

THE MAGIC LANTERN IN SPANISH TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

Miguel Herrero Herrero

The magic lantern has possibilities on television, both for entertainment and factual content. In the Spanish television programme *Cuarto Milenio* ('Fourth Millennium') (Cuatro TV), on which I am a collaborator specialising in media archaeology, we have been developing possibilities with the magic lantern and other optical devices that preceded cinema and audiovisuals. The programme is one of the most popular and long-running television shows in Spain – already 18 seasons – presented and directed by Iker Jiménez. As an eminent professor of physics, a pioneer in aeronautics and a master of phantasmagoria shows, he maintains the soul of Robertson (Étienne-Gaspard Robert, 1763-1837). *Cuarto Milenio* is a mystery show that brings together scientific dissemination, archaeology, history, criminology, new technologies, etc., with fascinating audiovisual pieces carefully recreating scenes with actors.

On 29 January 2023, 'Robertson's Phantasmagorias' was broadcast, in which I was able to play Robertson himself and perform several phantasmagoria sequences. These came from my show *Fantasmagorías* that I perform, using 19th-century phantasmagoria magic lantern slides from my private collection. The programme was seen by more than 3,700,000 viewers, not only in Spain but also in Latin America. We know that we awakened stirrings of potential lanternists in many viewers as we received messages such as: "What do I have to do to be a lanternist?" or "I want a magic lantern." The section with 'Robertson's Phantasmagorias', lasting more than half an hour, can be viewed at: www.cuatro.com/cuarto-milenio/alcarta/20230129/ver-programa-completo_18_08578373.html (from 01:18:00).

The magic lantern can also have its place in television magazine programmes, designed for a wide audience in which news, humour, performances, etc. are combined. In the programme *Bona Vesprada* ('Good Afternoon') (À Punt TV) in Valencia, presented by the former



Miguel demonstrates a slide of an erupting volcano to Mximo Huerta and María Fuster



Miguel showing presenter and director Iker Jiménez an 1890 W.C. Hughes magic lantern and slides on Cuarto Milenio

Minister of Culture for Spain and renowned writer Mximo Huerta, we put on an exhibition of 18th- and 19th-century optical devices from our own collection, including several magic lanterns and slides. Combined with information about them, this arouses curiosity about these, for most of the audience, unusual pieces. In addition, it must be remembered that many lanternists were also illusionists and that in the magic lantern sessions, in addition to showing optical devices, some magic tricks were also performed – in this case card tricks as a prelude. The section in the programme titled 'Illusionism XIX', exhibition 'Artugios para ilusionar' (Gadgets for Illusion) Miguel Herrero Herrero collection', can be seen on the Cinestesia YouTube channel at the following links:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBBLir7fq-c

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bvWWWYvZPzA

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvRjxaH8G1c&t=11s

There are other types of television programme in which objects are the main focus. These vary from buying and selling antiques to a documentary series about the objects. For example, the programme *Tresors amb Història* ('Treasures with History') (À Punt TV) focuses on the history and dissemination of vintage objects. For the programme I presented the magic lantern and performed a small session with slides from my collection. The programme can be seen at the following link on the YouTube channel Cinestesia:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tFGANsJyTw

As we can see in the 21st century, the magic lantern has its place on television. These are some ideas that I have been able to develop in Spain – do try the same in your countries. Good luck and enjoy!



The internet links in this article are also in issue 84 (April 2023 edition) of the MLS online newsletter Connect so you can avoid retyping them.