

Fairy Tale Love: Little Red Riding Hood and Photography, 1820–1920

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Prologue

Love is such a classic narrative of the fairy tale genre that the term (or cliché) ‘fairy tale romance’ is ubiquitously used either to applaud or decry unrealistic expectations of beauty, sacrificial femininity, male chivalry, love at first sight, romantic marriage or happily ever after. Fairy tale historian Jack Zipes argues that mass-mediatised versions, like some of the fairy tale images in this chapter,¹ have produced a universal voice and image which stultifies the public with escapist fantasy. But for critic Marina Warner and many others, fairy tale is a feminist genre, optative rather than prescriptive (suggestive of ‘if only’, rather than ‘you must’), which offers women a voice with which to critique love, from the literary tales of the seventeenth century to the disjunctive retellings of contemporary feminism.² As a highly metamorphic genre that has flourished in diverse media including oral tradition, literature, film and the visual arts, fairy tale has a great deal to say about love in all its forms, understood as an emotion with social, political and gendered affects and effects. Thus, in a sense, fairy tale love is at once both romantic cliché and its savage critique.

The child is of course another complex (adult) construction into which Rousseau and the Romantics invested ideals of inherent innocent love from a ‘natural’ pure point of origin that society corrupts. Given the flagrantly unequal power relations of child to adult, Jacqueline Rose’s study of Peter Pan phenomena declared children’s literature to be an ‘impossibility’ that serves adult needs to secure an imagined childhood innocence.³ In figures such as Peter Pan who famously refused to grow up, the ‘Golden Age’ of the nineteenth century saw what Ernest Dowson (1889) celebrated as the ‘Cult of Childhood’,⁴ with adults

¹ Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (London: Routledge, 1983).

² Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Virago, 1995).

³ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴ ‘Dowson and other members of the “cult” insisted that contemplating the innocent simplicity of children served as a healthy corrective to the tawdriness and scepticism of modern life’, according to Marah Gubar, in *Representing Childhood: The Victorian Child 1837–1901* (2024).

arguing that the love of children somehow cured society of evil. Manufactured as a figure both incorrupt and corruptible, the female child was particularly susceptible to this simultaneous idealisation and eroticisation.

It could be also said that the Victorians began a love affair with fairy tale and photography. Exploring fairy tale love as depicted via English photographs of children over the long Victorian period necessitates both a selective perspective and selection of images, but in so doing, I am aware that the study also necessarily omits images of working-class and minoritised children in England, who, rather than posing for fairy tale pictures over this period, were working the streets, factories and chimneys for the privileged and powerful. The Victorian period is often accused of being a particularly hypocritical one, in which the majority of actual childhoods, entirely unlike many idealistic depictions, were hard times. Perhaps, rather than a hypocritical age, it was one of extreme tensions: the threat to religion with the advent of science and technology, prosperity gained at the expense of poverty and enslavement, and child idealisation amidst high rates of child labour and child mortality.

Eager to understand its own complexity, the era is marked by technical innovation – such as photography’s invention – joined with physiognomy and other pseudo-sciences using the new medium to support spurious and prejudicial claims for reading, classifying and categorising the body. Yet many Victorians also believed in fairies, and that external signs – visible in photographs – could reflect the workings of the soul. In her study of the assimilation of the photographic image into literary rhetoric, Helen Groth claims that ‘the invention of photography complicated the always troubled distinction between illusion and truth, realism and romance in the Victorian period’.⁵ Within this troubled arena, this chapter addresses illusory, faked, fairy tale forms of love in photography of the child. Thus, love of/for the child carried the period’s uncertain slippage between representations – or performances of – platonic, romantic, spiritualised, naturalised and sexualised objects of commodification and consumption. Within this troubled arena, this chapter addresses illusory, fairy tale forms of love in photography of the child.

Once upon a time, fairy tale

Anthropological research finds the origins of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in an oral tale passed around in tenth-century France to Italy, where variants such as ‘La Finta Nona’ [The False Grandmother] were created. In the oldest variants,

⁵ Helen Groth, *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

the child is deceived by the disguised wolf into eating her grandmother's flesh and drinking her blood, getting into bed with the wolf, but saving herself from being eaten by deceiving the wolf in turn. Migrating easily to different versions and media, the tale has what adaptation theorists Gaudreault and Marion call the 'adaptogénie' of a text,⁶ or what Emer O'Sullivan describes as a 'quarry' for adaptors 'from which pieces can be taken and put together' in folkloric mode.⁷

Histories, or Tales of Past Times (1697) (published in English by 1729) by Charles Perrault,⁸ who is credited with laying the foundations of the new bourgeois genre of fairy tale, removed all gory cannibalistic reference and sexual or female initiative. His 'Le Petite Chaperon Rouge', ending with the child eaten by the wolf, is a warning to readers of the dangers of strangers preying on young girls. The Brothers Grimm used the French version in turn, told to them by Marie Hassenflug of Huguenot background, for their 'Rotkäppchen' ['Little Red Cap'] (1812), though they defined the tale as uniquely German, because they believed, as did Hitler, such stories were reflective of German culture.⁹ As editors, the Grimms further censored and sanitised the tale's origins by removing sexual or violent elements, securing the child's rescue from a male patriarch and adding a didactic warning, thus altering the tale very fundamentally and ideologically.

According to Hans-Wolf Jäger, 'Rotkäppchen' was also a commentary on the French invasion of the Rhineland during the Napoleonic wars. The French were associated with wolves at the time, hence the child in a red cap could be read as the innocent German youth first drawn to the revolution, then repulsed by its cruelty and barbarism. The Grimms reworked the tale into an explicit narrative of law and order, reversing the child/girl's initiative for conformity. For Zipes, 'it is impossible to exaggerate the impact and importance of the Little Red Riding Hood syndrome as a dominant cultural pattern in western societies'.¹⁰ While pointing out the era also included some parodies, presumably

⁶ A. Gaudreault and P. Marion, 'An art of borrowing: the intermedial sources of adaptation', in D. Cutchins, K. Brebbs and E. Voigts, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2018), 31.

⁷ Emer O'Sullivan, 'Does Pinocchio have an Italian Passport?' in G. Lathey, ed., *The Translation of Children's Literature: A Reader* (Cleveland: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 160.

⁸ Charles Perrault, *Histories, or Tales of Past Times* (Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 2020)

⁹ This was later to resurface in Nazi Germany, where nationalist propaganda 'sought to ground all the Grimms' tales in German blood and soil, though many originated in France and elsewhere in Europe' (Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 35).

¹⁰ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 56.

intended for adult audiences, such as F. W. N. Bayley's 'Comic Nursery Rhymes' (1846), his research reveals that for the Victorians, 'Little Red Riding Hood' largely swung between the Perrault and the Grimm 'regulatory' versions, of 'male creation and projections', 'tame and prudent' warning to control children and women's 'carnality', that 'reflects men's fear of women's sexuality – and their own as well ... in other words, that Little Red Riding Hood is to blame for her own rape'.¹¹ In Germanic thinking, fairy tales were an integral part of German Romanticism with its qualities of wonder and enchantment, spiritual and psychological insights, picked up as a vehicle for the rational mind of the German Enlightenment and to transmit didactic, moralistic messages. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Brothers Grimm were not writers but librarians and editors, collecting their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*, 1812) predominantly from women, then adjusting the stories to fit a patriarchal paradigm. They gave us evil stepmothers, children-eating witches, and so on, though scholars have since exposed the fact that for example, the region where the tale Hansel and Gretel originates has graveyards full of mothers who starved to death in a famine rather than let their husbands or children go without food. That, too, is a form of love, but apparently not one that men could stomach.

Notwithstanding its censorship, the genre was clearly loved by the Victorians. Fairy tale, fantasy and nonsense were popular forms for page and stage, from chapbooks and weeklies sold in the street to leather-bound literary collections, and in theatre, music hall and ballet. Well-known writers such as Dickens and Thackeray produced works with fantastic elements, and many writers followed suit with fairy tales in periodicals for adults and children. Traces of 'Little Red Riding Hood' can be found in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1862), and other sensation novels of the Victorian period with their plot devices of uncertainty and melodrama, such as Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White* (1860) or Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), following fairy story structures involving rags-to-riches, murder, bigamy and adultery. Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf featured in scrapbooks, on story cards, postcards, in paintings and popular prints, figurines, vases, cups and bowls for children, as dolls, and fancy-dress costumes. Thus, the tale (along with photographs of the characters) went through its own nineteenth-century process of beloved cultural 'artefactualisation'.¹²

¹¹ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 57.

¹² Susan Stewart, 'Notes on Distressed Genres', *The Journal of American Folklore* 104 (1991), 5–31.



Figure 3.1. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *le Gras*, France, 1827, the earliest saved photographic image, heliograph on pewter plate, open domain.

‘Photogenic drawing’ or ‘fixing a shadow’ is what Nicéphore Niépce called the first stages of photography’s invention.¹³ John Herschel coined the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ to describe what Geoffrey Batchen calls ‘the processes’ magnet-like bipolar character.¹⁴ Calling it ‘the miracle of analogy’, Kaja Silverman outlines how cameras themselves rapidly improved in design from the huge unwieldy boxes of the 1830s mounted on tripods to Lewis Carroll’s Otterwill folding camera of 1856 and Thomas Skiafe’s fast-lens version of 1858 modelled on a gun which he called the ‘Pistol-graph’ (perhaps foolishly, as pointing it at Queen

¹³ Nicéphore Niépce quoted in Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ John Herschel quoted in Wells’ *Photography*. Batchen also sees the term as indicative of photography’s central paradoxes: ‘photo’ meaning ‘light’, inferring ‘(sun, God, nature)’ and ‘graph’ that of ‘writing (history, humankind, culture); an impossible binary opposition fixed in uneasy conjunction only by the artifice of language’, in ‘The Naming of Photography’ *History of Photography*, 17:1 (1993), 28–29.

Victoria almost resulted in Skiafe's arrest).¹⁵ Photography, as a technological process, also represented a challenge to Victorian mores about what constituted art. 'Frequently imaged in contemporary writing as the "new child" abroad in the world; to Wiertz in 1855, the daguerreotype was an "infant prodigy"'.¹⁶ A reviewer of the 1856 Photographic Exhibition in London presented photography as 'Art's youngest and fairest child'.¹⁷ Writing 15 years after its invention, Lady Eastlake, a photographer in her own right, announced that:

Photography has become a household word and a household want; it is used alike by art and science, by love, business and justice; is found in the most sumptuous saloon and the dingiest attic – in the solitude of the Highland cottage and the glare of the London gin palace – in the pocket of the detective, in the cell of the convict, in the folio of the painter and the architect, among the papers and patterns of the mill owner and manufacturer and on the cold breast of the battlefield.¹⁸

What she omitted from her list was the fact that this metaphoric 'infant' apparatus was also very frequently turned on the infant; pointed at real children. Eastlake was also anticipating how ubiquitous and classless the medium would become by several decades. In 1859, Charles Baudelaire advised only using photography as 'secretary and record-keeper', linking its invasion to the 'great industrial madness of today' and warning that it threatened to 'supplant or corrupt art altogether'.¹⁹ In fact, 'pictorial' photography, from the 1850s onwards, sought to overcome the problem Baudelaire had warned of by taking meticulously arranged compositions and reducing the signifiers of technological production, such as making the image deliberately out of focus and scratching or marking the print to evoke a canvas. Such efforts to appear painterly can also account for the trend for religious scenes, allegorical and fairy tale subjects (thereby placing the connotations of the industrial age far ahead). So, in reflecting on photographs of Little Red Riding Hood, we start with the kind of painting they may emulate.

This *Little Red Riding Hood* was painted in 1851 as John Thomas Peele returned to London from having some success with idealised genre subjects featuring children (invariably in bare feet, with pets, butterflies, doves, and so on) in New York. Little Red Riding Hood is standing poised outside her grandmother's house with her

¹⁵ Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, or the History of Photography, Part 1* (California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁶ Wiertz quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 15.

¹⁷ C. Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 132.

¹⁸ Eastlake quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 16.

¹⁹ Baudelaire quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 13.



Figure 3.2. John Thomas Peele, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 1851, oil on canvas, 49 x 38 in, Private Collection.

basket, about to go in and face the wolf (Figure 3.2). The Victorian viewer would know that the wolf is in bed disguised as grandmother, and the next scene will involve the ‘what big eyes/teeth you have’ refrain, followed by her being eaten.

Then he put the poor lady’s night cap on his head
 And cunningly slipped himself into the bed;
 And when Riding Hood knocked as she’d oft done before,
 Says the wolf ‘Pull the bobbin, it will open the door ...’
 (from *The History of Little Red Riding Hood*, Juvenile Books, J. L. Marks,
 Smithfield, 1840)

As Zipes’ research and Peele’s painting demonstrate, Victorian English versions of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ censored out the tale’s former frankness about sexuality and dangers in the woods into a ‘coded message about rationalising bodies and sex... altering the tale ideologically to satisfy the morals and ethics

of the emerging bourgeoisie in the nineteenth-century'.²⁰ Peele focuses careful attention on the materiality of the scene: the drapery of the child's fancy-dress costume as she turns to face the viewer while pulling the bobbin, the white linen spilling over the basket, the cracked stone doorway out of which the hollyhocks are growing, tall as the child. The painterly metaphors are those of threatened innocence, growth and fecundity: in the rosy child, the flowering abundance of the mallow and the grape vine, contradicted by the dark shadow of the door (evoking the wolf on the other side of it). Looking up from under her red hood, the child's expression seems both knowing and inviting.

This particular moment in the fairy tale is revisited again and again in photographs, perhaps because it does not involve (how to depict) the wolf, yet of course the wolf is inferred. Typically, though the child's shining curled ringlets and white skin suggest she is not of the rural classes, she is posed in a white apron, red cloak and hood with a linen-covered basket, knocking at a wooden door framed with ivy, plus a few other rustic props, such as milk jug.



Figure 3.3. Anon., *Roodkapje klopt op grootmoeders deur* [Little Red Riding Hood knocks on grandmother's door] 1853–1863, hand-coloured stereograph, 85 mm x 173 mm, open domain.

'Cartes de visite' or visiting cards (Figure 3.4) were small-format photographs patented in Paris by the photographer André Disdéri in 1854, with his multi-lens camera. As an early form of social media, photographic cards were commonly traded among friends and visitors in the Victorian period. Albums for the collection and display of cards became a common fixture in

²⁰ Zipes, *The Trails and Tribulations*, 40.



Figure 3.4. Anon., *When the little girl knocks, he says, 'open the latch and come in'*, 1898–1903, hand-coloured photograph, L'éditeur Künzli Frères (Paris), 141 x 93 mm, open domain.

Victorian parlours. Queen Victoria collected visiting cards and photographs that she placed in over 100 albums, launching a new scrapbooking craze of 'cartomania'. The practice became a status symbol among the privileged class. As it gained momentum, it also gave weight to an emerging photography culture and commodification.²¹

Hand-coloured after printing, (often done by young women on male photographer's instructions) these visiting cards are unusual for being taken out of doors rather than posed on front of artist-produced country scenes (which studio photographers could commission, then use again and again). Small cultural differences, such as the French version (Figure 3.4) with the lace door curtains, the broderie apron and wicker tray, would have charmed international buyers,

²¹ This commodification mirrors historians describing nineteenth century science as a collecting practice.

and Batchen & Gitelman believe that it was the success of the *carte de visite* that led to photography's institutionalisation across Europe. The sudden proliferation of reproducible images that were both 'magical and empirical modes of storytelling',²² classifying things and people, meant new kinds of observers emerged – with new commercial interests. In this way, fairy tale also became co-opted into commercialised use, with certain fixed tropes and meanings, such as the trope of Little Red Riding Hood at the door.

Taking on Enlightenment ideals of the child as born good but in need of formation, and in the arts as representative of perfect, angelic morality (as found in Sir 'Sloshua'²³ Reynolds' child paintings) youth and innocence continued to be conflated and admired in the Victorian era. Incapable of consummating his marriage to Effie Gray (whom he met when she was twelve and he twenty-one) John Ruskin fell disastrously in love with Rose la Touche when she was ten and he forty. The tension in many fairy tales, and perhaps especially 'Little Red Riding Hood', speaks of love's continuum from innocence to experience, of normative to pathological or bestial love and love on the edge of acceptability, like Lewis Carroll's photograph of Alfred Lord Tennyson's niece Agnes Grace Weld as *The Little Red Riding Hood* (Figure 3.5). Carroll asked Agnes to act out the lines from a poem that he inscribed in his album next to the photograph: 'And now at last she threads the maze, / And now she need not fear / Nor trembles she, nor turns nor stays, / Although the wolf be near'.

Friend to many more children than adults, and less conscious of his lifelong stutter with the young, Carroll famously told stories to the girls as he posed them, and one sitter recalled fifty years later his skills in playfulness 'that still live in the memory after all these years', and how the children enjoyed the magical sessions, given 'his traffic with the fairies seemed a very definite thing to us, then. He was, so to speak, the link between them and us, the "middleman" in fact, and the Interpreter'.²⁴ Carroll sent the children signed copies of their photos and wrote them miniature notes in 'fairy writing' using a fine nib on 'Lilliputian Stationary'. The playfulness of Carroll's books, letters, games and stories thus became part of the photographic process, and this, Diane Waggoner believes, means his images are 'one of the first attempts to visualise difference between

²² Geoffrey Batchen and Lisa Gitelman, 'Afterword: Media History and History of Photography in Parallel Lines' in Nicoletta Leonardi and Simone Natale, eds, *Photography and Other Media in the Nineteenth Century* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2019), 15.

²³ Around 1848 the Pre-Raphaelite painters called Joshua Reynolds 'Sir Sloshua' as they objected to his influence for lax painting technique or commonplace genre scenes and portraits.

²⁴ Dymphna Ellis quoted in Diane Waggoner, *Lewis Carroll's Photography and Modern Childhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 109.



Figure 3.5. Lewis Carroll, *The Little Red Riding Hood*, 1857, one of only three images Carroll allowed the public to see in his lifetime (at the 5th Annual Exhibition of the Photographic Society, South Kensington Museum, 1858), 650 x 963 mm, open domain.

children and adults in the new medium of photography...[assuming] the role of the interpreter between the world of the child and the world of the adult',²⁵ signifying a significant shift away from untroubled romanticised love of the child and its world to something more conspiratorial.

Given the deliberate staging of the shot, it is possible that Carroll was also playing interpreter or 'middleman' between photographer and sitter, real and fairy world by suggesting the child herself as wolf. Agnes is anything but meek and is scowling, looking up threateningly from under her eyebrows, leading to Carol Mavor's response: 'Here are the eyes of the wolf that has presumably just eaten her grandmother; we wonder whether she has eaten the wolf, and whether

²⁵ In Marilyn Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: constructions of the child between Rousseau and Freud* (London: Ashgate, 2002), 159.

she is about ready to eat us up'.²⁶ Is there perhaps an element of this tale that speaks of the paedophile fantasies of adults imagining themselves innocent while imitating an aesthetics of eroticism? Displacing the taboo by representing the child as knowing? For Wakely-Mulroney, 'evidence of this not only in the author's correspondence, where he worked to persuade parents that his interest in naked girls was wholly artistic, but also in the diaries, where he worked to persuade himself'. She believes that Carroll, particularly though his later work exploring 'romantic but chaste' thus 'permissible forms of child-loving' in *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), was attempting to reconcile the creator of Alice with that of 'the clergyman concerned for the child's soul',²⁷ and that of his own ambiguous sexuality.

Apparently, negative Oxford gossip about Carroll's interest in photographing young girls, including in the nude, may have contributed to his destroying negatives and giving photography up by 1880. Given Seth Koven's research in the social and sexual politics of 'slumming' London suggests the Victorian 'public were well aware of the existence of a large underground market in pornographic photos of women and children',²⁸ it is perhaps no surprise that on his instructions after his death, Carroll's executors destroyed a collection of nude photographs of children gathered in an envelope marked 'honi soit' – an act which has only succeeded in further incriminating the photographer. As Wakely-Mulroney puts it, the abbreviated chivalric maxim 'honi soit qui mal y pense' ('shame be to him who thinks evil of it') 'underscores Carroll's awareness of the images' potential eroticism' while in his (conscious) mind, perhaps, exonerating himself in posterum.²⁹

Laurence Talaraich-Veilmas argues that several examples of Carroll's photography reveal how, rather than the stereotyped motif of 'the angel in the house', the 'Victorian feminine ideal was poised over contradictory discourses which the rise of capitalism brought to climactic excess'.³⁰ He cites Harriet Louisa Child-Pemberton's late Victorian *All My Doing or Red Riding Hood Over Again* (1882) which opens in a nursery discussion where the narrator agrees with her niece that 'we don't meet with wolves now, and if we did, we couldn't talk to them'.³¹

²⁶ Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London: J.B. Tauris, 1994), 29.

²⁷ Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'The Man Who Loved Children: Lewis Carroll Studies' Evidence Problem' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 30:3 (2021), 349.

²⁸ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 118.

²⁹ Katherine Wakely-Mulroney, 'The Man Who Loved Children', 361.

³⁰ Laurence Talaraich-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (London: Ashgate, 2007), 5.

³¹ Talaraich-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, 211.

The narrator then, however, recounts a true-life story about taking a train to her grandmother as a heedless young woman, wearing 'red stockings and a crimson cloak', meeting a dapper little man whose looks are somehow 'unreadable' but whose manners are so good he cannot be an 'ow ruffian', despite the fact that an austere woman in the same carriage 'casts severe and suspicious glances at him'. The wolf-man discovers her direction, robs her of her purse, and later inveigles himself into her grandmother's house, ostensibly to see and sketch the carvings and mouldings. Here, his big eyes are wide open, taking in the costly commodities of pictures, mirrors, china. One night the place is robbed of jewellery and other valuables, the thief disguised in her own scarlet cloak. The young woman's suitor is shot in the leg while chasing the villains. Eventually caught, the case comes to trial and the narrator testifies. Her wolfish gentleman is exposed as the 'well-known leader of a housebreaking gang'. Her grandmother never recovers her health from the shock, her suitor has to have his leg amputated, and she is left a 'lonely old maid'.

Written for the Christian Knowledge Society, this variant of 'Little Red Riding Hood' remains a 'scare and warning tale' of feminine foolishness and its consequences, while working in both Victorian and quite modern motifs. Independent travel on the railway associated with life 'off the rails', the dangers of fashion and commodity linked to the spoils of vanity and theft, and the 'unreadable' physiognomy of the stranger associated with Victorian society's sexual socialisation in its effacement of the natural body, its wildness concealed. In consumer culture, anyone can pass as anything. The fact that the villain presents himself as an attractive gentleman and later wears her red cloak as disguise suggests he is merely a reflection of the young woman, who artificially constructs her image through fashion accessories. 'Both are artefacts – products of mass reproduction'. For Talarach-Veilmas, the tale reveals 'the transformation of individuals into sets of visual codes – in other words, images',³² which he links directly to photography.

Confusing sight with insight, photography as 'evidence' of the metaphysics of presence amplified the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy (face reading) and later phrenology (skull measurements) as a reliable means of judging personality and mental traits. European Victorian fervour for classification into 'types' used photography as a means to observe 'objective' differences between peoples, races, castes and social categories, in support of the genocides and enslavements of empire and colonial oppression, where photography was 'no mere handmaid of empire, but a shaping dimension of it'.³³ Thus, photography, as a social tool,

³² Talarach-Veilmas, *Moulding the Female Body*, 12

³³ Quoted in Wells' *Photography*, 6.

contributed to shaping social categories, like those of fairy tale notions of love, and the love of children. Typological classification was considered to be reassuring to the rising numbers of urban middle classes and because visual appearances became important in an age of mass public transport, where physiognomy and phenology provided ‘a method of quickly assessing the characters of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth century’.³⁴ Hence the risks posed in Child-Pemberton’s *Red Riding Hood Over Again* (1882), where the young woman fails to read the stranger-danger on a train. Such dependency on a method of social observance quickly shifted to that of social control, with an increasingly professionalised use of photographic ‘evidence’ stored in police and medical archives, to its later sinister and political use in eugenics.

The child was not exempt from the pernicious effects of physiognomy, and the use of multiple photographic images was central to many publications depicting criminal, disabled or mentally ill children. Such usage illustrates the tension between exclusive romantic and realist versions of photography; that same paradox which Roland Barthes was later to pronounce the multivalence of the medium as able to picture both realist and rhetorical relations. This reading is far from the precise ‘language of nature’ as the Victorians had pictured it but sees it as language and nonlanguage, or a ‘message without a code’.³⁵ In terms of ‘framing the Victorians’, then, ‘from the 1850s, and with increasing authority, photography as a practice embodied, documented and justified the “flow”, or rather imbalance of power between the standard (subject) and its aberrations (objects) in popular physiognomy as much as in medical textbooks’.³⁶

Among Carroll’s contemporaries was the leading British figure of mental science Henry Maudsley, who made observations on ‘the insanity of early life’, with the ‘perverted action’ and ‘neuropathic temperament’ of children described as brutes and animals; like Havelock Ellis’ picture of children growing ‘out of initially savage animal and criminal organisation’.³⁷ Charles West, whose *Lectures on the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood* went through six editions between 1848 and 1874, stressed that one could not diagnose children without feeling real love for

³⁴ Alan Sekula, ‘The Body and the Archive’, in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (New York: MIT Press, 1989), 348.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 17.

³⁶ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (New York: Cornell University Press 1996), 166.

³⁷ Henry Maudsley’s ‘The Insanity of Early Life’ (1867), quoted in Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science and Medicine 1840–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182.

them and learning to speak their language (something relatives recalled of Carroll, as one of his abilities when speaking and playing with children). According to Anna Neill, ‘the assumption that [Carroll’s] photographs are evidence of sexual predation also, interestingly, situates the observation of an unfolding young life within the frame of mental illness’. She argues that, ‘with what seems almost like calculated punning, Dodgson’s photographs of children also play with the theme of development’, given his images capture children in surprisingly natural poses; ‘no small feat given the extraordinary challenges of the wet-plate process, which required a portable darkroom kit and chemicals for on-the-spot processing’, plus of course the fact that the child would have to keep still for at least sixty seconds in Summer, when the light was best.³⁸ Describing that ‘peculiar web of space and time’ he called ‘aura’, Walter Benjamin argued that photographs of the past hold something that ‘cannot be silenced, that impudently demands the name of the person who lived at the time, and who, remaining real even now, will never yield herself up entirely into art’.³⁹ Carroll’s photographs feature the expressions of sullen, bored, belligerent, hostile, tired or suspicious children, and in that sense, seem more real to life than many other Victorian portraits of children.

I would like to argue that Carroll’s visual code might be metaphoric. From his early years at school, Carroll demonstrated what his schoolmasters recognised as ‘a genius for analogy’ (whereas the boy himself reflected that at school none of the learning ‘was done *con amore*’). That love was to come, in his mathematics achievements, nonsense writing and photography. Given his interest was parallelism in *relations* rather than appearance, Carroll’s *Little Red Riding Hood* – surrounded by tangled ivy with her hair loose and her ferocious expression – is analogous to the idea of the feral, or wild child, an image of fascination for the Victorians, not least because of the tensions between the need to ‘civilise’ a sexually uninhibited body tempered with the need to retain childlike ‘innocence’.⁴⁰ Given parody was Carroll’s means of questioning the tangle of Victorian evolutionary and educational discourse, the fact that Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) ‘subjects its heroine to morphological metamorphoses and species confusion’

³⁸ Anna Neill, *Human Evolution and Fantastic Victorian Fiction* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2021).

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, *Screen*, 13:1, (1972), 20.

⁴⁰ According to Joanne McPherson’s ‘From Victor to Mowgli: the Transformation of the Wild Child in Victorian Literature and Culture’, *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal* 5:1 (1999), 124, Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron captured in the Caune woods of France in 1799 was the object of intensive study, caught the European Victorian imagination, and ‘became part of a medical, sexual and psychological discourse on the phenomenon of wild children’ that required ‘civilising’ while retaining their ‘natural’ innocence.

should come as no surprise.⁴¹ He had already experimented with the Little Red Riding Hood photograph.

Henry Peach Robinson's image (Figure 3.6), like Carroll's, is careful to include – if not stage – the tangled ivy, rural jug, basket and recognisable costume, but this Little Red Riding Hood is no wild child. Yet, just as the camera is 'loaded', 'aimed' at what will be 'taken', 'captured' or 'shot', photography was for some Victorians described as a collector sport, as if on a colonial hunt to bag trophies; its subjects as wild animals to be pursued. In his journal, Robinson described 'a picturesque model caught wild, but too stupid to be of any use. Naturally, she had a delightful smile, and though I tried all I knew for a fortnight to overcome her timidity – mixed her with tame models, as they train wild elephants – she remained camera-shy, and I could do nothing with her'.⁴² Unlike Carroll, whose repeated criticisms of the practice of hunting in *Sylvie and Bruno* has been attributed as 'evidence of the author's awareness of the problems that attend relationships between predatory men and girls',⁴³ Robinson positions himself proudly as a colonial aggressor in the 'taming' of the sitter 'caught wild but too stupid to be of any use'. But, like Carroll and many photographers of the time, Robinson wanted his images to be regarded as an art form. Several of his images could be seen as effectively substituting for the representational task previously attributed to painting.

By focusing on the fabric of the girl's costume, his image strongly evokes Peele's painting of 1851, with its painterly attention to the innocent child turned to face the viewer while knocking, and the hollyhocks planted beside the door. In reality, this is clearly a dressed-up farm or work building with carefully placed stage props such as climbing ivy, the rustic pot, the background blurred out of focus, perhaps to hide unsightly or modern working equipment. The wolf, as always in Victorian photography of the tale, is implied, never depicted.

Carroll rented a studio in Badcock's Yard from 1863, in the same street as his Oxford College. Part of an upholstery shop, the studio presumably offered fabrics, as can be seen in the Persian carpet and heavy drapes on the right. No longer knocking on the door, this is a Little Red Riding Hood who has come inside, taken off her shoes and is perhaps looking directly at the wolf in her grandmother's bed, pointing her cane at the camera (and the photographer) like a magic wand, as if to ward off evil. Tellingly, Carroll has printed the emulsion peeling back from

⁴¹ Anna Neill, *Human Evolution and Fantastic Victorian Fiction*, 8.

⁴² Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, 147.

⁴³ Henry Peach Robinson, *The Elements of a Pictorial Photograph* (London 1896; reprint New York: Arno, 1973), 104.



Figure 3.6. Henry Peach Robinson, *Little Red Riding Hood Arrives at the Door of Her Grandmother's House*, 1858/9, Albumen print, 23.3 x 18.7 cm, open domain.

the left-hand side of the glass negative, which acts like a second curtain revealing the chemical process, like breaking the third wall in the theatre.

From painting to poetry, bare feet have variously been read as symbolic of saintly submission or, as substitutes for genitalia, expressive of (female) penance. We might read this Little Red Riding Hood's bare feet as a pure index of the innocent childish state for the Victorians, but Carroll's images of Beatrice Hatch as *The Little Acrobat* (1879) or with her sister as *Beggar Children* (1872) follows a plethora of bare-footed photographs of the workhouse or street poor in 'beggar rags'.⁴⁴ Waggoner has documented the considerable lengths that Carroll underwent to ensure his images were of 'nonsexual bodies that could only be

⁴⁴ Beggars in rags, street children and child performers were subjects of cultural fascination to the Victorians, considered both 'picturesque' and as symbols of urban degeneration. Allegorical and evangelical photographs took artistic and charitable form, such as advertising for Barnardo's Ragged Schools and orphanages.



Figure 3.7. Lewis Carroll, unknown child as *Little Red Riding Hood*, Badcock's Yard, Oxford, 1868.

looked at innocently', believing these 'tactics were determined by a necessity to secure a visual practice that had become deeply uncertain by the Victorian era because of the Romantic legacy of dividing purity and sexuality by childhood and adulthood', but her claim that revealing the girls' feet brought her 'outside the bounds of civilisation and therefore a realm where the threat of sexuality in the civilised world did not exist',⁴⁵ faced with the fact that Victorian working women often went barefoot (shoes or clogs being prone to slip on oil-saturated wooden factory floors) suggests a very entangled politics of reference; both alluding to and denying the facts of everyday impoverished and working Victorian real life with those of fairy tale fantasy.

As John Berger reflected, a photograph provides more than a picture, it taps into the ambiguity of vision as an experiential opening to something. In *Another Way*

⁴⁵ Waggoner, *Lewis Carroll's Photography*, 201.

of *Telling*, he argued that ‘photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them’,⁴⁶ inviting the viewer to break the links between positivism, the camera and sociology. As a good amateur conjuror, Carroll thus misquotes the fairy tale, exploring its magic and that of childhood with his notorious ambiguity and sleight of hand. Lindsay Smith has argued that Carroll’s set-up for studio photographs such as the unknown child posing as Little Red Riding Hood (Figure 3.7), is characteristic of the ‘uncanny’ effect of his work: a ‘politics of focus’ requiring a certain depth of field, typically plenty of foreground space with a ‘captive, literally up against a wall’, suggestive of the distance to the photographer himself and the child ‘set up to view’.⁴⁷ Did Carroll, as Anne Higonnet argues, stage ‘the “natural” image of the “natural” child ... convinced that the innocence of the child was a natural quality, just as he was convinced that the truth of the photographic image was an automatic quality’?⁴⁸ Did these Little Red Riding Hoods ‘ensure a negation of a real sexual union, while at the same time staging its possibility’?⁴⁹ Mavor reminds us that for Roland Barthes, photography was ‘born not of painting, but of the theatre’ and,⁵⁰ as a man who loved all things theatrical, who worked so expertly in knowing parody and pastiche, I would argue that Carroll’s set up of the Little Red Riding Hood costume with magician’s cane, bare feet, rug and both chemical and fabric act curtains are so deliberately suggestive of a stage or theatre as to remind the viewer that *photographer, photographed, fairy tale, childhood and innocence are all staged*.

Given ‘Carroll’s photographs tapped into Victorian conventions ranging all the way from paedophilia to innocence, and back again’,⁵¹ photographers’ manipulations of the photographic field threatened to upset conventional acceptance of the medium as a neutral mode of visual representation. Techniques such as composite and combination photography produced photographs that were compositions built by the photographer in the darkroom rather than exact representations of a single scene placed before the camera, like the double-take of two children’s photographs. A famous example *The Cottingley Fairies* appeared in a series of five photographs taken in 1917 by cousins Elsie Wright (age 16) and Frances Griffiths (age 9). Writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle used the pictures to illustrate an article

⁴⁶ John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (London: Granta, 1982), 95.

⁴⁷ Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: women, children and nineteenth century photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998), 30.

⁴⁸ Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 110.

⁴⁹ Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, 105.

⁵⁰ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 28.

⁵¹ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 123.

on fairies he had been commissioned to write for the Christmas 1920 edition of *The Strand Magazine* (which sold out within days). The fact that Elsie worked in a photographic studio correcting plates should, of course, have alerted the men (such as Doyle, Edward Gardner of the Theosophical Society, occultist Geoffrey Hodson and Harold Snelling, a photography expert) who all pronounced the images to be untouched and showing no signs of being faked, but it is thought the terrible losses from the First World War and the 1918 flu pandemic encouraged their zeal for ideas of spiritualism and the afterlife. On a return visit to Cottingley in 1921, the girls no longer saw fairies, but apparently Hodson saw them everywhere. Both Elsie and Frances admitted (by the 1980s) that they ‘played along’ with Hodson ‘out of mischief’ and that they considered him ‘a fake’, but what also transpired later was that Gardner had asked the expert Snelling to ‘improve’ the negatives he claimed were authentic. A double-negative fraud had occurred. Despite confessing to the hoax, both women maintained all their lives that they had seen fairies as children, and that the men ‘wanted to be taken in’.⁵²

It is evident from this examination and many others that Victorian fairies and fairy tales were not just for children but perhaps predominantly for adult men. Nicola Brown argues that they represented a rejection of the values of the enlightenment which found its expression in Romanticism, were shaped by nationalism and the industrial revolution, and in many ways were metaphoric of (mostly men’s) optimism and anxiety about the technological and scientific developments of the age. Susan Casteras similarly attributes the Victorian fascination with fairy paintings as a ‘safety-valve’, permitting unrepressed images of nude female figures but of diminutive size associated with Victorian constructions of childhood innocence. Thus, the ‘counter-Enlightenment’s rediscovery of the irrational’ was appealing to men but – with its association with childlike nostalgia or fairy tale love – as not appealing to women at that time ‘for all that feminism was struggling to rescue women from’.⁵³

The psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel later suggested that fantasy revealed in analysis associated with recurrent themes of legend and fairy tale featuring little girls could be interpreted as phallic ‘half-girl’ figures, or ‘little doubles’. He concluded that ‘men who fall in love with little girls in whom they see themselves embodied ... was very probably the decisive mechanism of paedophilia’.⁵⁴ By

⁵² ITV programme, ‘Fairies, Phantoms and Fantastic Photographs’, *Arthur C. Clark’s World of Strange Powers*, 22 May 1985, Season 1, no.6.

⁵³ Nicola Brown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18.

⁵⁴ Otto Fenichel, 1949, ‘The Symbolic Equation: Girl=Phallus’, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 18:3 (1949), 311.

bringing paedophilia in from the margins, James Kincaid's study (1992) makes 'child-loving' central to the cultural history of the west that has systematically reified and sexualised children, while Steedman sees Little Red Riding Hood as assuming the shape of a child, but, operating as a form of historicised interiority, actually representing a Victorian masculinist 'cry for the self, the long lost and gone: possibly a bid for recurrence, eternity, sameness'.⁵⁵

As Susan Sontag has observed,⁵⁶ photography reifies the tension between the past and present. As it entered the twentieth century, childhood would be changing again. Emergent psychoanalysis meant Freud and others would explore pathological defences and repressions in adult memory related to the bodily trauma of childhood or in 'fantasized seduction' (outlined by Freud in *Family Romances*, 1908 and the *Sexual Theories of Children*, 1909) towards a growing understanding of the split subject of the adult, 'torn between consciousness and unconsciousness. Childhood, as a cluster of desires, happenings, experiences, assaults and traumas' would be relocated – as a metaphor for the unconscious itself – into another place and time.⁵⁷

Though not dressed as Little Red Riding Hood (Figure 3.8), placing a toddler in white lace on a wolfskin rug in such a theatrical setting recalls the tale, the child unconscious of any risk, or, like Angela Carter's 1989 reworking of the tale, knowingly 'sleeping sweetly, between the paws of the big bad wolf'. Later to be labelled a 'turbid Victorian hack' of 'midwestern fantasia',⁵⁸ Fitz Guerin was a highly successful society photographer in Missouri between 1876 and 1903. In this image, the curtain opens on staged opulence and vulnerability: the open mouth of the fireplace, the tiny child in white frills in a huge, empty room, sleeping on the open-jawed wolfskin rug; the dark shadow behind another curtain stage left. It is an image that, in looking back to the Grimm engravings and forward to the magical and highly theatrical visual metaphors of Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête* (1946), also anticipates the grip that America was to have on the fairy tale from the first Disney animation, which was the 'Laugh-O-Gram' *Little Red Riding Hood* in 1922.

The Disney conglomerate have never been bold enough to tackle the tale in film, especially not as Angela Carter and Neil Jordan did in the surreal

⁵⁵ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1930* (London: Virago, 1995), 171.

⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1977).

⁵⁷ Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780–1930*, 87–8.

⁵⁸ Stephane Russell, 'Midwestern Fantasia: the uncanny photographs of Fitz W. Guerin', *St Louis Magazine* (2009).



Figure 3.8. Fitz W. Guerin, *Child sleeping on wolfskin rug*, ca. 1900, photographic print, open domain.

Company of Wolves (1984). Like Carter and many feminist writers, Hélène Cixous reframed the way we might think about the notions of love and innocence, particularly as they bear on the issue of the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge. In her uncompromising essay *Castration or Decapitation* (1981), she reads fairy tale as the feminine entering into unknown spaces. Just as Little Red Riding Hood allows herself the forbidden and ‘makes her little detour, does what women should never do, travels through her own forest... caught in her chain of metaphors, metaphors that organise culture’, Cixous’ theories of the sexualisation of writing, or ‘writing the body’, links the language of the feminine to that of the child in play, and helps explain her suggestion that Little Red Riding Hood is a metonymy for the clitoris, or: ‘the female sex with her little jar of honey caught in a forest of male metaphors’,⁵⁹ though how much of this is noticed by the child or adult reader must of course be left to each unconscious.

⁵⁹ Hélène Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’, trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs*, 7:1 (1981), 44.



Figure 3.9. Still from the American film *Little Red Riding Hood*, 1922 featuring Baby Peggy, aka Diana Serra Cary, from *Universal Weekly*, 7 October 1922, open domain.

Little Red Riding Hood's forest of male metaphors was not to become radically feminised until the later twentieth century. Like the visiting or postcards of the mid-Victorian period, film posters and stills were to become a means to commercialise and popularise images of child actors, for the early twentieth century. Though the drawn versions of wolf and child are as unthreatening as Kate Greenaway idylls,⁶⁰ in the film still (Figure 3.9) 'Baby Peggy', described in the poster as "The Kutest little Kiddie on the screen" (Figure 3.10) has her hand actually in the wolf's mouth as he lies in bed. Whether a well-trained or taxidermised dog, the wolf is finally visible, as it would continue to be in the coming centuries. As with the earlier images, the child is turned to face the photographer, but now her anxious expression is highly suggestive of needing rescue. Thus, the nineteenth century began what Simon May has described as 'the rise of cute' as 'a weapon of mass seduction' or cultural uncertainty principle involving knowing, mocking versions of innocence and experience that were

⁶⁰ English Victorian illustrator Kate Greenaway (1846–1901) specialised in children's books. Her depictions of children in then 'retro' eighteenth-century costumes and dainty colours were/are very popular and influential.



Figure 3.10. Advert for the film with Baby Peggy, *Universal Weekly*, 11 November 1922, open domain.

to further pervert the shape and cultural commodification of childhood over the next two centuries.⁶¹

Unfixed conclusions

‘It is in the nineteenth-century that a modern western concept of childhood acquires, through photographic representation, a particular form of visual ubiquity’.⁶² Linked to the fact that as childhood mortality rates were still very high, a photograph could keep a child alive in memory who was lost to the living, like Benjamin’s subsistence of the future in the past (the present in a photographed moment) as a characteristic of photography manifest in early processes, or what

⁶¹ Simon May, *The Power of Cute* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁶² George Rousseau, ed., *Children and Sexuality: From the Greeks to the Great War* (London: Palgrave, 2007) 250.

Lindsay Smith calls the ‘chemical, physical trace of time passed, yet to pass and passing in the image’.⁶³ Smith reminds us that, as both Benjamin and Barthes have demonstrated, an adult subject’s identification of himself with a child involves a kind of infantilisation. A sociology of the ‘undeveloped’, negative imaging of an era and a nation emerges, the black and white of an inverse photography of the self, a darkroom with the need for intermittent light in order to capture, frame, develop and imprint on culture the conflict of the child and fairy tale notions of love.

Fairy tale love as depicted in photographs of children can only speak in metaphors and analogies, given the photograph’s limits as visual abstractions in space and time. Metaphor places photography as a connective process of memory, history and analogy. Though Alan Sekula considers the ‘two chattering ghosts’ of ‘bourgeois science and... bourgeois art’ to have defined photography for the Victorians,⁶⁴ throughout the long Victorian period, the medium both enacted and illuminated the proliferation and standardisation of visual and literary experience in a rapidly expanding cultural field. While its use as standard illustration found its place only by the final decades of that century, the efforts to reproduce photographs in affordable forms from the 1860s onwards pointed the way towards the mass reproduction of images that was to characterise the next century, and in digital form, epitomise the twenty-first.⁶⁵ As Mavor puts it, ‘the child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other; they were laminated and framed as one’.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding the fact that the childhoods depicted in the photography of the period may have shocked, surprised or displeased the very society they reflected, it has been noted that, from the long Victorian period onward, a shift took place from that of the woman to the object of the child as that which ‘carries the burden of expressing ideas’. Marina Warner speculates on how images of children somehow operate as ‘some ghastly masquerade of the way so much of the rest of society also “loves children”, by stimulating their desires, by exploiting their vulnerability and suggestibility, by finding them irresistibly cute, by staging, in any number of [images], the performance of their seduction’. She sees fairy tale’s

⁶³ Lindsay Smith, *Lewis Carroll: Photography on the Move* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 10.

⁶⁴ Alan Sekula, ‘The Traffic in Photographs’ in Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin, eds, *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1983), 122.

⁶⁵ Benjamin’s hope for photography offering a new materialist aesthetic (releasing it from former traditions of magic and notions of originality) is ever as troubled and unlikely with AI’s grip on massive data.

⁶⁶ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 3.

central narrative as a fear contest, and, when they feature little girls or women, as a ‘journey from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance’.⁶⁷

Yet, there exists a profound desire to complicate this trope in Carroll’s photography and writing. As an effeminate unmarried clergyman who preferred spending time with nonsense, children and algebra, Carroll epitomises the entangled tensions of the Victorian period that were to preoccupy the next century: repressed childhood experience, child and adult sexuality and perversity, masculine and feminine norms, the role of mathematics, science and technology in the face of religion and the supernatural. Just as his books and poems are full of uncomfortable doubts and self-conscious mediations (playful, resistant asides, the disputative authorial voice, failed communications, etc.), his photographic images play with the technology of mediation, giving the reader/viewer opportunities to doubt, test and question. Where is the wolf, after all? Where does love happen?

Storytelling thus becomes an act of hopeful love because it engages the reader/viewer in a bond of identification with the risk-taking author/photographer, in a quest for alternatives that could exist in a culture of such seemingly fixed values. Communicating *through* Alice, *through* Little Red Riding Hood’s wolfish innocence, it seems to me that Carroll actively resists the notion of the ‘type’ that photography was also serving through physiognomy, by claiming back or rescuing a personal, interiorised, improvised sense of self, as a form of transference love. The tension in his photographs evokes that of Rose’s critique of children’s literature, as ‘a soliciting, a chase, a form of seduction’,⁶⁸ yet is ‘not that of an adult man wanting sexual reciprocity with a child’, but perhaps one wanting to resist (bed)time, ageing and developing, desiring ‘the freedom to perform his visual compulsion, through a repeated photographic fixing of the minor’ that is expressive of his own Victorian fairy tale of childhood, capturing his own culture’s resistance to and reconsideration of what the child is or what love is.⁶⁹ Carroll’s girls photographed as Little Red Riding Hood thus enact a kind of ‘bodily theatre’ of these aspects of love in social practice.⁷⁰

Just as middle-class Victorians must have felt the idea of childhood innocence slipping away in a society whose comfort for some depended on its exploitation, they clung to staged versions of it all the tighter. Fairy tale, with its ambiguous

⁶⁷ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 276.

⁶⁸ Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 60.

⁶⁹ Smith, *The Politics of Focus*, 109.

⁷⁰ Claudia Castañeda, *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (New York: Duke University Press, 2002), 13.

double-take on purity and sexuality, could be eroticised, fetishised and naturalised through the shadowy, bipolar medium of photography. As Green-Lewis observes, photographs of stories from the distant past, such as allegory and fairy tale, can also provide ‘reverse transportation’.⁷¹ Did the Victorians place emphasis on the double-edged aspect of fairy tale love as depicted by Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf as a mirror of the cultural disquiet of their own age, and as travelling back in time away from it? Perhaps love for Little Red Riding Hood came to stand for the growing tensions between individual and mass reproduction, childhood as a personification of resisting vast tracts of evolutionary and cultural complexity; a strategy for acknowledging an unresolved tension between seeming innocence, simplicity and continuance. Steedman has argued that the long Victorian period

strenuously attempted to delimit and resist the implications of growth... pushing these thoughts into the interior. The vast, historicised world was turned inside, so that history itself might be dehistoricised, removed from the time that allowed growth and decay, so that they might be overcome, in the lost- and crucially- timeless place within.⁷²

Perhaps fairy tale in the long nineteenth-century entrenched certain western myths of childhood and love as it deliberately heightened the importance of repetitive forms of imagination and symbol (myth) to these states of being. The versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* explored here dropped all the tale’s connections with the French Revolution and even turned a blind eye to the Industrial Revolution, in favour of presenting the child and the fairy tale ‘as if’ timelessly and innocently about to face the wolf, yet also performing intimate familiarity with that wolf in staged knowingness. Standing at the door as if ready to knock on the next century, love, growth, risk and sexuality happen on a threshold of change and continuance for the child, photograph and fairy tale, pointing forward and back, at once progressive and retrogressive.

Interiorised hypocrisies of love for the child and its need for protection from that love, fairy tale love and the love of Little Red Riding Hoods took many overdetermined forms over the long Victorian era that continued throughout the twentieth and will doubtless do so over the twenty-first and beyond. The staged sources of such love’s ‘obvious sexuality’ continue to be ‘more complex than modern viewers may feel comfortable admitting’,⁷³ but, in our bid for

⁷¹ Jennifer Green-Lewis. *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 147.

⁷² Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 95.

⁷³ Mavor, *Pleasures Taken*, 8.

recurrence, eternity and sameness, as Steedman points out, ‘we cannot, it seems, stop wanting this child, nor performing all our acts of rescue’.⁷⁴

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⁷⁴ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 160.

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