

**Moving Books/Moving Images: Optical Recreations and Children's Publishing
1800-1900**

John Plunkett

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'And what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversation?'¹

Optical shows and devices played a key role in nineteenth-century popular culture. Panoramas, dioramas, peepshows and magic lanterns were a widespread form of domestic and public recreation. The growth of optical recreations as a leisure activity parallels that of popular publishing, and this essay explores the concomitant aesthetic crossover between optical and print media. It particularly focuses on the production of a significant number of illustrated and movable books, usually aimed at a juvenile audience, which exploited the novelty of the latest optical recreations. These children's publications attempted to replicate – or structure themselves on – the viewing experience of peepshows, panoramas and the magic lantern. The pervasive presence of optical recreations in popular culture meant that they exerted a creative pressure upon both the conceptual and material organisation of the book.

Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter have recently coined the phrase 'remediation' to describe the way that new media often assimilate, refashion or attempt to improve existing forms: 'What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the way in which older media refashion themselves according to the challenge of new media'.² For Bolter and Grusin, remediation operates according to a double logic: on the one hand, modern media borrow relentlessly from each other in a search for transparent immediacy – whereby their own mediating role is erased; on the other hand, this very appropriation means that they employ a collage of visual styles which invariably reminds viewers of the presence of the medium. Bolter and Grusin's notion of remediation is a useful one in that nineteenth-century children's books translate optical formats as a means of foregrounding their own visual and material

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novelty, which was the product of developments in popular publishing, particularly the use of illustration.

More than any other genre, children's books drew on optical recreations like the peepshow and magic lantern. They did so because the appeal of these entertainments was a marriage of the visual and verbal, which needs to be understood as something distinct from the combination of word and image. For children who were just entering the unfamiliar world of literacy, the appropriation of a peepshow and magic lantern aesthetic provided a way of recreating the visual and verbal within print, satisfying Alice's desire for books filled with pictures and conversation. Walter Ong has argued that 'Readers whose norms and expectations for formal discourse are governed by a residually oral mindset relate to a text quite differently from readers whose sense of style is radically textual'.³ Children's books structured around popular optical entertainments remediated the aural within print culture, and, in so doing, helped to bridge the gap Ong describes between print and aurality, literacy and illiteracy. They sought for a more interactive, and, in the case of movable books, sensuous interaction with the world of the text than had previously been the case in children's publishing. What makes the children's books discussed part of a larger dynamic is that they are products of the spread of literacy and print culture, and the attendant negotiation between print and aurality that characterised not only children's growing-up but nineteenth-century culture as a whole.⁴

The peepshow was the optical format most frequently remediated by children's illustrated and movable books. Why was this so? Partly, it is because it is one of the oldest and most enduring forms of optical entertainment. The emergence of the peepshow marked a coming together of art, philosophical recreations, particularly those involving mirrors and lenses, and the popular entertainment provided by itinerant showmen, either individually or as part of the traditional calendar of fairs, wakes, and holydays (sic). The earliest examples of peepshows conventionally cited are a device built in 1437 by the Italian polymath Leone Battista Alberti, in which views were looked through a small hole in a box; Samuel Van Hoogstraten's perspective boxes of the 1650s; and two clock-peepshows built

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by the Augsburg clock-maker Marggraf in 1596 and 1599.⁵ In Britain, travelling raree shows first achieved cultural visibility in the 1680s. In 1681, Stephen Colledge was sentenced to death for publishing a political pamphlet called *The Raree Show*, which satirised Charles II. Later that decade, in *The Cryes of London drawne after the life* (1687), a series of prints depicting those who hawked their wares on the streets of London, the Dutch artist Marcellus Laroon presented the itinerant raree show man as a familiar figure in the capital ([see fig. 1](#)).⁶

The Cryes of London, which was republished on numerous occasions, launched the genre of London Cries; subsequent series of prints in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century often included portrayals of itinerant peep-show men. Several recurring features of peepshow entertainments emerge from these prints, which help to explain why it was the format most frequently remediated by children's books. Prints portray peepshow audiences made up almost entirely of children, as is typified by the frontispiece of L. P. Boitard's series of London Cries (1760), Francis Wheatley's painting from his London Cries, and a print from William H. Pyne's 'Costumes of England' (1805) ([see fig. 2](#); [fig. 3](#); [fig. 4](#)). A later painting from c. 1850 exemplifies the common exhibition of peepshows at fairgrounds during the nineteenth century, with a scene of three children enjoying a show of the Battle of Waterloo ([see fig. 5](#)).

As the above pictures demonstrate, prints of peepshows often focus on the colourful figure of the itinerant showman who carried his entertainment on his back. Pyne's showman has a trumpet to catch his viewers attention ([see fig. 6](#)), while in an 1804 engraving of a peepshow man at Hyde Park Corner, the showman is portrayed as a disabled military veteran, perhaps forced into his new trade as a street entertainer as a result of wounds received during the war against France. He has a performing squirrel to help attract an audience by ringing the bells on his cage as he runs around. The accompanying text emphasises the audience's fascination with his performative role:

This amusing personage generally draws a crowd around him in whatever street he fixes his moveable pantomime, as the unemployed persons or children who cannot afford the penny or halfpenny insight into the show-box are yet greatly entertained with his descriptive harangues. . . The show consists of a series of coloured pictures, which

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the spectator views through a magnifying glass, while the exhibitor rehearses the story, and shifts the scene by the aid of strings.⁷

The appeal of the peepshow stemmed as much from the relationship between audience and showman as that between the viewer and the painted scenes. The showman provided an aural narrative that not only brought the scenes to life, but also encouraged those waiting to desire their own glimpse inside the box. In short, the attraction of the peepshow was as much verbal as visual. Moreover, while the viewing experience may itself have been enclosed, the chatter of the surrounding crowd and the showman's address means that it was also less solitary than is generally thought.

For children of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, travelling peep-show men were an important source of information and wonder concerning the world beyond. An autobiographical article in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* from 1838 emphasises their role as purveyors of visual education in the early years of the century. This was a time just prior to the explosion of illustrated journals and periodicals. The article was written by either Robert or William Chambers, the brothers who ran the journal; in it, the author reminisces about his childhood encounters with a travelling peep-show. The brothers grew up in Peebles, twenty-three miles south of Edinburgh, and the author declares that the boys of the town 'a public body to which the present writer had the honour to belong' knew no happiness equal to that which was 'conferred upon them by one of the most familiar, and therefore least regarded, of the pleasures of a tribe of city children – the sight of a raree show'.⁸ By the 1820s it seems the pleasure of the travelling peepshow was already greater for children in small towns and rural areas than those in the city, who were more accustomed to its fare, yet consequently less impressed by its novelty.

The showman seen by William or Robert Chambers was an old man by the name of Ben Minory. His show contained coloured prints of major European cities and a few other scenes; it was through his peep-show that the brothers 'first became acquainted with any part of the world beyond our own limited and rural range'.⁹ Ben's scenes included the Court of Versailles, the Vatican, Brandywine Creek, Vauxhall Gardens, the Duke of Brunswick's Palace in Germany, and, last and finest of all, Lord Rodney's Victory over the French in the West Indies in 1782. This

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peepshow entertainment, like so many others, consisted of a disconnected series of topographical scenes and national events, both historical and contemporary. Ben's narrative of his final scene emphasises the way that the showman sought to bring a static scene to life:

You see the French drawn up in a semi-circle to leeward, and the British fleet bearing down upon it. Lord Rodney, in the foremost vessel, has already cut the line, and is about to engage with two vessels at once. You see the signals flying for action, and see the smoke rising from some of the French vessels. But it was all in vain, for Rodney disabled and took many of them; but all them he took were lost after, as they were coming home to England, only twelve men escaping in a boat to tell the sorrowful tale.¹⁰

Peepshow images were always mediated through such aural narratives: scenes were imbued with drama, historical resonance, patriotic feeling, and curiosity over far-off and/or famous locations.

It is because of its status as a popular children's entertainment, as well as its combination of visual and verbal elements, that the peepshow was used as structuring trope by a significant number of illustrated children's publications. Readers were addressed as if they were a peepshow audience, much as Pierce Egan positioned his readers as viewers of a camera obscura. The appropriation of a peepshow aesthetic emphasized both the technological novelty and the greater availability of illustrated children's books. Simultaneously though, they provided a familiar model for children just entering the world of literacy, through which they could make sense of the unfamiliar combination of type and image. Children's illustrated and movable books also formed part of an important shift towards amusement in nineteenth-century children's publishing in that they used optical motifs in order to stress that they offered amusement rather than simply moral or religious instruction.

Two early examples of the type of aesthetic crossover I'm going to be arguing for are Elizabeth Semple's *The Magic Lantern; Or, Amusing and Instructive Exhibitions for Young People* (1806) and Ann Taylor's *Signor Topsy Turvey's Magic Lantern; Or, The World Turned Upside Down* (1810). Semple's book is organised around eleven hand-coloured engravings, which are meant to be scenes from a magic lantern show exhibited to Fredric, his sisters Caroline and Sophy, and

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their cousin Edward, by their father. The concept of a magic lantern show – a series of slides accompanied by a connecting narrative - operates as a structuring trope for the book to introduce its series of short moralistic tales. Similarly, Taylor's *Signor Topsy Turvey's Magic Lantern; Or, The World Turned Upside Down* tropes off the fact that projected slides appear upside down if they are put in the magic lantern the right way up. Taylor presents a carnivalesque world that reconstructs the upside-down show supposedly put on by the magic lantern's first inventor:

Now lest there may still be some pedant in town,
To laugh at this turning the world upside down,
With argument witty and weighty,
We've taken the trouble, at wonderful cost,
To copy the sliders (long thought to be lost)
And appeal to the whole literati.¹¹

Taylor turns an optical aesthetic into a satiric social principle in that it consists of poems, some with illustrations, which describe with such role-reversals as 'The Fish Turned Fishers' and 'The Monkey Turned Beau'.

The type of intermediality evident in these two books is characteristic of nineteenth-century optical recreations in so far as one of their defining features was the multifarious devices, prints and shows that sought to reproduce the same visual effect. The success of large-scale panoramas, for example, led to hand-held scrolling panoramas, children's panoramic games, miniature toy theatre panoramas, and even panoramic lantern slides. Critics such as Isobel Armstrong and Terry Castle have shown many similar instances of their influence upon literary texts.¹² The beginning of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821), for example, claims that the book offers a camera obscura view of London. Reading the text is made analogous to viewing London through a camera obscura because it offers a realistic yet safely detached glimpse into dangerous low-life London haunts.¹³ The illustrated and movable children's publications I examine are thus only one element of a more widespread phenomenon.

The earliest book I have discovered that remediates the peepshow is concerned very precisely with children's entrance into, and acquisition of, the printed word, in that the format of a raree show is used as part of a primer for learning the alphabet. Joseph Brown's *The New English Primer, or reading made*

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easy, according to an improved plan, for the use of schools, and as a first book for children (1790), has, as a final section, a series of small pictures, four to a page, of ‘The Raree Show, or Pretty Pictures for Good Children.’ The reward for those who have progressed to the end of the book is their own miniature peep-show; they can make use of their newly-learnt alphabet to imbibe the short homilies printed with the pictures, such as ‘The Holy Bible Teacheth Truth’, and ‘The Schoolmistress Instructeth Youth’.¹⁴ Just as with many contemporary children’s books, the pictures are meant to function as an appealing method of guiding, elaborating and reinforcing the meaning of the text. The use of a relatively ‘low’ form of entertainment in Brown’s *The New English Primer* needs though to be placed in the context of the concerted effort to improve the literacy levels of the poor in the last decades of the eighteenth-century, often with the concomitant aim of influencing the ideas they imbibed. The Sunday School movement came to the fore in the 1780s with the aim of teaching children to be able to at least read the bible, while the Religious Tract Society was founded in 1799.¹⁵ The peepshow provided an appealing form to gild the didacticism of Brown’s text.

Two other contemporaneous publications used the peepshow format more intrinsically to organise their combination of image and text. *The Raree Show* (1800) is a small chapbook consisting of sixteen crude woodblock illustrations, each accompanied by a short description. The frontispiece has the image of a child looking at a peepshow with an accompanying poem from the showman:

Come hand me your money,
And have a peep here,
When you’ve seen my show through
You’ll say it’s not dear.¹⁶

The pictures consist of a series of almost unrecognisable portraits – the British royal family, Louis XVI, the Emperor of China – together with such equally far-off animals as the zebra, crocodile, porcupine and rhino. In the same year, *Squire Summerton’s Picture Gallery* (1800) similarly used the peepshow format as a mode of visual instruction for children. A Mr Mayflower takes his son to see the Squire’s collection of engravings, which is presented in the book as a peepshow performance.¹⁷

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While these early chapbooks use the peepshow format to frame a relatively simple combination of text and image, subsequent children's books draw in a more sophisticated fashion on the mediating role of the peep-show man. *Kriss Kringle's Raree Show, For Good Boys and Girls* (1846), an illustrated American gift-book, bases its appeal on the character of its avuncular narrator, Kriss Kringle, an early American incarnation of Father Christmas. The frontispiece shows a group of children eagerly gathered around Kriss Kringle's peepshow, while the book's opening declares:

It is time for the Christmas holidays. Kriss Kringle has a new species of entertainment for his young friends. It is a grand RAREE Show! The spectators are assembled. All eyes are on the great curtain which bears the inscription *Kriss Kringle's Raree Show for Boys and Girls* ([see fig. 7](#)).¹⁸

The book is arranged as a series of thirty-eight 'sights', in which Kriss Kringle provides a short narrative to an illustrated scene framed as a peepshow image ([see fig. 8](#)). The 'sights' consist of scenes from European and North American history, ranging from the death of Lord Nelson to the capture of Stony Point during the American War of Independence.

The presentation of the 'sights' within the book reinforces its remediation of the peepshow format in that, in addition to the image of the scene itself, each engraving portrays the peepshow frontage surrounded by a group of children. What this reflexive staging does is to help fashion a transition between print and aural culture, illiteracy and literacy. Peter Hunt has noted that whereas orality unites people in finite interactive groups, reading is characterised by the necessarily imagined communities of print.¹⁹ Yet instead of the abstraction of print culture, the implied reader of Kriss Kringle's book is positioned as if s/he are one of the group of children in the illustration looking at the peepshow scene and listening to the showman's lecture. The reading-cum-viewing position is figured as collective rather than individual. Despite the enclosed nature of the peepshow, its exhibition at fairs and market-days meant that its viewing was not as isolating as is sometimes assumed. *Kriss Kringle's Raree Show* translates the sociability of the peepshow into the domestic sphere, making it ideal for being read aloud to children (and thereby turned back into an aural narrative).

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In his showman's role, Kriss Kringle directly addresses his readers as if they were a 'live' peepshow audience. Through Kringle's patter and the discussion of the children, the book attempts to recreate an aural narrative that is more interactive and intimate than the silent abstraction of the printed page:

'OH! is that not grand?' 'Is that not splendid?' 'Is it not beautiful?'
 These are the exclamations. Next comes the enquiry from several voices.
 'Pray, what is it?' 'What does it represent?' 'What is it all about?'
 John Oldfied, the boy that is holding his little brother up to see, answers,
 'That is Paul Jones's great fight off Flamborough Head, where he beat
 the English frigate so dreadfully, and made Captain Pearson surrender,
 when his own ship, that is, Jones's ship, was nearly knocked to bits'.²⁰

As Roland Barthes has noted, when speech is translated into writing, what is lost are 'all those scraps of language – of the type "Isn't that right?" – that the linguist would doubtless place in the category of one of the great functions of language, the *phatic* or interpellant function; when we speak, we want our interlocutor to listen to us ...'.²¹ Yet this type of interpellation is precisely what the garrulous showman's patter and children's conversation are full of and what the written narrative attempts to recreate. Whereas Pierce Egan uses the camera obscura as a trope to emphasise the detachment between the reader and the scene, Kriss Kringle's persona is an attempt to draw his young readers into the text. It also makes the book ideal for being read aloud to children with different levels of literacy: they can enjoy the pictures even if they are not able to follow all the written descriptions.

The British equivalent to Kriss Kringle is Peter Parley's *Sergeant Bell and His Raree Show* (1839). Peter Parley follows the peepshow entertainments being performed by a travelling showman and his 'Royal Raree Show' every market day in Taunton (see [fig. 9](#); [fig. 10](#)). Like Kriss Kringle's raree show, Peter Parley's book is structured around Sergeant Bell's peepshow views with an accompanying narrative consisting of the showman's patter:

'Here, you have the flight of the Great Napoleon! Ambition was his ruin. He was greedy of conquest, and never knew when he had enough. He should have been contented in trying to make France happy.'

'Look at the battle, my bonny boys and girls, while I finish my description;'

Life is a day
 That soon flies away.
 A human flower

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Fades every hour

‘Your turn will come by and by, whether old England is at peace or war.’²²

Kriss Kringle’s and Peter Parley’s books, in both their narrative structure and their visual organisation, attempt to reproduce the mode of viewing of the peepshow.

Illustrated children’s publications that ostensibly derived from the peepshow continued to appear for the rest of the century. While they were novelty books, it is important to realize just how many of them there are. For example, the *Picture Book for Little Children* (1864), published by the Religious Tract Society, uses the figure of John Robins the peepshow man to introduce a series of improving incidents, such as the example of a mission school in the South Seas. As Robins states, ‘There are no foolish pictures in my show. They will teach you some things you will do well to learn’.²³ Sometimes the allusion to a peepshow aesthetic could be very loose, merely a means of linking a disparate series of images. *The Picture Pleasure Book* (1853), which has an illustration of children gazing at a peepshow on the front cover, contains over five hundred illustrations ([see fig. 11](#)). Some pages simply have a large number of disparate engravings, while others take the form of short visual narratives such as Robin Hood and This is the House that Jack Built, whose rectangular framing echoes the design of magic lantern slides ([see fig. 12](#)). *The Picture Pleasure Books* suggest that any succession of images, which were to be looked at one after the other, could be identified with a peepshow entertainment.²⁴

A later example after the fashion of Kriss Kringle and Peter Parley is *The Fool’s Paradise; with the many wonderful adventures there as seen in the strange surprising peepshow of Professor Wolley Cobble* (1872) ([see fig. 13](#)). The book reprints comic-strip style stories from Wilhelm Busch’s *Muenchener Bilderbogen* (a children’s picture broadside), first published in Germany between 1859 and 1866. Professor Wolley-Cobble, a Regent Street peepshow man, is the organising force for the book: ‘He is of the old school of Showmen; voluble in small talk, ever ready with answers to countrymen and others, and with a never-ending supply of Bartholomew Fair trumpet-jokes’.²⁵ The publisher notes that it was whilst gazing one evening at the Professor’s show that it occurred to him ‘at last I have found the man to assist in arranging my gathering of droll pictures’, going on to note that, ‘Professor Cobble called on me a few days later, and the present book is the result of

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that and subsequent visits' ([see fig. 14](#)).²⁶ The book is thus explicitly formatted according to a peepshow aesthetic with the showman playing the role of editor, pulling together the disparate narratives into a whole 'performance'. Other late examples include Mrs George Cupples's *Sights at a Peepshow; Or, Pretty Pictures and Pleasing Stories* (1874), F. M. Allen's *Through Green Glasses* (1888) and *Our Parlour Panorama* (1882), which replicates the numerous panoramas and peepshows that were structured in the form of a journey around the world ([see fig. 15](#); [fig. 16](#); [fig. 17](#)).²⁷

The importance of the increased provision of formal education in providing the impetus for publications organized according to an optical aesthetic is most evident in the advent of *The Peep-Show: A Picture Magazine for Little Readers* (1875-9), a heavily-illustrated periodical published by Alexander Strahan, best known as the publisher of *Good Words*. It was available in weekly or monthly issues and was an inexpensive picture and reading book for children; its advertising puff declared that it was 'so simple that children who have been through a first reading book at home or school may understand'.²⁸ The 1870 Education Act introduced local School Boards whose role was to provide elementary education for all those up to the age of 12; *The Peep-Show: A Picture Magazine for Little Readers* supplied simple pictorial and written material suitable for the increasing number of children benefiting from the act ([see fig. 18](#)).

The Peep-Show was not the only periodical that framed its picture-book style according to a popular optical entertainment; a similar phenomenon is evident in the early years of the *Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1949). Launched under the auspices of the Religious Tract Society as a penny weekly paper, the *Boy's Own Paper* was extremely successful with circulation claimed to be as high as 200,000 copies in the early 1880s.²⁹ Optical recreations were a common subject in the journal with many 'how to' articles for boys on making their own magic lantern, kaleidoscope, peepshow, diorama, colour top, shadow show, and numerous other devices. Between 1880 and 1885, the *Boy's Own Paper* also published a regular series of illustrations that were comic-strip narratives yet titled as designs for lantern slides or shadow shows. These pictures were unremarkable in their subject matter; indeed, the fact

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that a narrative of eight or ten images could be spread over several issues meant that they were ideal column fillers, filling spare space as and when required. Nonetheless, they are a notable example of a hybrid visual aesthetic that foregrounds its own mediated status.

The first illustration that consciously adopted the appearance of a lantern slide was published in the issue of 27 November 1880 as ‘Plaguering a Philosopher! (A Pictorial Study for the Magic Lantern or Shadow Show)’. It was a comic series of eight square cartoon-strip style illustrations of two boys plaguing a philosopher-scientist. The engravings functioned *in situ* as an illustrated story but could also be cut out and used for magic lantern slides or shadow shows. Five other narratives of this kind appeared in volume three (Oct 1880-Sept 81), sometimes spread across several issues.³⁰ These illustrations continued as an intermittent feature until volume seven (Oct 1884-Sep 1885).³¹

A revealing example of the visual impact of this use of an optical format comes from the *Boy’s Own Paper* of 28 June 1882. Printed diagonally across the ‘Correspondence’ page is a series of three mildly comic scenes for the magic lantern (see [fig. 19](#); [fig. 20](#)). The three scenes in rectangular frames clearly replicate the design of lantern slides. Equally as important though is the way their diagonal positioning disrupts and dominates the flow of the page, in a way that particularly sets them apart from the other two neatly-placed engravings. The lantern images call attention to their own distinctness: they foreground their own mediated status, becoming what Bolter and Grusin would call hypermedia. Thus, at one level, the cumulative effect of these slides-cum-engravings is to emphasise the visual novelty and up-to-date nature of the *Boy’s Own Paper*: in the 1880s and 1890s the magic lantern was probably at the height of its usage. At the same time, they were keyed into its provision of improving leisure activities in that the illustrations could have been used as the basis for homemade slides (the *Boy’s Own Paper* published several articles on making slides and lanterns).³²

Whereas children’s books that remediated the peepshow did so in order to frame the relationship between the verbal and the visual, other novelty publications attempted to replicate the aesthetic of optical recreations in order to literally create

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moving-images. A number of children's books attempted to actually provide moving images within their covers. The conventional material organisation of the book was altered so that, as far as possible, books became a series of dissolving views or a moving Punch and Judy show. These books were spin-offs from the popularity of optical recreations, but also provided children with the opportunity for a more interactive and user-friendly relationship with the book. The standard reading experience – turning flat pages filled with regular lines of black type – was rejected in favour of books that demanded a more hands-on engagement. The appropriation of optical recreations enriched and played upon the tactility of the book, foregrounding its status as a mediated form. Alfred Crowquill's *Comic History of the Kings and Queens of England* (c.1855), for example, presents the chronological procession of Kings and Queens in a foldout panorama consisting of thirty-six mildly comic portraits ([see fig. 21](#)). The structure of the book embodies, far more successfully and captivatingly than consecutive pages could ever do, an unbroken national procession of English and British monarchs.

The leading British publisher of children's movable books for most of the nineteenth century was Dean and Son. Although long-established, the firm's movable books came to the fore in the 1850s as part of the growth in children's publishing.³³ Their books were cleverly designed, expensively produced, and renowned for their colour illustrations; they also drew heavily upon both the subject matter and forms of optical recreations, theatre, and popular entertainment ([see fig. 22](#); [fig. 23](#)). Their *Royal Moveable Punch and Judy* (1870) is typical in that it contains key scenes from the drama, which move through pulling the appropriate tabs: the book is as much performance as text. Likewise, *Dean's New Book of Magic Illuminations* (1862) consists of a series of scenes with coloured transparencies which, when held up to the light, take on a luminous aspect ([see fig. 24](#)). A skating scene, for example, bases its charm on the play of different light sources through illuminated lamps, fireworks and lit torches. Peepshows and pleasure gardens often employed backlit transparent scenes, while the making of small transparencies was still a common juvenile leisure activity.³⁴ Nonetheless, transparencies, and designs for them, tended to be bought individually from print-sellers like Ackermann's.

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Dean's New Book of Magic Illuminations reproduced the appeal of transparencies in a more mass-produced form ([see fig. 25](#)).

Dean and Son also took inspiration from the magic lantern for *Dean's New Book of Dissolving Views* (1860) ([see fig. 26](#)). Dissolving views were an extremely popular form of magic lantern slide whereby, through using two lanterns and fading the light source to one while increasing it to the other, one scene was slowly transformed into another. Dean and Son attempted to create their own dissolving views within the covers of the book. By pulling a tab at the bottom of the page, a clever Venetian-blind style mechanism meant that one image would transform into another, such as *War into Peace* ([see fig. 27](#)).³⁵ Dean produced three volumes of their Dissolving Views; the first, which appeared in June 1860, had an edition of 2,000 copies while the third, published in November 1862, had an edition of 6,000.³⁶

Dean and Son also produced books that folded out into telescopic peepshows. *Dean's Peep Show, Magic Picture Book showing Wonderful and Life-Like Effects of Distance and Space* (1861), was made up of four fold-out concertina-like peepshows of the Crystal Palace, the Thames Tunnel, St. Paul's Cathedral, and Westminster Abbey, each with a short accompanying narrative. Several Dean and Son's publications used this means of escaping the conventional flatness of the book; they had layers of pop-up painted flats that created three-dimensional scenes of the kind employed by toy theatres and peepshows. *Pleasant Peeps at Cosmoramic Pictures with Pleasant Tales* (1870) and *Cosmoramic Pictures. With Pretty and Instructive Tales* (1870) consisted of short tales illustrated through pop-up flats. Like Dean's other 'optical' books, these alluded to the popularity of the cosmorama, a sophisticated form of peepshow that imbued its flat scenes with the appearance of three-dimensional depth. The Cosmorama Rooms at 209 Regent Street was a staple London attraction from its opening in May 1823 to its closing in September 1851. Another series by Dean and Son drew on the panorama rather than the peepshow. Available at the expensive price of 2s.6d. each, titles in this large-scale format included *The Scenic Fairy Tales of Cinderella and Her Glass Slipper* (1876) and *The Scenic Effect Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday* (1877). The

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books were so arranged that ‘by the movement of a ribbon a pretty coloured panorama arises, resembling a theatrical scene’.³⁷

Dean’s movable books were more toys than text: they were to be viewed and played with rather than read. Narrative progress was disrupted by and subservient to the tactile pleasure of pulling tabs and ribbons, turning wheels, lifting flaps, and unfolding pages. Peter Hunt has observed that in children’s books, the desire to make sure that narrative is understood can mean that they are what Roland Barthes has called *lisible* rather than *scriptible*, ‘readerly’ rather than ‘writerly’.³⁸ In contrast, movable books, through children’s sensuous interaction with the various tabs and pop-up devices, give at least the impression of children fashioning their own reading experience. While readers’ experience of Dean and Son’s books was obviously set by the limits of the movable mechanisms, it was still the case that they offered some of the ‘openness’ advocated by Barthes. *Pleasant Peeps At Cosmorama Pictures With Pleasant Tales* (1870), for example, noted that when children were tired of the book they could take off the foreground pop-out scenes and add their own coloured figures or views ‘thus varying the scenes, and amusing young minds at the same time’.³⁹ Readers were thus able to fashion their own three-dimensional narratives.

The late nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of children’s movable books published in an optical format. Some of the most notable were designed and published by Ernest Nister, who was based in Nuremberg, but whose work was published widely in Britain and America.⁴⁰ Nister’s books are littered with optical tropes to describe various types of moving scene and pop-up effects; among his many publications are *Peepshow Pictures: A Novel Colour Book* (1894), *Changing Pictures. A Book of Transformation Pictures* (1894), *Nister’s Panorama Pictures* (1894), *Our Peep-Show* (1902), *Vanishing Pictures: a Novel Picture Book with Dioramic Effects* (1896) and *Railway Pictures: a Panorama Book for Children* (1909). *Peepshow Pictures: A Novel Colour Book* is typical in that it consists of short poems with illustrations, some of which were in pop-up form to create three-dimensional scenes. The opening poem, on a page covered with circular images in the fashion of projected lantern slides, is akin to that of Kriss Kringle, Sergeant Bell

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and Professor Wolley-Cobble in that it sets out the book as a peepshow entertainment:

This is the Peepshow Picture Book
All you've to do,
Went [sic] you want to look
Is open the pages not too wide
And see what you can find inside.

You'll see there's not all in the land
A Picture Peepshow that's half so grand
You'll exclaim before it's done,
It's quite as good as the real one!

It's open always, night and day,
As long as you like to, you can stay;
From Mother kind to Baby small
This Peepshow book is free to all!

But there's one thing I ought to say,
Everyone must this rule obey;
Turn its pages with care
Never a finger-mark or tear!⁴¹

Significantly, Nister sets out the book as an improvement on the travelling peepshow. Unlike those exhibited in the street, it could be viewed at any time and for as long as you wanted, and each viewing cost nothing. In its remediation of the peepshow, the illustrated book makes the most of the specificities of its own material form.

Two other movable Nister books, *Our Peep-Show* and the *Little Folk's Peepshow. A Novel Picture Book* (1898) exemplify the use of circular transforming pictures akin to dissolving lantern views. *Our Peep-Show* consists of verse together with a moving disc which the reader could turn to reveal a series of pictures. The first page shows a group of children going to visit a peepshow, with an accompanying poem that foregrounds the viewing experience of the book:

Walk up! walk up! Come this way.
For our show's on view to-day;
If you'll kindly peep inside,
Quite a treat we will provide.⁴²

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Nister's *Little Folk's Peepshow. A Novel Picture Book* similarly has a peepshow man and his juvenile audience-cum-readers on the front cover, suggesting, like Kriss Kringle and Peter Parley, a collective rather than individualistic viewing experience. Another example of this technique can be seen in *The Magic Lantern Struwwelpeter* (1896), which has a young showman pointing to moving circular images that portray different scenes from a poem on the opposite page. The bright circular images clearly resemble projected lantern slides (see [fig. 28](#); [fig. 29](#)).

Despite the employment of a lantern form, the conventional opening rhyme of *Little Folk's Peepshow* nonetheless again presents it as a peepshow, declaring that the dissolving view feature gives it more technological novelty and wonder than conventional peepshows. One remediated optical format – the dissolving view – is used to justify why this peepshow-in-print is better than another optical recreation, the travelling peepshow:

It's better than all other peep shows
That ever were looked at, my dears;
When one picture vanishes, straightaway
Another one quickly appears.

A Baby who would be a sailor
Will change in a trace, you will see,
To a Baby at play in the hayfield,
As happy as happy can be!⁴³

In their use of the showman figure to introduce the book, the opening poems of *Our Peep-Show* and *Little Folk's Peepshow. A Novel Picture Book* demonstrate what Verity Hunt has noted as an important characteristic of Nister's work. Hunt argues that Nister often appears within his books as an impresario figure, both showing off his technological ingenuity as a designer and providing a mediating hand to guide his young readers over how the movable scenes should be understood.⁴⁴

The appropriation of the peepshow format by children's movable books in the latter decades of the nineteenth century is notable insofar as it was a form of entertainment in almost terminal decline. James Greenwood's *Mysteries of Modern London* (1883) named peepshow men as one of the street performers 'who have been less fortunate in retaining a hold on the affections of the public'.⁴⁵ The last Greenwood remembered seeing was in Camden Town, and he had reached a stage of

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penury where the show could be seen for rag and bones, or some old bottles. Money was no longer a prerequisite as the show catered for the poorest segment of working-class children. Alfred Rosling Bennett, looking back on 1850s and 1860s London, similarly fancied that ‘this device was decrepit and well on its way to extinction in the 1850s, for its professors were usually poor fellows of the shabbiest description’.⁴⁶ Events such as the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny and the Sayers-Heenan fight provided brief spasms of interest but nothing more, and thus ‘the Raree show died its death, at least in London’.⁴⁷

A poem by Henry Chance Newton published in 1886 tells of the obsolescence of the penny showman. Recounted through the character of a peep-show man who continued to display his hackneyed scenes, such as of the murder of Maria Martin that took place as far back as 1827, he blamed the decline of his art on the rise of formal education. The knowledge provided by his crude visuals of far-off places of Europe and beyond, and the accompanying ‘lecture’ on the historical and cultural import of the scene, was now being fulfilled by board Schools and the burgeoning number of illustrated children’s periodicals:

That’s the way I rattle on, my friends, in ev’ry street or lane,
But receipts is sadly fallin’ off – the drammer’s on the wane!
The kids is too enlightened *now* to patternise my show,
All a-owing to the School Board teaching ‘em such things is low.

[. . .] No; I’ll defy the workus, gents, alone I’ll toddle on,
Though, like Otherller in the play, ‘my occupations gone!’⁴⁸

Given the increasing outmoded nature of the peepshow, why did many movable books draw on it as a structuring trope for their visual novelty? It seems likely that its remediation both drew upon its popularity but was also part of its decline. The peep-show was being superseded by illustrated books and periodicals, some of which were also appropriating its aesthetic. Moreover, they had none of the crudities of the showman, whose dress had often seen better times and whose pictures were usually crudely-painted.

This essay has so far focused on the remediation of optical recreations by print media; however, it is important to emphasise that this creative crossover was always a two-way dynamic. To give just one example: at the same time as the

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movable books of the 1890s were often turning to the peepshow, the stereoscope was enjoying a revival of popularity due to the availability of a series of elaborately produced stereoscopic tours that sought to provide an immediate and interactive experience of distant countries. In their physical and creative design, they appeared as a new form of visual encyclopaedia – the multimedia Encarta of its time – that combined print, cartography and three-dimensional images, and would supersede much traditional book-learning in the areas of geography, natural history, history, art and architecture.

When the stereoscope had first emerged in the early 1850s (and in so doing contributed significantly to the decline of the peepshow), there were idealistic hopes for its long-term communicative role as a purveyor of visual information. Oliver Wendell-Holmes proposed a system of stereograph libraries containing images of all the sites of the world, while David Brewster claimed that it provided an improved means of teaching natural history and geography and would offer numerous possibilities for engineers, architects, and sculptors.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the expense of individual stereographs and the lack of a standard format meant that it remained more of a novel philosophical toy. After a significant decline in its popularity, the 1890s saw a revived interest in the stereoscope that lasted until at least the First World War. The most significant international producer of stereographs during this period, and a key driver of the revival, was the American firm Underwood and Underwood. In 1901, Underwood was reputedly producing 25,000 stereographs per day and selling nearly 300,000 stereoscopes annually.⁵⁰ The success of Underwood and rivals like the Keystone View Company was primarily due to the way they updated the marketing, packaging, and distribution of stereographs.⁵¹

Underwood's most significant innovation was the production of stereograph tours. Although the trope of the stereoscopic tour dates back to the 1850s, Underwood's tours represent its most sophisticated development. As far as possible they sought to literalize the idea of the stereoscopic traveller. Tours were used to create a coherent package, centred on a country or an event, which could be consumed as an evening's entertainment or as a classroom lesson. Underwood's first full tours were *Journeys in the Holy Land Through the Perfecscope* (1897) and *The*

Land of the Pharaohs Through the Perfecscope (1897). They consisted of stereographs of scenes arranged in the order that a traveller might visit them, accompanied by a short descriptive guidebook. The larger tours usually included 100 stereographs, although some of the most popular ones were available with different numbers of cards.⁵²

The stereoscopic tour's ability to function as a substitute for travel reached its zenith in what became known as the Underwood Travel System, which was deemed commercially important enough to be patented in both the USA (21 August 1900) and Britain (22 March 1900). The first stereoscopic tour using the patented travel system was a new Palestine Set called *Travelling in the Holy Land Through The Stereoscope* (1900). It was accompanied by seven maps, which showed the route taken by the tour and the exact field of vision of each stereograph, as well as a guidebook of over 200 pages by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, author of several publications for Sunday Schools.⁵³ The guidebook provided extensive topographical information on each picture, as well as an historical and social overview of the respective country or area. Underwood repeatedly stressed that the value of stereographs stemmed from the amount of time that should be spent on each of them:

Do not move from place to place too rapidly – this is the greatest mistake people make in travelling. Each place should be studied and pondered over. Usually illustrations and photographs serve merely as embellishment or supplement to the text or reading matter of a book or article. In this case that order is reversed. *The places themselves* are the text, and all that is given on the backs of the stereograph mounts or in this book is intended as a help to their profitable study.⁵⁴

Underwood stereographs claimed to reverse the traditional hierarchy between written and visual forms because of the immersive viewing experience of the stereoscope. The combination of visual and printed information in Underwood's Travel System underpinned its claims for the educational value of its tours, which were marketed widely to schools, colleges and universities in both America and Britain.

Whereas movable books attempt to incorporate optical effects within the traditional codex form, Underwood's Travel System asserted the primacy of optical over printed communication. This was reinforced by the final development in their

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Travel System, the packaging of tours to resemble hardcover books. It was a design feature that stressed the refined social and educational status of Underwood's tours, and, more ambitiously, suggested that their stereoscopic library could actually replace a set of reference books. Taken together, their tours constituted a multimedia encyclopaedia of the world ([see fig. 30](#)). British firms, notably Sunbeam Tours, Realistic Travels, and the B-P Series of Stereoscopic Views, copied the stereoscope tour format developed by Underwood. Sunbeam Tours, a London-based firm, are typical in that they produced a series of stereoscopic tours of 36 stereographs, complete with a short guidebook. As with Underwood and Keystone, their volume cases were made to look like books ([see fig. 31](#)).

While the broader influence of cinema upon modernism has been extensively examined, Ian Christie has recently argued that 'the detailed contextualisation of nineteenth-century optical devices still awaits serious study'.⁵⁵ This essay is a small contribution towards demonstrating the creative and commercial influence of optical recreations upon nineteenth-century culture as a whole. Magic lanterns, peepshows, and dioramas did not just stand as figures for the working of the imagination; they offered a visual format that could be imaginatively translated into other media, from children's books and toys to satirical prints ([see fig. 32](#)). This infiltration into everyday life is key to understanding the cultural impact of optical recreations. Moreover, it also offers a link towards understanding the way cinema subsequently had such an influence through its associated products and merchandising. The advent of the cinematograph at the end of the century, for example, produced a number of children's books that sought to provide their own version of these new moving-pictures. Flick books were produced in large numbers, while other publications included *The Motograph Moving Picture Book* (1898) and *The Christmas Magic Motion Picture Book* (1909). Only by tracing the multiple interactions between print, optical and graphic media is it possible to further demonstrate the intermediality characterising nineteenth-century popular culture.

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⁵ See Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A Visual History* (London: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), pp. 18-19.

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- ¹² Terry Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie,' *Critical Inquiry*, 15:1 (1988), 26-61; Isobel Armstrong, 'The Lady of Shallott: Optical Elegy,' in James Lyons and John Plunkett, eds, *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, (Exeter: Exeter UP, 2007), pp. 179-93.
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- ¹⁸ *Kriss Kringle's Raree Show for Boys and Girls* (New York: W.H. Murphy, 1845), p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 80.
- ²⁰ *Kriss Kringle's Raree Show for Boys and Girls*, p. 6.
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- ²² Peter Parley, *Sergeant Bell and His Raree Show* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1839), p. 231.
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- ²⁴ *The Picture Pleasure Book* was also available in sixteen individual numbers at sixpence each. A series *Picture Pleasure Book* (1854) was subsequently produced.
- ²⁵ Professor Wolley Cobble, *The Fool's Paradise; with the many wonderful adventures there as seen in the strange surprising peepshow of Professor Wolley Cobble* (London: J.C. Hotten, 1872), n.p.
- ²⁶ Professor Wolley Cobble, n.p.
- ²⁷ See also Mrs George Cupples, *The Pretty Marmoset* (1875); 'The Peepshow,' *The Baptists Children's Magazine and Youth's Missionary Repository*, 3 (1847), 57-62: 62. Balzer also provides illustrations of more American examples, pp. 122-24.
- ²⁸ *The Peep-Show: A Picture Magazine for Little Readers*, 1 (May 1876), endmatter.

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²⁹ See Richard Noakes, 'The *Boy's Own Paper* and Late-Victorian Juvenile Magazine' in *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature* ed. by Cantor, Dawson et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 151-171.

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³³ On the history of movable books, see Peter Haining, *Movable Books: An Illustrated History* (London: New English Library, 1979).

³⁴ See John Plunkett, 'Transparencies, Optical Recreations, and the Invention of the Screen,' in *Visual Delights II*, ed. by Simon Popple and Vanessa Toulmin (London: John Libbey, 2005), pp. 175-93.

³⁵ This tab-transformation has been claimed as Dean and Son's particular invention, see Ann Montanaro, 'A Concise History of Pop-up and Movable Books' <<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/montanar/p-intro.htm>> [accessed 20 May 2007H].

³⁶ Percy Muir, *English Children's Book 1600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1954), pp. 234-236. Muir provides information on several series of movable books published by Dean and Co.

³⁷ Mrs Fanny Cousens, *Pleasant Peeps At Cosmoramic Pictures With Pleasant Tales* (London: Dean and Son, 1870), endmatter.

³⁸ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*, p. 81.

³⁹ Mrs Fanny Cousens, *Pleasant Peeps At Cosmoramic Pictures With Pleasant Tales*, the instructions are on the rear of the first illustration.

⁴⁰ Nister's titles were also available in the USA in that they were published in conjunction with the New York firm of E.P. Dutton.

⁴¹ *Peepshow Pictures. A Novel Colour Book* (London: Ernest Nister; New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1894), n.p.

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- ⁴² *Our Peep Show. Verses by Constance Low with Pen and Ink Illustrations by Edith A. Cubitt* (London: Ernest Nister; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1902), 1.
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- ⁴⁴ Verity Hunt, 'Technologies of Wonder: Optics, Perception and the Book in mid to late Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture', Ph.D. thesis (University of Reading, forthcoming 2008), published in French as Verity Hunt, 'Regarde mais ne touche pas!: Émerveillement de l'enfant, instruction et contrôle dans les livres à système de la fin du XIXe siècle,' in *Le livre pour enfants*, ed. by Cécile Boulaire (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), pp. 149-160. Hunt notes that in *Touch and Go* (London: Nister, c. 1894) he appears alongside Santa dressed in a Santa suit giving out books to children; in *Pleasant Surprises: for folks of all sizes* (London: Nister, 1892) he appears as a farmer on 'Story-Farm', growing picture books from letters of the alphabet and giving them to children.
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- ⁵⁵ Ian Christie, 'Toys, Instruments, Machines: Why the Hardware Matters,' in *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, p. 19.

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