the subsequent history of the Australian movie industry. Discussions of the importance of the ‘cinema of attractions’ to the experience and reception of film from 1896 to c. 1906 have established that film technologies weren’t just narrative devices, but were part of larger systems of spectacle, experience and affect for sophisticated audiences (Gunning 1986; Musser 1994). The methodological approaches of media archaeology also encourage us to reconsider the production of *Soldiers of the Cross*, which occurred at a crucial juncture in the development of mass media entertainment between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, outside of the narrow teleology of cinema but in relation to nineteenth-century technologies of the theatre and the magic lantern, as well as later new media environments and experiences (Musser 1990; Ligensa and Kreimeier 2009; Huhtamo and Parikka 2011; Parikka 2012).

However, the evidence remaining from the lecture needs to be analysed with some circumspection. Like all lantern presentations, the production changed from night to night depending on circumstance, and evolved and mutated as new elements were added and others retired. This was particularly the case with the *Soldiers of the Cross* slides, which left Australia in 1902 and were used as part of a private evangelical crusade until the 1920s, not returning to Australia till the mid-1950s. The numbers painted on the edge of the glass slides, for instance, are invaluable for correlating the sequences with the contemporary reports; but that numbering system was not completed until at least the mid-1910s, when a group of additional slides was added to the collection. Nonetheless, although it is impossible to know precisely what audiences saw, when, and in what order, we can deduce enough to make some robust conclusions about what they would have experienced during these extraordinary events.

The Limelight Brigade

Soldiers of the Cross was made in the middle of an extraordinary period of Australian media, from 1891 to 1909, when the Salvation Army in Melbourne used advanced technologies to convert souls to Christ and to recruit new members. During this period the Army saw themselves as competing with all of the other fantastic, thrilling, colourful attractions of nineteenth-century Melbourne: not just magic lantern shows, but panoramas, cycloramas, dioramas, pantomimes, illuminated transparencies, and kinoscope parlours (Long 1994a, 1994b; Callaway 2000; Colligan 2002; Hartrick 2003).

The Army even saw themselves as competing with the moving cavalcade of the streets themselves. For instance, in 1894 Captain (later Major) Joseph Perry, head

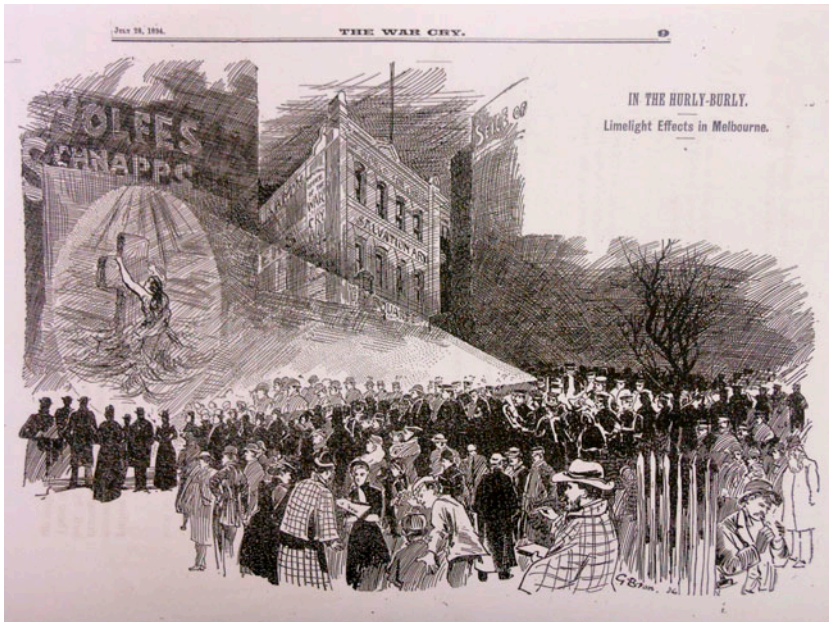


Figure 1. 'In the Hurly-Burly: Limelight Effects in Melbourne.' *Melbourne War Cry*, 28 July 1894, 9.

of the Army's special Limelight Brigade, used a magic lantern to stage an outdoor meeting in a vacant lot on a cold and wet night in the middle of winter to divert the aimlessly drifting people of Melbourne towards Christ. The illustration of this somewhat dismal event in the Melbourne Salvation Army's magazine *Melbourne War Cry*, captioned 'In the Hurly-Burly: Limelight Effects in Melbourne' (see Figure 1), dramatized how the lantern not only obliterated with a blast of light the Schnapps ad on the side of the pub across which they had stretched their projection sheet, but also literally shouldered aside the *Siege of Paris* attraction offered by Melbourne's Cyclorama.

Colonial Australia had a thriving lantern slide culture, with firms such as Gunns distributing both projection apparatus and slides imported from the UK (Hartrick 2003). The Army made use of all the different types of slides available, including dissolving mechanical slides and chromatropes, which had been shown in Australia since the late 1840s; painted slides; life-model slides (hand-coloured photographed slides of models enacting a sequence of tableaux in front of painted backdrops to accompany the verses of a song, poem or short narrative), which had been popular for several years; 'social' slides (photographs of slum life and charitable works, which were becoming popular); song slides, which projected the words of hymns for audience participation; and, finally, hand-coloured copies of famous paintings and engravings, such as William Holman Hunt's *Light of the World* (1853–57) or Gustave Doré's 1866 Bible engravings. Illustrations of Army magic lantern performances from 1894 indicate that they owned, for instance, two different painted sets of the popular recitation *Jane Conquest*, based on the 1874 poem by James Milne, and produced as lantern-slide sets by several different companies in

the late 1880s and early 1890s (Lucerna – The Magic Lantern Web Resource; see www.slides.uni-trier.de). They also showed life-model sets of the sentimental favourites *Neddie's Care*, *The Match Girl* and *Billy's Rose* (*Melbourne War Cry*, 16 June 1894, 9; *Full Salvation*, 1 September 1894, 294; Hartrick 2003). Both types of slide told their stories in an iterative way, like visual verses. The painted slides were able to move their narratives through a series of diverse scenes, though they were nonetheless locked into the repetitive verse structure of the accompanying poem read by the lecturer. The life-model sets were photographic, so they repeated exactly the same background scene with only slight variation to the foreground figures, like the repeated tune in a strophic verse structure. Many of these slides also feature additional special effects – usually angels, either projected over another slide by a skilled lanternist, or superimposed onto a slide by a skilled slidemaker. The production, distribution and exhibition of lantern slides in this period was characterized by rampant copying and appropriation. In Australia, itinerant and transient lanternists jostled with and undercut each other in a bid for market share in a competitive, volatile and far from lucrative commercial environment – an environment that was therefore not conducive to formal innovation (Hartrick 2003; Crangle, Heard and Dooren 2005).

By 1894, the Limelight Brigade had set up their own studio and laboratory and had begun to produce their own life-model slides, conscripting members of the Army as models; as well as social slides, reporting on the Army's good works in Australia. In 1896, Herbert Booth, youngest son of the Army's founder, took over as Commander of the Australasian Territory. He placed the Limelight Brigade at the centre of the Army's proselytizing, and by 1897 it had incorporated both kinematographs and gramophones, along with magic lanterns, into a 'triple alliance' of evangelism (*The Victory*, August 1898, 300; *Melbourne War Cry*, 21 August 1897, 4). From that date, Perry, Booth, and Booth's wife Cornelia worked closely together and embarked on an extraordinary period of formal innovation (Cox 2010). Cornelia Booth and Perry produced a major slide and kinematograph lecture in the 'social' genre called *Social Salvation* in 1899; then Herbert Booth and Perry embarked on *Soldiers of the Cross*, a slide and kinematograph lecture in the 'life-model' genre. Even after the departure of Herbert Booth, who quit the Army in 1902 and took *Soldiers of the Cross* with him to the USA, the Army continued to make slide and kinematograph lectures for a further seven years, as well as becoming an independent and active film production company, before being precipitously closed down by the Army's new Commandant in 1909 (Long 1994b).

The production

For the premiere of *Soldiers of the Cross*, Perry and the Booths projected about 200 glass lantern slides from a dissolving biunial projector set up beside a kinematographic film projector that projected approximately 15 60-second strips of kinematographic film. The 1900 version of *Soldiers of the Cross* had no dedicated score (although a later, 1909, version did); instead, a Salvation Army orchestra and choir accompanied the projections with Mozart masses and appropriate hymns. The whole production was integrated by Herbert Booth's sermon, which was structured primarily as a sequence of separate stories of different Christian martyrs, usually climaxing with a 60-second kinematographic film.

About 30 of the 200 slides were either commercially produced painted slides, or slides bricolaged by the Limelight Brigade's copy camera and team of colourists from various sources: either copies of popular paintings and Doré's Bible engravings, or copies of one half of stereoview photographs that had been previously sold in sets of 12 as travel views for the home stereoscope. Predominantly, however, the production featured Army-produced life-model slides. About two of the films shown were purchased, while the other 13 were produced in Melbourne by the Limelight Brigade.

Some evangelical Christians in the UK had also begun to use lantern slides in their church services from the early 1890s, and there was an enthusiasm for 'passion play' films in the USA, Europe and elsewhere from the late 1890s to the early 1900s (Musser 1993; Bottomore 2002). The Melbourne Limelight Brigade made good use of this international material in their production. The production began with general commercial slides of the Life of Christ, as well as two commercial films, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* and *The Crucifixion*, each one-minute reels, taken from the 13-reel Lumière production *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* (1898). These French films, which survive, give an indication of what the Melbourne footage may have looked like.

After this introduction, the audience met their first martyr: St Stephen. Booth's narrative must have been based closely on the Bible: it opens with five slides of St Stephen expounding in various attitudes before the elaborately dressed Jewish court. Why, one wonders, does this first chapter open with five very repetitive slides that don't advance the narrative? This is because in chapter 7 of the *Acts of the Apostles*, St Stephen spends an entire 53 verses defending himself against the Jewish court by recounting the story of Moses' persecution. So these slides may have been dissolved, one into another, perhaps quite slowly, as Booth recounted possibly all of the 53 biblical verses.

After that, the biblical narrative suddenly picks up. Stephen looks up to see Heaven opening up to him. There he sees God with Jesus at his right hand. The Bible says:

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried out in a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7: 55–60)

In the sixth slide of this sequence, Perry has repeated the fifth slide but, to give the effect of Heaven opening up, the repeated slide has an added superimposition, taken from a commercial slide, of Jesus and angels above the heads of the court (Figures 2 and 3). The slides in this sequence have been made in different ways. We began in the courtroom with single exposures of live models posing in attitudes in front of a perspectively painted scenic backdrop, which were then hand-coloured. But the slide of St Stephen being cast out of the city is assembled in a different way: it is a collage of cut-out photographs pasted onto a painted background, and re-shot onto a glass slide before being hand-coloured. Both of these quite different techniques are used



Figure 2. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'St Stephen in front of the Jewish court', slide numbered 29, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 3. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'St Stephen in front of the Jewish court, with Jesus and angels', slide numbered 30, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

throughout the Army's productions, while there does not appear to be any narrative significance to the technique used.

The account of this chapter in the *Melbourne War Cry* (22 September 1900, 9) closely follows the slides we have, as well as the biblical narrative, and indicates how the kinematographic film was strategically inserted:

The events that lead to the martyrdom of Stephen passed in review. The Sanhedrim, the trial, Stephen's impeachment by the rulers and the stoning of the first martyr. The kinematograph was employed in this latter scene. The effect on the audience, as they beheld in a moving picture the innocent Stephen cruelly beaten to the earth, and killed by fiendish fanaticism of the formal religionists of his day cannot be described. The kinematograph give place to a picture of Stephen lying dead upon the roadside, while Paul the persecutor stands over him in an attitude of painful contemplation.

There are three slides numbered in sequence for the stoning: two were photographed against a backdrop that has clearly been inspired by a Gustave Doré engraving, while the third is a photographic collage on a painted background. The kinematograph film came after this sequence of slides, which may have been dissolved more quickly, perhaps, than the earlier courtroom slides. So the audience would have seen the same action twice, first as hand-coloured slides and then as animated pictures.

An indication of how this might have worked can be gleaned from the script of a later set of life-model slides, *Lazarus*, produced by the Army in 1902. This is a set of eight slides that was also supplemented with a kinematograph film. The script for the later and shorter slide set tells the story of the raising of Lazarus, with the usual cues for slide changes. At the end of the story, the cue changes to 'Kino'. Unfortunately, the corner of the script has been torn off, but the lecturer says: 'We shall now show you ... [missing] ... actually took place ... [missing] ... this remarkable miracle, most impressive and realistic. WE WILL SHOW YOU IN LIVING FORM WHERE MARTHA MEETS CHRIST, and tells him Lazarus is dead...' (National Film and Sound Archive c. 1902). The script then continues as a commentary on the kinematograph, with prompts for the reader of the script to alert the audience when the kinematographic scenes change.

To return to the 1900 *Soldiers of the Cross* production, as the *Melbourne War Cry* reported, the kinematograph then gave way to a slide of Stephen lying dead, with Jesus receiving his spirit. There then follows a hand-coloured copy of a lithographic reproduction of a Pre-Raphaelite Millais painting. *St Stephen* (1895), before the sequence cuts back to two slides of Salvation Army Officer Colonel James Annetts, who played St Stephen, lying on the ground. Between those two slides, we see his crimson blood pool, as though a few moments of time have elapsed; and in the final slide, a crucial character for the next chapter, Saul, appears, to look over him (Figures 4 and 5).

So in this chapter, even though viewers are experiencing a synthesized production, it is not built on anything like a unified visual syntax. Instead, there are up to five different expressions of time and modalities of audience experience in play, audience members' responses to which may have varied:

- (1) A strophic, verse-like, mode of slowly dissolving lantern slides, familiar from previous commercial slide sets, here associated with the rhetorical iteration of theological argument.
- (2) An expository mode of tableaux taking us through key narrative developments.
- (3) A faster action mode, often in couplets or triplets, intended to create the effect of experiential time passing, and perhaps linked to an accelerated lantern dissolve, which is an innovation of the commercial slide format.



Figure 4. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'St Stephen martyred', slide numbered 38, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. Collection: National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 5. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'Saul contemplating St Stephen martyred with pooled blood', slide numbered 39, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

- (4) The real-time animation and realistic living-picture mode of the cinematograph, giving a visceral feeling of natural movement.
- (5) The contemplative mode of a familiar work of 'great art' which is embedded in a universal historical/symbolic/aesthetic time.

These different modalities are reflected in the contemporaneous comments on the production. For instance, often the micro-movements ‘magically’ captured by the kinematograph – such as the splash of water as a martyr is thrown in a river, the rising of smoke, or the falling of stones – were specifically recalled by individual members of the audience. But the beautiful colour of the slides was also frequently mentioned. All of these modes, although not syntactically unified in any way we would recognize from subsequent cinema history, nonetheless worked together to directly involve the audience with the story through shared sight. This sense of collective witnessing, which this opening sequence sets up, is caught well by the *Melbourne War Cry*, in a description that seamlessly encompasses both the lantern-slides and the film: ‘We saw the great stones falling thick and fast upon the white robed figure on the ground, till it grew strangely still. Then the “witnesses” left the scene, and Saul of Tarsus stood alone looking down upon the dead young man’ (29 September 1900, 14). The next slide, after we have shared with Saul our contemplation of the dead St Stephen, is a shot of contemporary Damascus extracted from a stereograph. But this clever segue still follows the Bible fairly closely, because after being transported to contemporary Damascus as it was in 1900, the next slide takes us immediately back to biblical times for Saul’s conversion. We then see a tight sequence of three slides that, in a time-based triplet, shows us St Paul’s escape by basket and rope down the walls of Damascus to continue his preaching (Figures 6, 7 and 8).

These time-based ‘runs’ of slides often seem to pick up momentum towards a kinematographic climax. For instance, at slide 72 there is a slide sequence of Romans raiding an outdoor service by Christians, who are then forced to flee underground to continue their worship clandestinely in the catacombs. In 1901, this sequence was supplemented with a kinematograph film of the Romans chasing the Christians across a plank over a stream, augmented with the much-noted comic relief of a Roman bouncing off the springy plank and into the stream.

A later sequence focuses on life in the catacombs, perhaps to parallel life for Salvationists in the midst of pagan Melbourne. Like the opening shot from a movie of 20 years later that establishes the location of the story, this sequence begins with

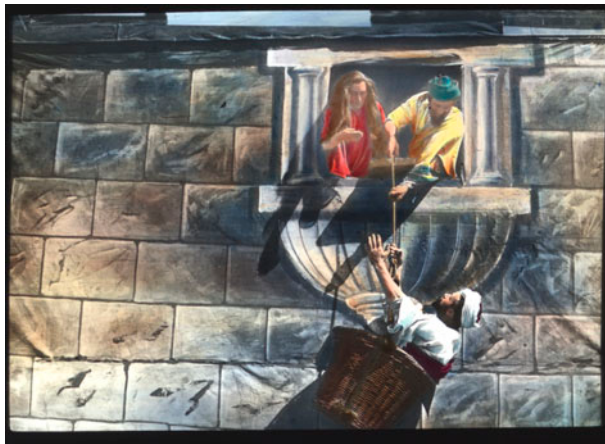


Figure 6. *Soldiers of the Cross*, ‘St Paul escaping Damascus by basket’, slide numbered 44, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 7. *Soldiers of the Cross*, ‘St Paul escaping Damascus by basket’, slide numbered 45, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 8. *Soldiers of the Cross*, ‘St Paul escaping Damascus by basket’, slide numbered 46, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

an aerial map of the catacombs, and then swoops us down into the underground stone passages using two painted images of the entrance to the catacombs followed by two photographic images of the interior of the catacombs extracted from a commercial stereograph view set. We then see daily life – worship, marriage, birth, sickness and eventual death – carried on in what I have called the ‘iterative’ mode through a mixture of Army collages and copies of prints and engravings. As the *Melbourne War Cry* put it (29 September 1900, 8):

All these scenes, painted and reproduced to sight and sound by word and art pictures, simply enchain the mind, and carry one in thought 1800 years back through the ages. The listener sups, prays, praises, adores, worships, suffers and dies with these saints of apostolic times.

The mode switches from 'iterative' to 'expository' for a detailed and strangely beautiful funeral sequence of four uncoloured slides. Once more there is a kinematographic climax, before a final extended contemplation of souls ascending into heaven painted in the brilliant supersaturated colour of a commercial slide – manufactured by Newton & Co. of Fleet Street, London – that may have been accompanied by music or singing.

About 20 slides later, another quartet of slides appears which encapsulates a tight action. A Christian woman is about to be burnt to death in a lime kiln. Will she offer just one grain of incense to the pagan gods and save herself? No! After pointing upwards to the one true God, she disappears into the kiln. This again may have been followed by a kinematograph film showing rising smoke.

Fourteen slides later, after another contemporary view of the Colosseum, another run of five slides introduces an extended piece of action. Christians wait at the gate of the Colosseum, while a stuffed tiger with a ferocious red tongue threatens them from a cage. Then the gates inch open in the final three slides, before a kinematograph film showed the Christians entering the Colosseum, after which individual slides show their martyrdom.

Judging by several separate reports in Salvation Army publications, the final sequence in the production was for many people the most affecting; for instance, in Hobart it caused 'general sobbing' in the audience (*Melbourne War Cry* 26 January 1901, 9). Perpetua, played by the young, attractive Army member, Cadet Mabel Tolley, was a young wealthy Roman woman who chose to give up her baby and be martyred in the Colosseum rather than renounce Christ. A script with slide and music cues exists, probably for another stand-alone version made shortly after *Soldiers of the Cross*. The surviving script is punctuated with nine popular hymns requiring audience participation, with a hymn supplementing the narrative about every four slides. However, in *Soldier of the Cross* there were most probably far fewer hymns because of the whole production's larger scale.

The script is ekphrastic in that it describes what the audience is seeing with their own eyes, and rhetorically explains what they should be feeling. For instance, during a dissolve between two opening slides the script says:

We may picture the surprise of this Christian lady when sitting in one of her well furnished rooms. The stillness of the occasion was broken by the intrusion of two armed men. On learning the object of their sudden appearance, Perpetua showed neither fear nor alarm. (National Film and Sound Archive, *Perpetua*. c.1900)

This was immediately followed by a hymn. Later, when she is cast into prison, the script tells the audience: 'Glory filled her soul amidst the gloom of her surroundings'. Later on, a tight sequence of slides showed her arguing back and forth with her father in a series of melodramatic attitudes, while the script provided the ekphrasis. After her father leaves, disappointed that he has not been able to convince her to give up on Christ, the script says:

This was to her a dark and trying moment. The grey beard, the fatherly face, the agitated frame, the loving entreaties, and the stern rebuke; as well as the sombre environment of the place, all spoke to her heart with a weird-like eloquence. Still she faltered not. An invisible power supported her even now.

As we have seen in the conclusion of the St Stephen sequence at the beginning of the production, the script is often self-referential, making direct links between Perpetua's experience and the experience of the audience seeing the projected slides in Melbourne 1800 years distant from the reported events. After Perpetua has finally handed over her baby to her mother, and before calling for the hymn 'What a friend we have in Jesus', a slide shows Perpetua in a swoon (Figure 9), and the script says:

But when the mother had gone a dreary lull set in. The baby's prattle had given way to a deep silence. The past rose in vivid pictures, and strong as she was in the grace of God, her poor heart was grief stricken. But there is always solace in prayer, and even in this dark dungeon Perpetua might well prove the unfailing words, 'My grace is sufficient for thee'.

In a second courtroom sequence, tight time-based rather than expository, action is shown. She is offered pagan incense to burn and her mother and father show her the baby, which will be returned to her if only she renounces Jesus. She refuses. Her father remonstrates with her once more, and is struck to the ground by a guard. After Perpetua has been martyred (Figures 10, 11 and 12) and before the final hymn, the script ends with:

But the end was near, for soon Perpetua lay bruised and bleeding upon the floor of that slaughter house of iniquity still praying to Him she loved. The excited crowd yelled that her misery and pain might end with a thrust of the gladiator's sword. A moment later the soul of Perpetua had gone to be with God, gone to hear her master say, 'Now that thou hast been faithful unto death, I will give thee a Crown of Life'.

Affect

Now that a few of the many sequences in this production have been examined, what general conclusions can be drawn? The unifying force in the piece was the



Figure 9. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'Perpetua in prison in a swoon', slide numbered 200, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 10. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'The martyrdom of Perpetua', slide numbered 208, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

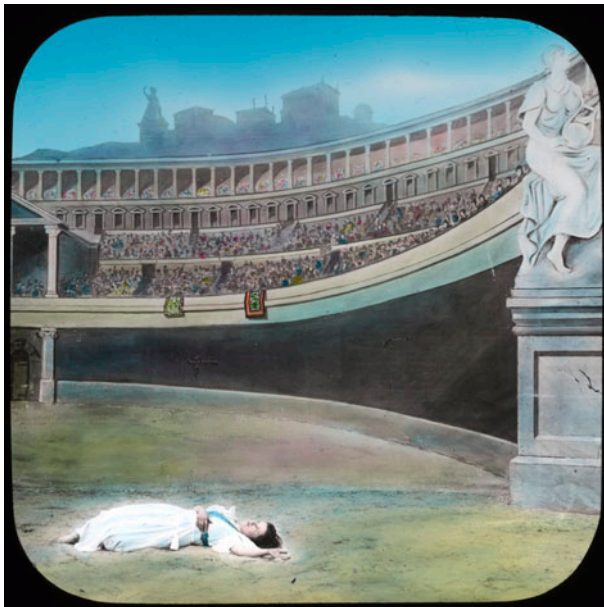


Figure 11. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'The martyrdom of Perpetua', slide numbered 209, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.



Figure 12. *Soldiers of the Cross*, 'The martyrdom of Perpetua', slide unnumbered, hand-coloured glass lantern-slide. National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

live human voice reciting a sermon. That voice was provided first by the charismatic Herbert Booth, and during a sickness by his equally charismatic wife. Booth spoke in 'short and harmonious' sentences, 'constructed with due regard to the balance and equilibrium of the whole', according to the *Melbourne War Cry* (22 September 1900, 9):

The lights went down, and the audience were hushed into breathless silence as the immense pictures were thrown upon the canvas. The Commandant's voice alone broke the stillness thrilling the enthralled audience with burning words fitted in compact sentences, forming an eloquent and beautiful tribute to the heroic deeds and unflinching endurance of the saints whose pictorial reproduction riveted every eye.

Other connecting forces were musical: the familiar hymns and masses played by the orchestra and sung by the audience. But the dominant force that distinguished the limelight lecture from others was the lanternist himself, who was always present in the audience's consciousness as his lanterns hissed and spluttered and projected their beam above their heads. As the *Melbourne War Cry* noted (13 October 1900, 8):

Carefully watching the screen as the lecture progressed, and noting the rapid changes from one slide to another, from slide to kinematograph film, and then again from kinematograph film to slide, each appearing exactly at the right time, one could not help but admire the consummate skill with which Major Perry manipulated his elaborate and complicated apparatus.

The presence of the lanternist signalled the radical shift in the site of principle address which the Salvation Army made in their evangelism: from the body, or the ear, or the mind, or the voice – although these were, of course, still present – to

the eye and to the retina; from the phenomenological architecture of the church to the dominating address of the projection sheet; from the magical ritual of the service to the retinal power of the projected image. This separation of the Army lecture from conventional religious experiences was signalled as early as 1891. For instance, describing a 1891 limelight lecture by the Army's founder, General William Booth, at the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings, the *Melbourne War Cry* reported that a 'dim religious light pervades the building, which was, however, relieved at one end by a huge white sheet, behind which a mysterious manufacturing of light and shade seemed to be going on' (21 November 1891, 7). The magic lantern shifted the locus of the spiritual to the limelight itself, and turned the lanternist into a kind of thaumaturge. For instance, before the third production of *Soldiers of the Cross* at South Melbourne Town Hall, Brigadier Unsworth prayed with the congregation that 'the pictures might be luminous with Divine light, instilled with divine power, and fruitful in bringing about more of that spirit of heroism that dominated the lives of the Christian martyrs of old' (*Melbourne War Cry*, 13 October 1900, 8). The Army's spiritual bellicosity was evoked in another comment by the *Melbourne War Cry*: 'The lecture is a double-barrelled weapon, which captivates both sense of sight and enchains the mind, while indelible impressions are made upon it' (22 September 1900, 8).

The Army's slides, like all slides of the period, were propelled forward by the retinal frisson of the dissolve, as one image appeared to materialize itself within the very optical substance of the image it was replacing. The rhetoric of the Army frequently equated the light of the lantern with the light of salvation, and the magical transformation of the dissolve with the transformative power of Jesus. As one *Melbourne War Cry* comment on William Booth's 1891 lecture explained:

You would be gazing intently at a street girl's red jacket, until all at once you would discover that it was not a street girl's dress, but a Salvationist's guernsey, and the surroundings were totally different. You would be taking in that fact when a glance would show you that what you took for a guernsey was a fire, the pantaloons of an actor, the side of a house, red Maria, a red flannel petticoat, or the leg of a horse. (21 November 1891, 7)

Booth's major innovation was to scale up the traditional lantern lecture into a complete evening's production, and to give it a thematic unity. As the *Melbourne War Cry* reported:

Although the audience was taken through a great variety of scene and incident, the intervals were cleverly bridged or, to change the metaphor, the stories, instead of being scattered gems were strung on an elocutionary necklace and, in their semblance or contrast made into a beautiful and complete circlet. (22 September 1900, 8)

A secondary innovation was to work the kinematograph films into the slides more closely. As Booth reported, 'I saw at a glance that living pictures, worked in conjunction with life-model slides, would provide a combination unailing in its power of connecting narrative' (*Melbourne War Cry*, 18 August 1900, 8). This 'working in conjunction' allowed Salvation Army lantern slides to describe tight time-based actions, rather than just expository narrative elements or iterative strophic elements. Compared with comparable magic lantern or cinematographic presentations elsewhere, this integrated complexity of various images and image

sequences, from different sources, thrown onto a single screen within a single lecture, is a globally significant development at the time.

These innovations were all to provide thrills: Army thrills to compete with all of the other thrills young people, particularly young men, had to divert them in 1900. In its advance publicity for *Soldiers of the Cross*, the *Melbourne War Cry* described it as a ‘new sensation’ (18 August 1900). It was the power of the thrill that led Booth to choose as his subject the martyrdom of the early Christians, because the bloody and violent martyrdoms provided opportunity for spectacle and action. If the thrill was one key concept, the other was realistic action. The intention was to create a retinal connection between the audience and the Christian martyrs. The ultimate objective was for people, particularly men, to pledge their souls to Christ and their lives to the Army at the end of the lecture. Realism was one conduit of empathy; the other was contemporary travel photographs of the Holy Land and the copies of the familiar paintings used to introduce each chapter. As the *Melbourne War Cry* (15 September 1900, 8) predicted before opening night:

The thrilling scenes in the arena, the cruel tests, the thrilling presentiments of Christians under torture, the sustaining power of the presence of the invisible Christ should bring forth all that is best in the nature of the observers, while the graphic and eloquent word-pictures of our leader should tinge with colour, as with the hands of an artist in studies of human nature, these pictures, which all but speak their own story. May God’s spirit be poured upon lecturer, operator and audience alike!

Part of this thrill was also a sense of transport, a promise to take the audience out of their seats in Melbourne, and into another spatiotemporal realm. As Booth declared (*Melbourne War Cry*, 18 August 1900, 8):

I have sought to make everything absolutely correct. From the plumes on the Roman helmet and the imperial robe of Nero to the rough garments of the pagan slave, everything will be exact. You only have to follow the screen and you will be as much in Rome as if you had been there – now in the palace of Caesar, then in the open square – now in the residence of the patrician, then in the den of the libertine – now in the Colosseum then in the Catacombs, where the early Christians concealed themselves for safety – all will be absolutely exact.

This is very similar to the promises that had been made by stereograph manufacturers since the 1850s. By the 1900s, retailers such as Underwood & Underwood were marketing complete ‘Travel Systems’ incorporating stereographs, guidebooks and maps, to give a similar, touristic sense of optical transport. The Limelight Brigade appropriated some of these stereographs for *Soldiers of the Cross*. But to the Army audience, this transport was more than just virtual tourism: it was transport of a more profound kind. In the view of a later report on a Limelight meeting, ‘the meeting almost becomes as a séance, and our spirits seem to blend with the spirits of these just ones’ (*Melbourne War Cry*, 9 February 1901, 9).

Was *Soldiers of the Cross* effective? Did the almost cathartic connection, which the optical thrills, authoritative lecturer’s voice and familiar music attempted to create between the modern Melbourne audience and their historical predecessors, actually produce an affective reaction? The *Melbourne War Cry* frequently reported on the ‘involuntary interjections, moans of pity, sighs of relief’ coming from the audience (29 September 1900, 8). Indeed, all the Army reports are ecstatic; but that is to be expected. But even the hard-bitten, seen-it-all mainstream press confirmed

the affective power of the production. The premiere elicited a review from two out of the three Melbourne newspapers; both used buzzwords such as ‘thrilling’ and ‘daring’, but also employed other words redolent of emotional power. In the view of *The Age*, ‘To have some of the most tragic episodes of Christian history carried out in all savage but soul-stirring realism is an accomplishment essentially of today. It was done by the aid of the kinematograph, when Commandant Booth delivered his thrilling lecture last night’. *The Argus* reported: ‘Opening with the last days of the life of Christ, Commandant Booth dealt with the lives of the disciples ... the horrors of Nero’s efforts to exterminate the followers of Christ, the tragedies of the dark catacombs, and the thrilling scenes that were enacted in the arena of the Colosseum. Bold as the lecture was in conception, the illustrations were even more daring’ (*Melbourne War Cry*, 22 September 1900, 16).

Booth’s choice of Christian martyrdom as a theme for his lecture, while drawing on roots in the ecclesiastical writing of the nineteenth century, and calculated to strengthen the group cohesion of the Salvationists while appealing to potential young, male recruits, was also very much in tune with the broader popular spirit of the times. The painted backdrops for the Colosseum sequence were derived from two recent popular paintings by Jean-Léon Gérôme: *Thumbs Down* (1872) and *Christian Martyr’s Last Prayer* (1883). In 1896, the Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz had added to this popular interest in the early Christianity with his novel *Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero*. After it was translated into English, the novel became a bestseller; and in 1912, it was produced into a blockbuster film by the Italian director Enrico Guazzoni. The film’s elaborately massive sets were based on Gérôme’s paintings, just as *Soldiers of the Cross*’s painted backdrops had been 12 years before (Blom 2001). Booth had become ill after the premiere of *Soldiers of the Cross* and in 1901, after falling out with his father and elder brother, resigned from the Army and negotiated to take *Soldiers of the Cross* with him as he embarked on a career as an international travelling evangelist. In 1907, the *Illustrated London News* featured him with his ‘Evangelisation by Tableaux Vivants’, including ‘bioscopes’ of ‘animated pictures’ (14 September 1907, 409). Booth was still travelling with the slides in the mid-1910s. By that time, he must have felt that they needed refreshing, perhaps because the cinematographic film had become unusable or seemed out of date; because he then added to the original 1900 slide sequences a new set of spectacular and ‘big budget’ commercial slides made from production stills of the 1912 film version of *Quo Vadis*, which integrated with the earlier slides because they drew from the same pictorial sources.

Conclusion

Soldiers of the Cross is extremely important because it was Australia’s first large-scale multimedia production. Experientially integrated, on several occasions it kept 2000 people simultaneously enthralled over an entire two-and-a-half-hour period. It innovated on narrative formats from the nineteenth century, and incorporated technology that would come to dominate the twentieth century. It created a seemingly unprecedented affective experience by weaving familiar visual forms and technological experiences in with established viewing protocols and ritualized behaviours that had been developed and inculcated into Australian audiences during the previous five decades. It was a production with an international horizon,

bricolaging material produced overseas into a primarily Australian production, and, in its second life, touring the world. The scale and the complexity of the integration of these experiences looked forward to twentieth-century media forms. One of those media forms was certainly the cinema; but others include the lantern itself, which continued in parallel to cinema for another five decades, as well as later media forms such as broadcast radio and television – and even, at a stretch, contemporary digital media platforms.

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