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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON, 2004**

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

**PASSIONATE FEET:  
HISTORIC AND CULTURAL USES OF  
RED SHOES, 1750 – 2004.**

**by Hilary Davidson**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
MA (History of Textiles and Dress)  
by instructional course.

## ABSTRACT

This study looks at how the historic and cultural uses of red shoes have contributed to the enduring potency of this footwear as object and symbol. Investigation covers the period 1750 to 2004 in the English-speaking and European societies of the West. The interdisciplinary cultural studies approach to dress history proposed by Breward informs the research, which draws on both material and textual objects as resources. These include the Museum of London and Northampton Shoe Museum collections; and literary, cinematic, musical, artistic and other cultural expressions using red shoes as an inspirational motif. Three primary expression form the main case studies: Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale *The Red Shoes* (1845); the ballet film *The Red Shoes* based around the story (Powell and Pressburger, 1948); and Dorothy's ruby slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939). The study demonstrates how an interrelated network of ambiguous, changing and contrasting meanings affect considerations of red shoes, through the identification and discussion of six different types. The broad analysis of relationships *between* uses of red shoes combines previous historiographic findings to present a new perspective on the topic.

Context for the study is established through discussion of uses and meanings of the colour red, some sexual, folkloric and psychological symbolisms of shoes, and the Masculine type. Male red shoes created a historic paradigm connecting red shoes first with authority, status, religion and power, and later with creative individuality. The Feminine red shoes type follows in two halves. Andersen's story is used to explore the historical Negative aspects through a series of social transgressions concerned with sexuality, religion and gender roles. The ruby slippers and their continuing legacy, the concept of sovereignty, and the results of a survey evaluating current views on the red shoe motif represent the more contemporary Positive type. The uses are found to be independence, transition and self-expression. Discussion of the Dance type then centres on the ballet film, the passionate sacrifices of dancers, and issues of autonomy and mobility. These three types form the dominant cultural meanings of red shoes. The next chapter on Magic encompasses red shoes as fairytales, folklore and myth to highlight this quality underlying uses in the previous types. The final type is Children's red shoes, typified by patent-leather Mary-Janes and concerned with a pre-gendered state of innocence and protection. Red shoes are shown in conclusion to symbolise four different fundamental qualities of magical-religious, active, sexual and transgressive uses, whose layered potency is summarised by the multiple meanings of the term passion.

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SMN            The Shoe Museum in Northampton

MOL            The Museum of London

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# 1. Introduction

There is really nothing in the world that can be compared with red shoes!<sup>1</sup>

Red shoes have exerted a fascination over people throughout history which remains just as strong today. Red shoes are objects that are more than the sum of their parts, and their story is one of ambiguities and contrasts. This work begins to analyse some of the reasons for this by comparing the cultural and historic uses of red shoes in the West from 1750, looking at red shoes as historic objects, cultural symbols, and how the concept of Red Shoes inspires cultural expressions in a wide range of media.

This research is the result of a personal fascination with red shoes, myth and folklore, deepened by a period as an apprentice shoemaker. I have collected material culture using the red shoes motif since 1995, and this larger exploration of the topic is in part an attempt to understand why red shoes remain magic and seductive to me. What became quickly apparent is that red shoes cast a spell over many people. With no recollectable exceptions, every person to whom I mentioned this research has given an instant response once the magic phrase ‘red shoes’ is uttered: a childhood memory, an association, a film, expressing love for, an indrawn breath, or comments like ‘how fascinating’ or ‘how potent’. No response has been neutral. Books on shoe history often feature red shoes as the cover image (Figs 1, 2 and 3), and the emblem of large on-line footwear retailer Shoes.com makes a visual impact by using red shoes (Fig. 4, below). A display devoted to Red Shoes in the *Followers of Fashion* exhibit of Northampton Boot and Shoe Museum (Fig. 5) identifies many of the themes addressed in this work. These uses suggest red shoes are something more than coloured footwear, and embody the cultural complexities related to all shoes.

Red shoes are a potent, symbolic motif, and to discover some of the reasons for their continuing allure, this research engages with questions such as:

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<sup>1</sup> H. C. Andersen, ‘The Red Shoes’ (1845) *Project Gilead* <[http://hca.gilead.org.il/red\\_shoe.html](http://hca.gilead.org.il/red_shoe.html)> [accessed 23 April 2004], para. 6.

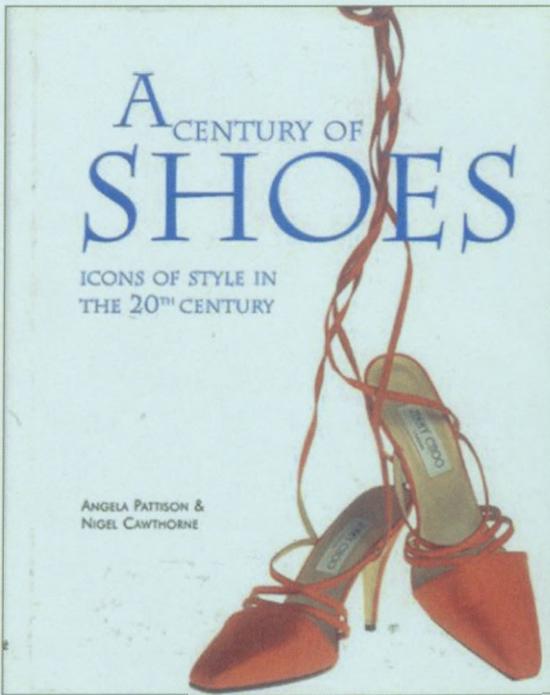


Figure 1

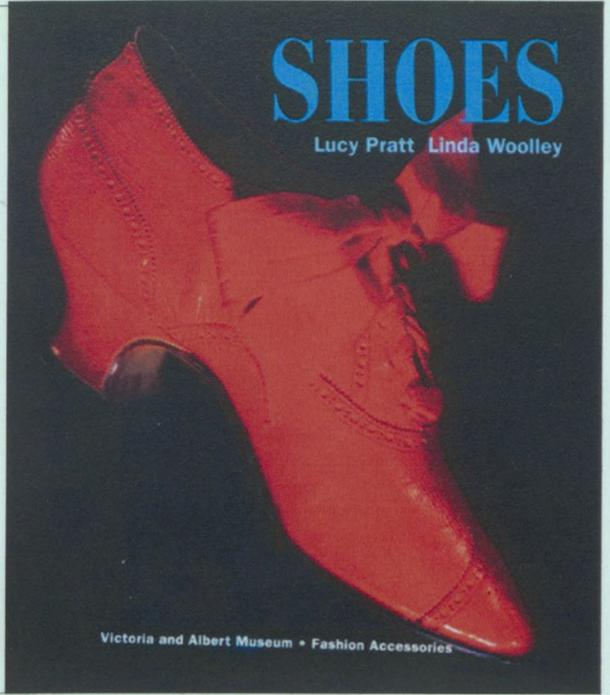


Figure 2

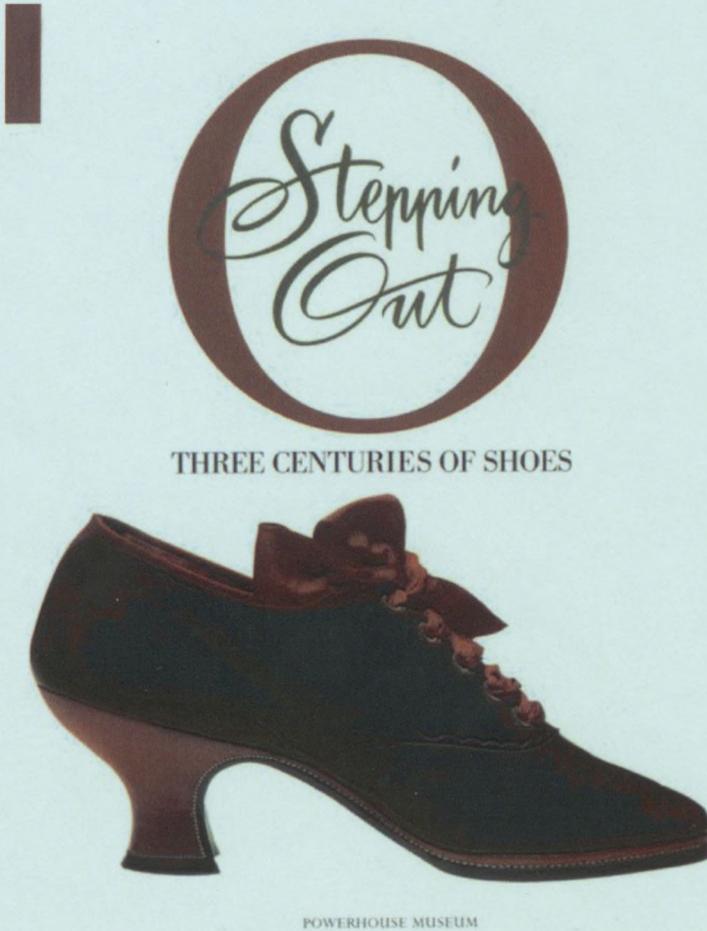


Figure 3



- What are the historic and cultural meanings of red shoes?
- How have these meanings and uses changed over time?
- What is the relationship between the historic object and the cultural motif?
- How has the motif been used as inspiration?
- Why are red shoes symbolically potent?
- What elements contribute to creating potency?

## Parameters

Certain words that recur in this work require initial definition. *Motif* refers to a dominant feature or recurring theme in a cultural expression. The term *symbol* is here defined as something typifying, recalling or representing something else, especially an object representing an abstraction.<sup>2</sup> The word *passion* in the title will be explicitly discussed in the concluding chapter. Throughout, capitalised Red Shoes refers to the greater idea or symbol of red shoes, and the lower case is used for all other references.

Since red shoes appear in most eras and places through history, it has been necessary to limit the focus of the work to Britain, Europe and North America ('Western' culture), and start investigations from around 1750, continuing to the present day (2004). A brief outline of earlier history is given in chapter 2.3, Masculine red shoes. Red boots are not considered, as their spectrum of military and practical use is outside the scope of this work to discuss as a separate type.

The proviso must also be given that not every pair of shoes coloured red are Red Shoes in a greater symbolic sense. Meaning can be attached to objects, and some pairs are just shoes in a red material. The symbolic possibility of a pair of red shoes is also not necessarily 'readable' from an object, even when they can function in a symbolic or archetypal way. The shoes in figure. 6 highlight this contextual ambivalence between red shoes as historic objects and cultural symbols. They are similar to the style drawn on cartoon character Jessica Rabbit<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 7). As objects, they are a pair of 1940s high-heeled court shoes which can be worn to match or complement an outfit. In the context of the cartoon, the red shoes

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<sup>2</sup> *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, ed. by R. E. Allen, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (1984) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 762.

<sup>3</sup> *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Bob Hoskins, Kathleen Turner. Amblin Entertainment/Touchstone Pictures/Silver Screen Partners.1988.



Figure 6



Figure 7

become clearly sexualised, and their colour continues Jessica's image as a provocative temptress, the curves in the shoes echoing the curves of her body. Some of the categorisation, especially in contemporary Western society, can be subjective and arbitrary, when colour has lost much of its previous social significance, and all shades of the spectrum are available, permissible, affordable, and present in fashion.

## Methodology

Red shoes gain potency from a network of interrelated uses. To only examine their appearance in fairytales, or in connection with dance, for example, would neglect the influence of the footwear's other cultural and historical manifestations. Any of the areas considered could form a basis for further study, but in order to answer the research questions, an historic overview of multiple perspectives is necessary. This work takes the interdisciplinary cultural studies approach to dress history outlined by Christopher Breward (1998), which discusses how the former field 'finds its history in a literary rather than a visual tradition, and objects of study reflect those roots, existing as texts to be decoded in the present, rather than reflections or remains to be recovered from the past.'<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, three of the major sources for this study, the dominant cultural expressions using red shoes, are text rather than object-based. The short fairy tale *The Red Shoes* written by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen in 1845 has introduced countless readers to a compelling but disturbing pair, and is the root of many later uses of the Red Shoes motif as inspiration. The ballet film *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger, 1948), took ideas from Andersen but used them to fundamentally establish the connections between red shoes and dance. Thirdly, Dorothy's ruby slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939) form a source for magic, positive, transformative ideas of red shoes. This story and two films will be examined as objects for case studies, reflecting their historic importance. Red shoes will also be shown to have a strong role in what Breward terms 'the formation of normative understandings of status and gender, and [their] capabilities in terms of dissent and deviance from those roles'<sup>5</sup> through issues of status and gender boundaries, sexuality, religion,

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<sup>4</sup>C. Breward, 'Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress', *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, Issue 4 (1998), p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> Breward, p. 307.

individuality, ambiguity and transgression. All contribute their various passions to the cultural meanings of these dress objects.

References to red shoes appear in diverse areas of human history and culture, beyond works concerning clothing and display. No work has yet traced the connection between these historic and cultural appearances solely as they appertain to red shoes. Producers of what are here termed ‘cultural expressions’ - music, literature, theatre, films, fashion, artworks, dance, television – exploit the potency of red shoes as a creative motif. Aspects of their use appear in works on footwear history, dance, psychology, folk and fairy tales. However, no one scholar draws these threads together to consider how the disparate manifestations of red shoes inform each other and contribute to their *overall* cultural potency, or ‘take on board the complexities of social considerations, economic implications and cultural problems that inform and are informed by’ these objects.<sup>6</sup> This work aims to start redressing this lack, resulting in a deliberately broad scope in order to extract qualitative cultural information from quantitative historic analysis of red shoe use.

A project as inclusive as this would not have been possible without the Internet, which turned up useful material from unconsidered sources and disciplines.<sup>7</sup> This tool made it possible to collect lyrics to otherwise unknown songs, and survey the large number of written works incorporating red shoes. The growing number of ‘blog’<sup>8</sup> websites gave unsolicited personal insights into modern perceptions of red shoes, useful when considering the results of the cultural impact of both object and symbol. However, if the Internet is the communication form of the global village, then it also becomes the modern equivalent of the gossip, folk tales, old wives’ tales, recipes, stories - the rich miscellany of snippets of information swapped amongst the inhabitants of any community. It can function as a post-modern folk-memory. The myths, superstitions and tales cited by researchers now are the collated, recorded versions developed from vast historic networks of interpersonal communication. The Internet is a tool for

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> The American Modern Language Association (MLA) format is used throughout this work for citing electronic or textual sources not covered by British referencing conventions.

<sup>8</sup> Publicly accessible individual on-line journals. The word is short for web log. *Google Definitions*, <[4](http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&oi=defmore&q=define:Blog+-+(weB+LOG)></a>></p></div><div data-bbox=)

extending the contemporary, and searchable, reach of the same kind of network.<sup>9</sup> The collections of the Shoe Museum in Northampton and the Museum of London have been invaluable: Northampton for the breadth of object examples it holds as the largest collection of footwear in Britain; and the Museum of London for its particular collection of shoes connected with the British monarchy. To gain an insight into modern women's attitudes to red shoes, I conducted a survey from January to August 2004 amongst women of various backgrounds. Later chapters present the results in more detail. Besides these individual memories, a wide range of the cultural expressions mentioned above have been consulted to trace the path of the multiple and changing uses of red shoes. While excellent for approaching 'the problem of conceptualizing the social relationships that make up popular cultures',<sup>10</sup> this large number of non-object sources does, as Breward points out, 'defeat contained empirical analyses'.<sup>11</sup> The tables in Appendix 1 attempt to negotiate this problem by enumerating the textual sources. A total of one hundred and twenty-four cultural expressions using red shoes as a primary or strong secondary motif were consulted, and the findings are summarised in table form. This mass of material resulted in the identification of themes present in red shoes, and quantifying the mass allowed for statistical as well as qualitative analysis. The number of illustrations reflects the study's argument for red shoes as an influential visual symbol.

The only work found to engage academically with red shoes as a cultural motif is Erin Mackie's 'Red Shoes and Bloody Stumps' (2001). This essay, and other pieces in the book *Footnotes: On Shoes*,<sup>12</sup> were useful for their consideration of the primarily cultural implications of shoes from diverse perspectives, rather than as historic or fashionable objects.<sup>13</sup> In the absence of a larger historiography, the study has benefited from works by author and journalist Angela Carter, fairytale and myth researcher Marina Warner, and fashion historian Valerie Steele. Each

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<sup>9</sup> The phrase 'urban myth' is an example of the modern application of old human tendencies. There are many websites now dedicated to the recording, and therefore, incidental dissemination, of these 'myths', which may in time be published and accepted as a valid folkloric expression, like Grimm's Tales or Irish folk stories. 'Urban Legends Reference Pages' [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com), [www.urbanmyths.about.com](http://www.urbanmyths.about.com), [www.urbanmyths.com](http://www.urbanmyths.com). They are also called urban legends or folklore.

<sup>10</sup> Breward, p. 309.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds.), *Footnotes: On Shoes*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> In Britain, Berg will be producing a book on the cultural history of shoes in early 2006.

woman explores the boundaries between myth, culture and dress in both literary and academic forms, in ways that bring perspective and context to an examination of red shoes.

To facilitate clearer investigation, red shoes are considered a footwear sub-category, with six types of red shoes identified and arranged in approximately chronological order according to which type prevailed in an historic period. As the characteristics of each type emerge, they will be used to analyse the layers of meanings attached to red shoes, and show how they became, and remain, psychologically potent emblems of the passion of the foot through attributes of magic, activity, transgression and sexuality. Much of the material presented in each section overlaps; it is placed in the section of its strongest symbolism or associations. The types are: Masculine, Negative Feminine, Positive Feminine, Dance, Mythic, and Children's red shoes. Most attention is paid to the Feminine and the Dance types, as together they form the greatest influences on uses of red shoes. These types were identified after preliminary research, and all examples of red shoes use found subsequently confirmed the classifications' validity.

## 2. Contexts

The second chapter subsections present brief outlines of the history of the colour red; cultural uses of shoes and shoe symbolism; and the original paradigm of Masculine red shoes, as contexts necessary for understanding elements of the cultural use and early history of red shoes.

### 2.1 Red

Humanity's use of the colour red is a vast topic well beyond the scope of this work. Following is a summary of the salient points applicable to this study, as the colour contains many of the ambivalences seen in red shoes. The diversity of meanings associated with red throughout history are discussed in detail elsewhere; Steele's *the red dress* [sic] in particular considers the uses of red in a clothing context.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, certain constants. It is a primary colour, the hue of blood and thus of the events concerning blood: birth, menstruation, defloration, injury, death, and the basic pumping that maintains life. We cannot live without this red, which is probably why red is always the first colour added to the palette during early tribal development,<sup>2</sup> is the third most frequent colour to appear in human cultural expression after white and black, and is the most frequently used colour in heraldry after the precious 'metals' of silver (white) and gold (yellow).<sup>3</sup> It gains significance from being the common point between the extremes of colour values and the primary colours. Red is the colour of rebellion and revolution, seen in the Phrygian caps worn by French revolutionaries and the communism of the Soviet Republics and China. Red can signal danger, or protection, like the Red Cross. Cooper's comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* calls red 'the zenith of colour'.<sup>4</sup> The red symbolisms he lists fall into the following areas: the sun/fire, the masculine principle, activity/energy, royalty/divinity, joy, sexuality/passion, strength, life/fertility, death/danger, blood, spirituality, and

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie Steele, *the red dress* [sic] (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2001), pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> J. Hutchings, 'A Survey of the Use of Colour in Folklore – A Status Report' in J. Hutchings and J. Wood (eds.), *Colour and Appearance in Folklore* (London: The Folklore Society, 1991), p. 57.ref

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thanos and Hudson Ltd, 1979, repr. 1998), p. 40.

anger/violence. This study will show that the red in red shoes has influenced their uses into sharing many of these symbolic attributes.

The Biblical phrase ‘the blood is the life [of all flesh]’<sup>5</sup> embodies the source of many religious uses of red. The belief in the redemptive power of the Blood of Christ and its role in communion makes red an important symbolic colour within Christianity. The widespread European folk use of red eggs documented by Newell symbolises the Easter Passion of Christ, and is shown to be fundamentally connected with life- and health-giving blood, passionate love and the resulting fertility.<sup>6</sup> Many of these folkloric instances seem to incorporate older pagan beliefs in the power of red into an accommodating Christian structure.<sup>7</sup> The return of the sun, of fire, featured in Easter red egg practices, parallels the Orthodox practice of lighting candles upon the priest’s saying ‘Christ is risen’ during the Easter mass.<sup>8</sup>

Red is also a magic colour, or the colour of fairies. Yeats quotes this in the Irish tradition,<sup>9</sup> and while discussing the ‘fairy characteristic’ of red hair, Warner mentions this as ‘inherited from the demons of Christian superstition’,<sup>10</sup> reflecting popular depictions of a red-skinned Devil. For contemporary witchcraft practitioners, red means ‘the Goddess as Mother, fire, passion, lust, the south, fruitfulness, fertility, assertiveness, battle’.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the historic prestige and status associated with red comes from the expense of the dyestuffs used to produce the colour. The main red dyestuffs before synthetic dyes were madder (*Rubia tinctoria*), produced from a root; and the *Coccidae* insects producing kermes, cochineal and lac.<sup>12</sup> In the sixteenth century, cochineal from the New World ranked second only to silver in importance of exports, and its insect origin was jealously guarded. The cheaper madder root still takes seven years of expensive waiting to form a good crop. Sandberg includes murex purple as a red dye, reflecting the ambiguity shown by translators of the

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 12:23.

<sup>6</sup> V. Newell, *An Egg At Easter: A Folklore Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 207 – 231 *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> The word Easter is derived from Eostre, a pre-Roman goddess of spring and fertility.

<sup>8</sup> Newell, p. 225.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Red is the colour of magic in every country, and has been so from the very earliest times.’ W. B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) (New York: Dover, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> Kate West, *The Real Witches’ Kitchen* (London: Thorsons, 2002), p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> F. H. Gerber, *Cochineal and the Insect Dyes*, (Ormond Beach, FL: Frederick H. Gerber, 1978), p. 5. Dominique Cardon has done extensive research in the area of kermes.

Greek *porphyros* as either red or purple.<sup>13</sup> This dye is the prestigious violet produced from shellfish, at great expense and difficulty. It was a mark of status from the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the fall of the Byzantine empire in 1453.<sup>14</sup> Synthetic aniline red dyes appeared in 1868, the azo- and diazo-reds, and most were developed through the period 1880-1910.<sup>15</sup> Their affordability – a quarter the cost of madder dyes by 1870<sup>16</sup> – caused madder values to fall by 74% within two years of their introduction.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Shoes

Like red, the material regarding shoe beliefs, superstitions, and place in cultural ritual is extensive, fascinating, and beyond the investigative scope of this work. However, some particular connections, between shoes, sex, and magic, give informed context to the study of red shoes. Superstitions regarding shoes can involve both good and bad luck, making them as ambivalent in meaning as the colour red. Cooper gives shoe as ‘authority and liberty, but also as the lowly and humble.’<sup>18</sup> Putting off shoes on entering a holy place represents leaving earthly contact outside, to enter in ‘submissiveness and reverence’.<sup>19</sup>

The Deliberately Concealed Garments Project<sup>20</sup> is currently collating data on objects discovered hidden in buildings around the world, and shoes are the most prevalent type found. This superstitious practice of ‘builders’ sacrifice’ is widespread, but the reasons for it are still unclear. Shoes are placed in the ‘weak’ parts of a building where evil spirits were thought to enter, like the roof, above doorways, and under fireplaces.<sup>21</sup> Ancient cultures are known to have put babies or puppies in foundations, possibly as a good luck or fertility sacrifice. Footwear authority June Swann considers that perhaps baby shoes were substituted for the baby at some point, and eventually any shoe would serve as a token of life.<sup>22</sup> She cites fertility and protection as the strongest probable motives. Sue Constable, the

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<sup>13</sup> Chenciner 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> G. Sandberg, *The Red Dyes: Cochineal, Madder and Murex Purple*, trans. by Edith M. Matteson (Stockholm: Tidens förlag, 1994; repr. Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Gerber, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Chenciner, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Chenciner, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Cooper, p. 241.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> [www.concealedgarments.org](http://www.concealedgarments.org).

<sup>21</sup> E. Brooks, ‘Watch Your Step’, *National Trust Magazine*, Autumn 2000, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> J. Swann, ‘Shoes Concealed in Buildings’, *Costume* 30, 1996, p. 67

current keeper of the Northampton Shoe Museum, expands on this by saying ‘Shoes are very personal because they retain the shape of the owner [...] they act as a container [...] considered to hold a person’s spirit.’<sup>23</sup> The intimacy of the foot and shoe causes them represent substitutes for the person themselves in folkloric uses, like the giving of a bride’s shoe to her bridegroom. Driving a nail into a witch’s footprint was believed to curtail her power. Expressions like ‘walk a mile in another man’s shoes’ show the correspondence attributed between shoes and personal identity.

## Psychoanalysis/Symbolism

William Rossi has written an extensive work on the subject, *The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe*, which explores the myriad connections between shoes and sexuality in detail.<sup>24</sup> Although the Gillray caricature of 1792 in figure. 8 directly refers to Frederick, Duke of York and the size discrepancy between him and his bride, and is obviously sexual in nature, the title ‘Fashionable contrasts; - or - the Duchess's little shoe yielding to the magnitude of the Duke's foot’ becomes sexually explicit if *shoe* and *foot* are considered euphemisms.<sup>25</sup> Chenciner feels that the madder wash in the print, which gives the Duchess red shoes, is also ‘redolent of the symbolic association of red with passion’.<sup>26</sup> Freud drew out this association in the twentieth-century, mentioning that ‘the foot [...] is an age-old [phallic] sexual symbol which occurs even in mythology...The shoe or slipper is a corresponding symbol of the *female genitals*’<sup>27</sup> Here, the foot is thought to resemble to a woman’s penis, the lack of which causes penis-envy,<sup>28</sup> due to its insertion into the passive shoe. Bettelheim has demonstrated the vaginal symbolism of the shoe in Cinderella stories,<sup>29</sup> and there are frequent historic examples of the size of a woman’s foot seen as indicating the size of her vagina. In both cases the smaller is considered the better: ‘to have a small vagina is considered a sign of virginity and delicacy: the opposite

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Brooks, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

<sup>25</sup> The picture often appears in histories of footwear, but as far as I know the explicit possibility of the title has not been previously considered.

<sup>26</sup> Chenciner, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> S.Freud, *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. and ed. by J. Strachey (London: Pelican 1953-1977), XII: *On Sexuality. Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other works*, ed. by Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> Freud, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 265 – 66.



Figure 8

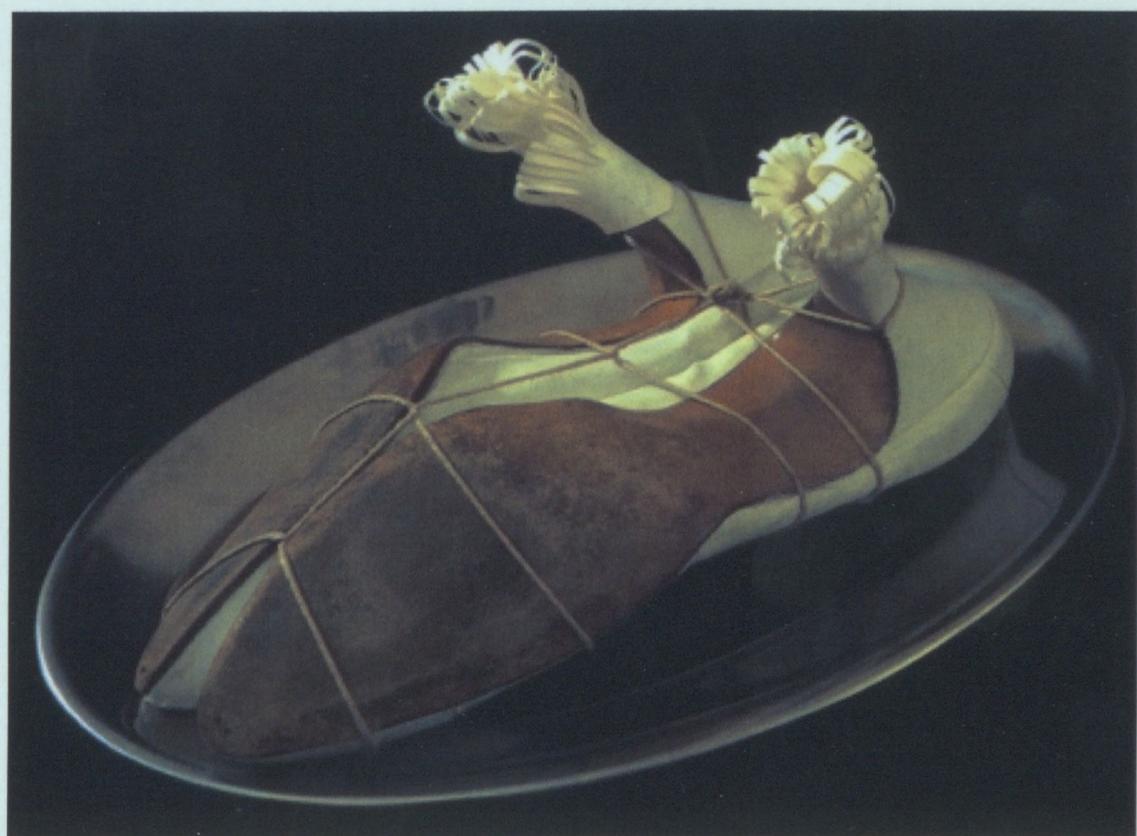


Figure 9

suggests a coarse and loose woman'.<sup>30</sup> In historic Chinese erotic practice, a woman's bound foot could become a place of penetration, sometimes in preference to the genitals. Psychology considers feet a phallic or masculine symbol, and the shoe a vaginal or feminine symbol. With red shoes, the vaginal association becomes more relevant for understanding the motif's contemporary potency. Women wear shoes more to please themselves, rather than men, as fashion theorists have postulated. It is other women who mostly notice the shoes a woman wears, appreciating the same details the wearer does. Wearing red shoes today has masturbatory overtones through the combination of shoe symbolism, and the red of increased blood-flow associated with physical arousal. A woman putting on a pair of shoes can be seen in Freudian terms as a solitary act of intercourse.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps this is part of the unconscious fascination shoes exert over women, especially in contemporary Western society where masturbation is considered a normal healthy part of adult sexuality. As Madonna phrased it, 'Manolo Blahnik's shoes are as good as sex...and they last longer'.<sup>32</sup> The multiple and continuing congruencies between shoes, sexuality, femininity and mythic symbolism in cultural expressions are demonstrated by the Surrealist sculpture in figure 9. The one work has been used to illustrate arguments on female fetishism,<sup>33</sup> as an exploration of fairytale metonymies of female expectations,<sup>34</sup> and as the cover image of a book on *Female Desire*.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> M. Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1989), p. 297.

<sup>31</sup> Gamman quotes Suzanne Moore as saying 'Most of the pleasure [of buying shoes] involves a private fantasy that starts with me and ends at my feet. Men don't get a look in'. L. Gamman, 'Self Fashioning, Gender Display and Sexy Girl Shoes: What's at Stake – Female Fetishism or Narcissism?' in *Footnotes* (see Benstock and Ferriss, above), p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> D. Kazanjian, 'Feets of Brilliance', *Vogue* (USA), March 1992, quoted in M. Blahnik, *Drawings* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> L. Gamman and M. Makinen, *Female Fetishism: a New Look* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Warner, pp. 385 – 386; pl. 25.

<sup>35</sup> R. Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (1984) (London: Paladin, 1987).

### 2.3 Masculine Red Shoes

'But since their wings have got rusted,/the angels wanna wear my red shoes'<sup>36</sup>

In order to understand some of the later attitudes and prejudices towards uses of red shoes from the eighteenth-century, it is necessary to look at their early history. Most cultural uses of red shoes, through Greek, Roman, medieval and early modern times, occur in conjunction with masculinity, often in the specific state forms of royalty or religion. Therefore, the Masculine type of red shoes will be discussed first to set up precedents with which to compare later instances of red shoes.

Men have worn red shoes for a long time, as emblems of status, strength, authority and power. Spartan soldiers wore red boots to hide bloodstains, as showing fear or pain was frowned upon in their culture.<sup>37</sup> Red Roman sandals first indicated the highest magisterial ranks – a privilege removed if the wearer was suspected of Christianity - and later became the sole prerogative of the emperor.<sup>38</sup> Plutarch describes Romulus, the founder of Rome as wearing red shoes as an 'outward trapping of power.'<sup>39</sup> The Coptic shoes in figure 10 of approximately 500CE display their value through the application of gold decoration. Henry VIII was buried in red shoes in 1547, following the funerary tradition set by Edward IV (d.1483).<sup>40</sup> The Choctaw tribe in North America gave their newly-initiated warriors red moccasins as a sign of honour. One famous, though possible legendary, chief even took Red Shoes as his warrior name (more accurately, 'He took red shoes and killed').<sup>41</sup>

The general fashionable introduction of heeled shoes is apocryphally credited to Catherine de Medicis upon her marriage to Henri II of France in 1533. Although the first documentary record of high-heeled shoes is in a price list of

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<sup>36</sup> Elvis Costello. (The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes. *My Aim Is True*. 1977. Rykodisc. RCD 20271, line 2.

<sup>37</sup> Chenciner, p. 37. and E. Girotti (trans. J. H. Neuteboom), *Footwear. History and customs*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Milan: BE-MA Editrice, 1990), p. 125.

<sup>38</sup> Girotti, p. 128.

<sup>39</sup> D. H. J. Larmour, 'Plutarch's Compositional Methods in the Theseus and Romulus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, (1974), p. 373.

<sup>40</sup> J. Loach, 'The Function of Ceremonial in the Reign of Henry VIII', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> H. C. Horsford, 'Faulkner's (Mostly) Unreal Indians in Early Mississippi History', *American Literature*, (1992), p. 317.



Figure 10

1605,<sup>42</sup> visual evidence shows heels were established as a footwear style by about 1600. Red leather-covered heels soon emerged as a status symbol, no matter what the colour of the shoe, and were one of the few seventeenth-century fashions to appear in England before being seen in France: James I had favoured them since the beginning of the century.<sup>43</sup> In the court of Louis XIV, whose appellation of the Sun King echoes some of the symbolic solar nature of red, only the King and the highest ranking nobles were allowed to wear red heels to their shoes, as seen in Fig. 11. Louis was only 5 foot 5 and a half inches tall and ‘must have felt a completely different man when he put on his high-heeled shoes as part of the panoply of power’.<sup>44</sup> Making the heels red, a colour of kingship, would add to Louis’ display of royal authority. Eventually red heels became established in male fashion, their wear spreading to different echelons of society. The Earl of Chesterfield twice mentions appropriate wear for a well-dressed young man as including ‘white feathers and red heels’ in letters to his son written in 1751.<sup>45</sup> Red heels continued to be popular, and by around 1770 they were not restricted to either grand dress or men, while remaining quite fashionable. A London Magazine writer asked ‘whether your London ladies like your London gentlemen intend to wear red heels to their shoes’, while the *London Chronicle* of 1787 dictates that for a man making his entrance into society, ‘Your first appearance must be in red morocco slippers with yellow heels.’<sup>46</sup>

Entirely red masculine shoes have less of a general history. A letter from Lord Palmerston in 1829 says ‘...your Mustaphas have no idea of any traffic beyond rhubarb, figs and red slippers; but what energy can be expected from a nation who have no heels to their shoes and pass their whole life slipshod?’<sup>47</sup> These red slippers, often made of morocco leather like those in Fig. 12, were popular as male informal domestic wear during the nineteenth-century. The predominance and respectability of black menswear during the same period – the ‘Great Masculine Renunciation’, as Flügel termed it<sup>48</sup> – precluded respectable men wearing red shoes in public, except as part of ceremonial wear. Northampton

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<sup>42</sup> L. Vass and M. Molnár, *Handmade Shoes for Men* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), p. 162.

<sup>43</sup> C. McDowell, *Shoes: Fashion and Fantasy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> C. Strachey, (ed.) *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to his son* (London: Dent, 1932), volume II. Letter CCLXI, p. 174; and letter CCLXIII, p. 180

<sup>46</sup> J. Swann, *Shoes* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1982), p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> McDowell, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930) (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 111.



Figure 11



Figure 12

holds five pairs of men's slippers, in red tapestry, leather or with red heels, from the years 1800 to 1899, but none for outdoor wear.<sup>49</sup> This seems to reflect a class-based use of red shoes, even outside the public domain, as well as a certain romantic orientalism which corresponds with nineteenth-century art movements.

Despite copious regulations on what English monarchs wear during their coronation, curiously, these do not seem to extend to footwear. Charles II wore white kid shoes with red heels in 1660 (fig. 13), and there are four later pairs in a similar style in the collection of the Museum of London. Two examples from c. 1821 are described as 'coronation' shoes (figs. 14 and 15), suggesting that this white upper, red heel shoe had become a court convention for those attending the ceremony. A pair from the 1850s with no recorded provenance echoes Charles' seventeenth-century fashion (Fig. 16), and may have been used as fancy dress or purely ceremonial wear.<sup>50</sup>

### **Contemporary use of Masculine red shoes**

As McDowell notes in connection with shoes, 'since the 1960s men have become a lot more adventurous as social and sexual stereotypes have become looser'.<sup>51</sup> Masculine red shoes are an exuberant choice of accessory and expression of self with little of the spectrum of connotation attached to Feminine red shoes (Chapter 3). For the contemporary male who chooses red shoes, the cultural emphasis seems to have shifted from power and status to an expression of individualism and creativity. Though Vass and Molnar believe that the historic use of red heels is also a sign of individuality, at a time when there were fewer ways to be distinguished: 'The more important the wearer, the more magnificent and individualistic his shoes would be.'<sup>52</sup>

The titular character in the 1985 film *The Man With One Red Shoe*, Richard, is picked at random by CIA agents at an airport to be used as a decoy because he is wearing one red trainer with one brown loafer. Richard plays violin

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<sup>49</sup> Vass and Molnár record a man's personal recollection of a scandal caused in the Parisian society press by a member of the Vanderbilt family wearing yellow shoes with his black tuxedo at the Deauville casino in 1924 (p. 63), but no specific material on the inappropriateness of public masculine red shoe use was found during this research. However, inference can be drawn from the lack of extant pairs, and of visual and textual evidence, during most of the nineteenth-century.

<sup>50</sup> The most recent monarch, Elizabeth II, wore entirely white court shoes in fine kid.

<sup>51</sup> McDowell, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Vass and Molnár, p. 54.



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

professionally, and in a summary of his character by the agents trailing him is called ‘an eccentric; a creative’.<sup>53</sup> He teaches music, encouraging his students to play ‘with passion’, and breaks into his own composition during performances. Throughout the film, he is frequently referred to not by his name, but as the Man With One Red Shoe. Thus, the motif of a red shoe becomes a cipher for the identity of an individual, creative man.<sup>54</sup> For a 1997 exhibition, the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney commissioned a pair of men’s handmade crocodile-skin shoes entirely coloured red. Shown in figure 17, they were used in the exhibition to demonstrate the fusion of traditional craftsmanship, modern style, and the individual choice and fit that bespoke shoemaking represents.

A thirty-year-old male Irish costumier writes that three of his four pairs of shoes are red, and when wearing his red shoes he feels ‘very comfortable and confident in them [...] They give me a boost.’ He also connects red shoes with individual expression:

They are my way of saying something about myself. They are not about anyone else and whether anyone else really understands it is irrelevant. The thing is I understand it and whenever I put them on I am asserting a certain side of my personality.<sup>55</sup>

In personal experience, I saw the actor Jeremy Irons wearing red shoes with a black outfit at a film premiere.<sup>56</sup> The legendary artist and *couturier* Mariano Fortuny wore only black patent leather shoes or sandals of plaited red leather, according to his friend’s description.<sup>57</sup> Both these men are also creative individuals expressing their personality through red shoes.

## Religious red shoes

One type of Masculine red shoes remains in continuous historic and cultural use. The Pope has worn red shoes since at least the fourth century as part

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<sup>53</sup> *The Man With One Red Shoe*. Dir. Stan Dragoti. Tom Hanks, Jim Belushi. Twentieth Century Fox. 1985. DVD FO 01447ST.

<sup>54</sup> The reason for his wearing one red shoe is never explained.

<sup>55</sup> M. Roberts. <martinr3@hotmail.com>. RE: red shoes!. Personal e-mail to Hilary Davidson. <hbgd103@soton.ac.uk>. 4 September 2004.

<sup>56</sup> This may have been a reference to the theme of the film, *Chinese Box*. Greater Union Cinema, Pitt St., Sydney (February 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Ugo Ojetti, quoted in G. de Osma, *Fortuny: The Life and Work of Mariano Fortuny* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 1994), p. 17.

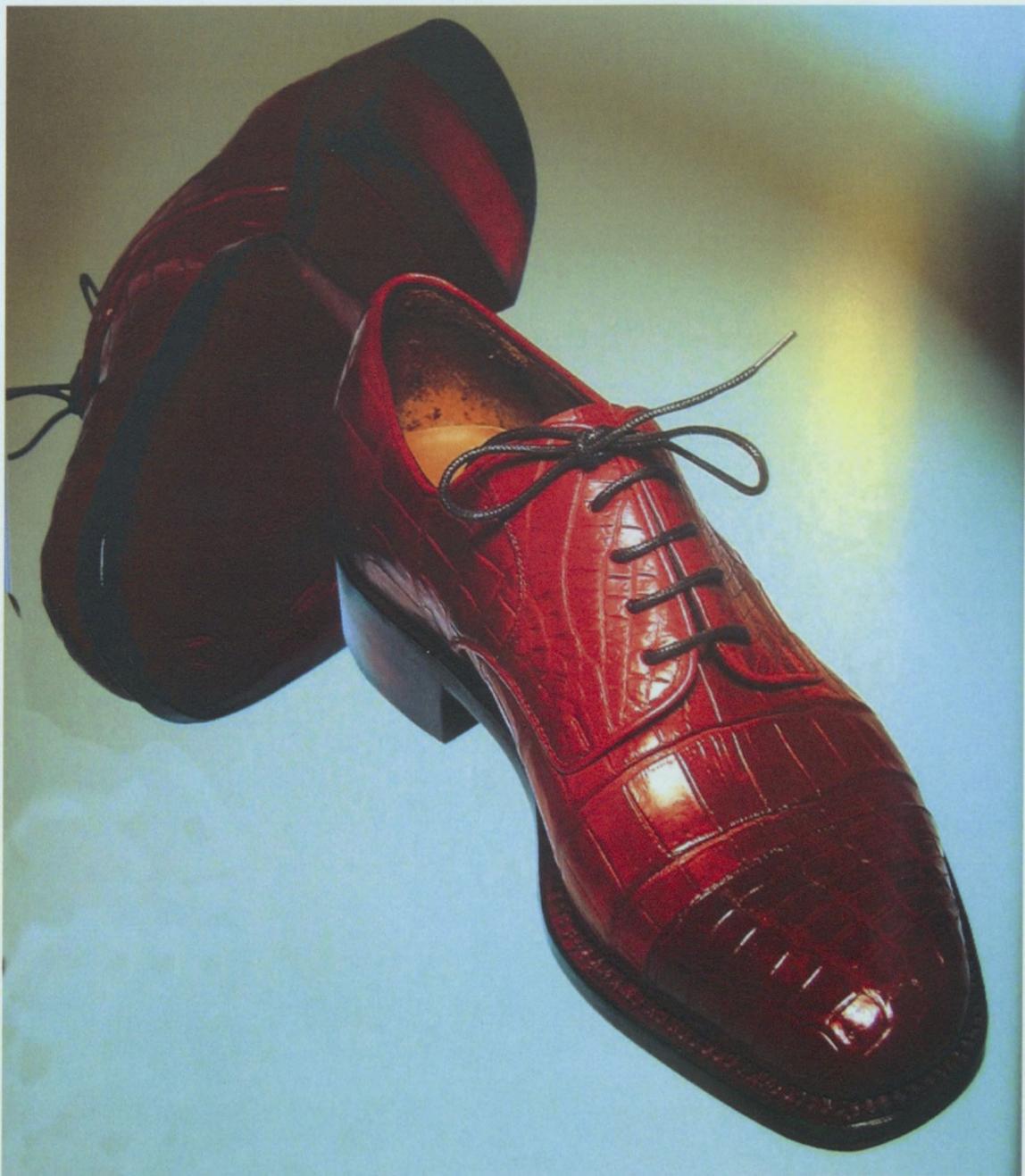


Figure 17

of the pontifical regalia.<sup>58</sup> Figures 18 to 20 show an historical selection of papal footwear. Cardinals wear red shoes with their red robes and hat, symbolising their position as soldiers of the Pope,<sup>59</sup> and also ‘the virtue of charity [and] the blood of the martyrs’, by Papal decree.<sup>60</sup> Holy red shoes thus become emblems of a status whose masculinity is neutralised by the rule of chastity. This clerical androgyny de-genders the personal male identity of the wearers, while reinforcing the power of the sanctity associated with their spiritual rank and status.<sup>61</sup>

## Summary

Throughout history, Masculine red shoes have served to set one individual apart from others, a symbol of power, and mark of rank. The authority can manifest in positions of religious, military or royal status. The use of red heels, and red slippers in a domestic environment were fashionable attributes which also served as markers of nobility and the upper classes. In recent times, this individualising has transferred into signifying a creative, sometimes eccentric male who can use red shoes for self-expression. Apart perhaps from eccentricity, all of these meanings of Masculine red shoes may be considered positive, appropriate qualities for men.

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<sup>58</sup> Girotti, p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> V. Steele, *the red dress* [sic] (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2001), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> The distinctly unchaste popes of the early church, particularly during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fulfilled the power and nobility aspects of red shoes use through their military involvement and political influence.

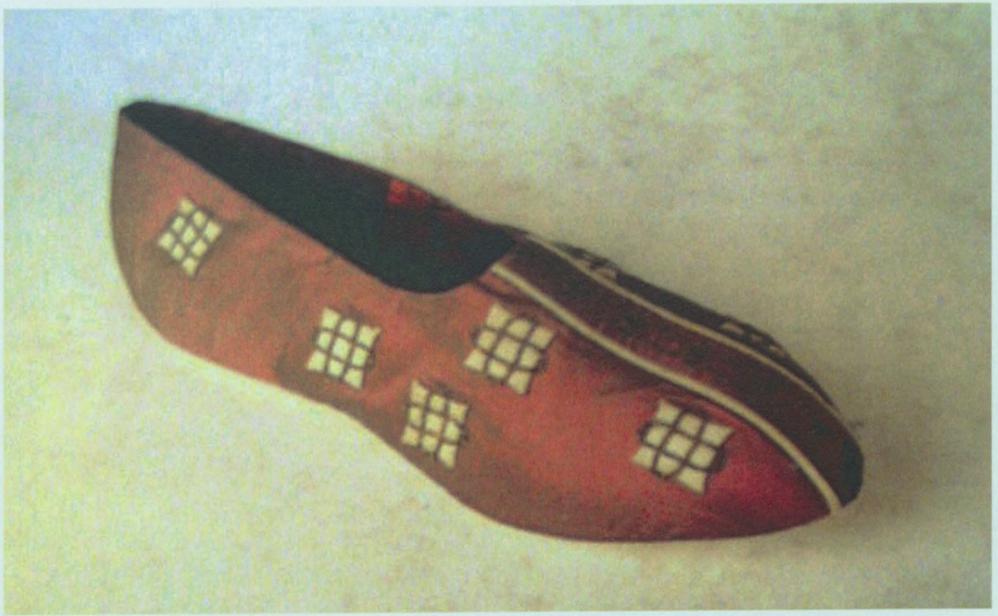


Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

### 3. Feminine Red Shoes

Every woman should own a pair of red shoes.<sup>1</sup>

As Margaret Atwood asks, ‘What is a ‘good’ woman? What is a ‘bad’ one? Is goodness for women the same as goodness for men?’<sup>2</sup> These are questions fundamentally connected with the ambiguities of red shoes as a female symbol. The next two sections look first at the Negative Feminine type of red shoes, as the earliest chronologically, then at the Positive, which is more contemporary. These types are two sides of the same coin, and can represent both attitudes simultaneously, depending on the viewpoint of the observer. Feminine red shoes particularly embody how clothing is ‘instrumental in the process of socialisation into sexual and gender roles’.<sup>3</sup> The chapter covers the entire investigative period of 1750 -2004, although red shoes create a discourse that requires flexibility within a chronological approach. Since the range of historic examples of female red shoes is far larger than men and children’s, the focus is primarily on their use as symbol and motif.

#### 3.1 Negative Feminine: *The Red Shoes*

Hans Christian Andersen’s 1841 story *The Red Shoes* will be used to explore the Negative views of Feminine red shoes. The tale encapsulates most of the meaningful issues surrounding them; provides an insight into pre-twentieth-century attitudes; and has been the inspiration for many later uses of Red Shoes as a cultural motif.

*The Red Shoes* is the story of a poor, pretty girl named Karen. She receives a pair of red shoes on the day her mother is buried. An old lady passing the funeral in her carriage feels sorry for her and adopts Karen, educating and providing for her, but also burning her clumsy red shoes. The old lady allows Karen a pair of shining red shoes or her confirmation, as she cannot see their colour due to poor eyesight. At the service,

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<sup>1</sup> Survey response 9.

<sup>2</sup> M. Atwood, ‘Running with the Tigers’ in Lorna Sage (ed.), *Flesh and the mirror: essays on the art of Angela Carter* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 117. Atwood’s work deals sufficiently with Red Shoe themes that Rosemary Sullivan wrote a critical biography entitled *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out* (1998).

<sup>3</sup> M. Barnard, *Fashion As Communication* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 111.

Karen can only think about the shoes.<sup>4</sup> The girl chooses the red shoes again to wear to church next Sunday, and meets an old soldier outside, who calls them ‘pretty little dancing shoes’. Karen starts dancing, and cannot stop until she removes the shoes. Wearing them to a ball later, instead of nursing the old lady, the shoes dance Karen out of the town and into the forest. She cannot stop dancing and the shoes will not leave her feet. In the churchyard, Karen meets an angel who curses her to dance forever as punishment for her pride and vanity. She dances night and day until the executioner mercifully cuts off her feet, and the shoes dance away with them. On wooden feet she goes to church, where the shoes dance in front of the door and bar her way. She then works at the vicarage, until her prayers and repentance are heard and the angel lifts her bodily into heaven.<sup>5</sup>

The effect of wearing red shoes during the period Andersen is writing can be appreciated from a survey of nineteenth century shoes in the Northampton Boot and Shoe Museum. From circa. 1799 to circa.1870, the collection holds only one pair of women’s red footwear, the elastic sided boots seen in figure 21. These were found in the back of a storeroom of a long-established shoe shop that shut down. The inference is that these boots did not sell, perhaps because the colour was unpopular. The predominant colours for the rest of the women’s footwear between these dates are cream, pink (pale and coral), black, or white. Around 1810 there are also bright colours like yellow, purple, blue and green. It cannot be known exactly how representative the Northampton collection is, but as the largest shoe collection in Britain, which contains frequent examples of red shoes before and after these years, the lack may be considered indicative. During the same period, red shoes and heels are found in both the men’s and children’s collections. Translating the lack of female red shoes to rural Denmark highlights just how sensational Karen’s footwear would have appeared in church.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is apparently based on an event from Andersen’s own life, when a new pair of boots distracted him during his confirmation. M. Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1989), p. 311.

<sup>5</sup> The full tale can be found in Appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup> Informal discussion has shown that even now some women would hesitate before wearing red shoes to a church service.



Figure 21

## Transgression

Andersen's *Red Shoes* connects the footwear with a series of symbolic transgressions. Karen starts the tale as an orphan, a common experience for fairytale heroines. The good, beloved mother dies, leaving her daughter to the future mercies of a step-mother or mother in law. These 'absent mothers'<sup>7</sup>, as Warner terms them, sometimes remain in the form of a magical protector to help their daughters through the vicissitudes inflicted upon them. They thus manage to provide a guiding femininity, a template for the 'right' female behaviour according to the social mores of the time and place of the fairytale's recording. A society's perspective on displays of feminine independence and character changes, and the patterns of change are reflected in fairytale attitudes. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, women writers produced many literary fairytales, dealing with the ambiguous positions of women in their time, and the problems of negotiating marriage, love, sex, and a female identity. Warner identifies a shift then from 'pre-revolutionary protests [...] to comparative acquiescence'.<sup>8</sup> The audience for fairytales became not the literary *salon* but the nursery, with a corresponding shift to a morally instructive, edifying tone. Andersen's tale, written in 1841, sits within the later period. The Brothers Grimm also create a specific notion of feminine identity and behaviour in their stories. Revisions through successive editions of their two-volume *Children's and Household Tales* originally published in 1812 and 1815, ensured that by the 1857 publication, gender-specific role models were emphasised according to 'the dominant patriarchal code of that time'.<sup>9</sup> The Old Lady replaces Karen's mother in the story and attempts to continue the girl's socialisation. Karen's obsession with red shoes counteracts this restrictive care, allowing her inner desires an agency for expression. Therefore, Karen's punishment for flouting social conventions through the exercise of her will is appropriate within the moral atmosphere of Anderson's day. She displays the sins of pride and vanity, according to her contemporary perspective, in the first of her series of transgressions.

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<sup>7</sup> M. Warner, 'Absent Mothers: Cinderella' in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 201 – 217 (p. 206).

<sup>8</sup> Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>9</sup> J. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 14.

The second relates to class. Karen sees the princess of the land wearing ‘the loveliest red shoes, made from morocco’,<sup>10</sup> increasing her own longing for red footwear. While these shoes are appropriate for the role and status of a princess, for Karen they represent an ambition beyond her poor origins. Mackie considers Karen’s progress through the series of red shoes to deal with ‘inequities, ambitions, and charmed transfigurations rooted in class status.’<sup>11</sup> In *Indolence* of 1757 (Fig. 22), Greuze depicts a lazy servant girl, disordered in dress, wearing one red shoe with the other lying at her feet. Behind her, cracked dishes testify to neglect and idleness. Loosened shoes were an allegorical symbol for a loose woman,<sup>12</sup> and here the vanity of the colour reinforces the painting’s moral admonition. A similar pair of shoes to those in the painting is held by the Museum of London. Figure 23 shows these slightly later red shoes of circa. 1785, which belonged to the wife of George III’s doctor. What is appropriate for a married woman, of respectable standing, is insolent in lower class girl. This agrees with the class and status issues identified by Mackie as themes in Andersen’s tale.

## Sexuality and gender

Issues surrounding female sexuality contribute greatly to the potency of red shoes, especially the Negative type. *The Red Shoes*, while containing no overtly sexual references, still raises a number of these issues that underlie Karen’s third transgression as a female aware of her sexuality. Both Duffy and Reaves read a female castration interpretation into Karen’s experiences.<sup>13</sup> If the latter considers that the executioner’s cutting off the red shoes is a castration that ‘desexualizes Karen’<sup>14</sup>, then logically her wearing the shoes is a form of sexualisation. The Grimm’s removal of many of the original erotic and sexual elements from their collected tales is a literary castration supporting the abbreviated perspectives on sexuality prevalent in their time. Karen is aware of her physical self; the mirror tells her ‘You are more than pretty, you are beautiful’.<sup>15</sup> This can be interpreted as vanity, but also as the girl’s consciousness of her

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<sup>10</sup> Morocco is a very fine kidskin leather, sometime finely grained, and used historically for high-quality footwear. ‘The Red Shoes’, *A Treasury of Hans Christian Andersen*, trans. E. C. Haugaard (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993), pp. 231-236, repr. in S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds.), *Footnotes: On Shoes*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001)), p. 306.

<sup>11</sup> Erin Mackie, ‘Red Shoes and Bloody Stumps’ in *Footnotes* (see Haugaard, above), p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> L. O’Keeffe, *Shoes* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1996), p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> Duffy, pp. 310 & 296.

<sup>14</sup> G. Reaves, ‘The Slip in the Ballet Slipper: Illusion and the naked foot’ in *Footnotes* (see Haugaard, above), p. 261.

<sup>15</sup> Haugaard, p. 306.



Figure 22



Figure 23

physical desirability. Confirmation, like the start of puberty, occurs around age twelve or thirteen. Karen's use of red shoes during this 'solemn occasion'<sup>16</sup> symbolically represents her potential rebellious behaviour as a mature adult, and is an unseemly visual reminder of her imminent menstrual cycle. On two instances, everyone in church looks at Karen's feet. Her red shoes focus the social gaze onto a hidden and sexually expressive area of her body, drawing inappropriate attention to her physical presence in a spiritual domain.

The role of shoes as sexual fetish objects is well-documented, from Freud (1927)<sup>17</sup> to Rossi (1977)<sup>18</sup> and Steele (1996)<sup>19</sup> and may be considered the object's dominant fetish interpretation. Figure 24 shows an art installation using a typical 'fetish' style of modern red shoes, involving platform soles, numerous straps and buckles, and a phallically extended high-heel. Freud's interpretation of a fetish as substitution for the female phallus perceived, by the fact of its absence, as having been castrated. Mackie, however, argues for a Positive interpretation of Karen's shoes within the Negative moral stance of Andersen's tale by presenting them as operating 'primarily [...] as magical-religious rather than psychoanalytic-sexual' fetishes,<sup>20</sup> acknowledging the critical power this stance contains. She uses the term 'counterfetish' to describe Karen's use of her red shoes 'to reveal and transgress [...] the bad jujū of a socioreligious system fixed against her',<sup>21</sup> rather than subscribing to the notion of an inherently worthless attribution of value to the fetish object encouraged by sexual- or commodity-based fetish critiques.

The sacred potential of the fetish raises the issue of red shoes and religion. Mackie points out that 'Karen's first, and all her subsequent, brushes with religion define her transgressive independence'.<sup>22</sup> When Duffy notes that 'Fairies were often rationalised as rebel angels who didn't fall all the way [...] out of heaven',<sup>23</sup> she connects the fairytale form with Christian spiritual beings moved out of their appropriate context through rebellious action. Extending the parallel, Zipes posits that

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> S. Freud, 'Fetishism' in *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. and ed. by J. Strachey (London: Pelican 1953-1977), XII: *On Sexuality. Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other works*, ed. by Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 351 – 357.

<sup>18</sup> W. Rossi, *The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> V. Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, sex and power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Mackie, p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> Mackie, p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> Mackie, p. 238.

<sup>23</sup> Duffy, p. 197.



Figure 24

as a literary institution, ‘the fairy tale assumes a secular religious purpose’<sup>24</sup> helping to maintain the prevailing holy paradigm of an age. Karen’s distraction during confirmation, and exile from church until she sacrifices her red shoes and truly repents, mark out religious transgression as a reason for her punitive suffering.<sup>25</sup> The Negative attitude implied by the church towards red shoes makes sense in the context of the institution’s own use of the footwear for celibate males in positions of sacred authority. If this pattern of holy virginity is upheld as a socially approved way to use red shoes, then any profane or sexually active use, especially by women, contravenes the norm and become automatically ‘wrong’ or sinful. Warner acknowledges the value of fairytales in attempting to negotiate this spiritual dichotomy:

The stories express the difficulties experienced by young women entering a sexual life in a social context where the pattern of sinful woman is Eve, who had carnal knowledge and was fatal to humanity, and the pattern of goodness is Mary, the Virgin.<sup>26</sup>

Virginity has been regarded as a woman’s most valuable asset throughout Western history, and marriage the only culturally sanctioned form of sexual activity. The moral message is clearly that sexually active women outside the boundaries of marriage, or husbandly control, are inherently bad, and cultural uses of red shoes reinforce the madonna/whore tension in the Negative perspective on sexuality and independence. Cultural expressions connect the Red Shoes motif with women considered immoral in various ways, including deserting mothers;<sup>27</sup> unfaithful wives;<sup>28</sup> girlfriends who leave;<sup>29</sup> prostitutes; bad girls; and *femmes fatales*. This type is prevalent in songs, where 37%, the highest proportion, use the Negative Feminine red shoes motif, and 29% connect red

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<sup>24</sup> Zipes, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Although red shoes for clergy are used within the Catholic church, and nineteenth-century Denmark was Protestant, Karen’s use of red shoes is representative of any transgression against the institutes of Christian religion.

<sup>26</sup> Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, p. 355.

<sup>27</sup> For example, ‘[mama’s] long gone with her red shoes on’, leaving ‘nobody but the baby’, in a disturbing lullaby by Gillian Welch, Alison Krauss and Emmylou Harris. Didn’t Leave Nobody But The Baby. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*. 2000. Mercury Records Inc. 170 069-2(11)

<sup>28</sup> Emma Bovary wears ‘little crimson slippers’ while contemplating unfaithful behaviour. G. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary: A story of provincial life (1857)* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 281. Mississippi John Hurt’s song ‘Richland’s Woman Blues concerns a woman who, while her ‘husband’s goin’ away’, is ‘raring to go, got red shoes on [her] feet’.

<[http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/artistswithsongs/mississippi\\_john\\_hurt\\_3.htm](http://blueslyrics.tripod.com/artistswithsongs/mississippi_john_hurt_3.htm)> [accessed 18 March 2004], lines 6 & 9.

<sup>29</sup> A character in a B. B. King song sings ‘I saw you with another man, baby/[...]You know I recognised the dress I bought [...] /To match your red shoes’. Take Off Your Shoes. *King of Blues*. 1989. MCA. MCAD-42183.

shoes with sex.<sup>30</sup> Karen's six transgressions are rebellions against forms of social regulation, making her wayward and out-of-control either of herself or a male authority. Issues of control in the Negative Feminine type are emphasised by the concept of *femme fatale*, the seductive, predatory and destructive woman. The term could describe a sexually mature Karen. Zipes considers how evil is 'always associated with female nature out of control' in the Disney versions of Grimms' tales,<sup>31</sup> and Warner points out that for fictional female predators 'after a bout of hellraising, there's nowhere else for the story to take them but death'.<sup>32</sup> She cites cartoon *femme fatale* Jessica Rabbit's classic line 'I'm not bad. I'm just drawn that way' as an example of the expectations put onto such women by society (refer to Fig. 7). In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), Jessica is suspected of adultery and murder, but by the film's end is proven an innocent, faithful and loving wife. This subversion of assumptions about an overtly sexual female character demonstrates the extent of their preconception.

The higher percentage (59%) of male musical artists utilising Negative Feminine red shoes also raise the question: what is the male role in the lives of 'immoral' women? How much of the Negative Feminine type results from male interpretations of female behaviour? The connection between these censured and often fugitive women is their sexually availability – non-virgins moving outside their acceptable social environments and rejecting the idea of the passive female sexual experience. The latter stems from patriarchal social models created and upheld by male authorities. *The Red Shoes* is unusual for containing a female shoemaker, albeit an old, clumsy one. Various translations call her Dame Shoemaker, Granny Cobbler, or a widow. Her husband was a shoemaker and she makes Karen's first pair of red shoes from scraps. Historically, shoemaking is a predominantly male trade, physically demanding and labour intensive. This early introduction of a woman fulfilling a male role points to the feminine transgression to follow, also involving an exhaustive physicality in the form of dance. The history of Masculine red shoes use means that any woman wearing red shoes could be seen as subverting the power of a male symbol. Accordingly, the appropriation of masculine gendered roles forms the fifth transgression of Feminine red shoes, an action more easily committed in context of the prevailing 'double moral standard' discrepancy between male and female behaviour

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 1, Table 2.

<sup>31</sup> Zipes, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> M. Warner, 'Monstrous Mothers: Women Over the Top' in *Managing Monsters. Six Myths of Our Time. The 1994 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 3.

operating in the nineteenth-century.<sup>33</sup> The research has found no historic examples of men being considered sexually available by red shoes use. As a leading campaigner for women's rights wrote in 1879, 'We never hear it [...] complacently asserted of a young woman that "*she* is only sowing her wild oats"<sup>34</sup>. This duality remains effective in contemporary use for heterosexual men.

Karen's multiple violations of social codes serve to actively connect red shoes with the danger inherent in the colour. Turim wonders if 'perhaps all narratives fixated on young women in red shoes are [...] deathly cautionary tales of the danger such shoes signify.'<sup>35</sup> As human survival is dependent to a certain extent on community resources, defying the established community rules can serve to put the transgressive individual in physical danger. If a society considers the rejection of religion and being sexually active as sinful, these moral violations are believed to also endanger the soul. Andersen presents Karen's desire, vanity and pride as sources for the obsession with red shoes blinding her to impending danger. This forms a sixth transgression against the instinct of self-preservation, protecting oneself from harm.

### 3.2 Positive Feminine Red Shoes

Having discussed the Negative side of Feminine red shoes, this section explores the symbol's opposite aspect. The use of red shoes in *The Snow Queen*, another Andersen story of 1845, embodies the difference. When little Gerda is looking for her playmate Kay, taken by the Snow Queen, she offers the river her red shoes, 'which she loved better than anything else'.<sup>36</sup> They float back to shore, so she stands in a boat to throw the shoes further in. The boat drifts off, with the shoes following, and her adventures begin. When the children eventually return, they have grown up. Like *The Red Shoes*, the footwear precipitates a journey, but here a positive one resulting in maturity, understanding and love. Gerda does not display Karen's obsession with her red shoes, giving them up willingly instead. Thus, after a series of trials, her virtuous reward is the return of her beloved friend. Red shoes remain objects of desire for both girls, but

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<sup>33</sup> L. Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Gender History*, 16, no. 1 April 2004, *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> J. Butler, *Social Purity* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1879), p. 7, quoted in L. Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Gender History*, 16, no. 1 (April 2004), p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> M. Turim, 'High Angles on Shoes: Cinema, Gender and Footwear' in *Footnotes* (see Haugaard, above), p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> H. C. Andersen, "Second Story: The Flower Garden of the Woman Who Could Conjure' in *The Snow Queen' Project Gilead* <[http://hca.gilead.org.il/snow\\_que.html](http://hca.gilead.org.il/snow_que.html)> [accessed 10 June 2004], para. 3.

Gerda knows how to use them. This alternative symbolic appearance of the motif in a story by the man who attached such strong Negative connotations to red shoes demonstrates their inherent duality. However, the qualities Karen manifests with her red shoes – passion, independence, self-determination and transgressing social restrictions – can also be seen as Positive actions by contemporary women.

It is fairly simple to trace Masculine red shoes historically because of the introduction of red heels during a certain time period. Doing the same with women's red shoes is harder as female footwear comes in more colours than male, especially in the last two centuries.. Some pairs must simply have matched red dresses, as the oft-cited incident from Proust's *The Guermantes Way II* (1925) demonstrates. Upon leaving for dinner, the Duc de Guermantes notices his wife's footwear and exclaims 'You've kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and put on red shoes, or [...] tell the lady's maid at once to bring down a pair of red shoes.'<sup>37</sup>The number of historic red shoes rises in pairs dated after the 1860s, when synthetic aniline dyes were introduced. The dyes were particularly effective on fabric, resulting in startling contrasts in historic collections between early pale or soberly coloured shoes and the cheerfully gaudy satin creations of the late nineteenth-century, like the shoes in figure 25.<sup>38</sup>

## Metamorphosis

Although the contrasting aspects of Feminine red shoes are inseparable, and the ambiguity created by their simultaneous attributes is an essential contributor to the symbolic potency of red shoes, the second half of the historic period covered by this study (1880-2004) develops more Positive attachments to red shoes as object, motif and symbol. The shift in considerations of Feminine red shoes from generally Negative to a more balanced and synthesised Positive follows larger socio-cultural changes. Those with most impact on red shoes concern women's emancipation, revisions of the double moral standard, and developments in psychology and sexual studies.<sup>39</sup> In the recent exhibition *Femme Fatale* (2003), Steele focused on the 'metamorphoses of the

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<sup>37</sup> M. Proust, *The Guermantes Way II* (1925) (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 96. This appears to be based on some real-life incident concerning Proust's friend Mme. Straus, based on a letter to her, and his inscription in her copy of the volume. The shoes also function as an indication of the Guermantes' selfishness, and is the subject of discussion by many commentators, most notably Walter Benjamin. The whole scene hinges on the social and personal characters of the couple as revealed by this potential faux-pas, giving even these shoes a greater symbolic meaning.

<sup>38</sup> The change in dye technology does not appear to have affected the colours obtainable in leather.

<sup>39</sup> Hall, *passim*.



Figure 25

modern woman during the pivotal decades from 1880 to 1914'.<sup>40</sup> The changes she discusses are worth closer examination for the way they embody shifts in attitudes towards feminine sexuality and identity as represented through clothing. The term *femme fatale* is discussed above in relation to its Negative connotations of danger and sexuality. Steele also balances the concept by closely relating it to the contemporary anxiety aroused by the position of the modern woman.<sup>41</sup> Modern perspectives can initiate a reconsideration of an apparently censoring discourse of identity.

### 3.2.2 The ruby slippers

The appearance of the ruby slippers in the film of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939; Fig. 26) is the cultural counterpoint to Andersen's *The Red Shoes*. Andersen incorporated previous and contemporary attitudes into one cultural expression at a point in history. This literary expression also formed a source of inspiration for uses of red shoes in a Negative way from that point onwards. His story is chronologically at the centre of the first half of the modern era under consideration – approximately 1750 to 1880. In addition to the changes outlined above, by the time *Wizard* was filmed in 1939, the First World War had passed and the Second approached. The benevolent effects shown in the film of a female wearing red shoes encapsulates the gradual cultural changes of the previous decades, and therefore marks the transition between Negative and Positive uses of Feminine Red Shoes. The ruby slippers appear near the middle of the second half of the modern era, 1880 to 2004, and have formed a source of inspiration for Positive uses of red shoes from the point of their appearance onward. In the greater type of Feminine red shoes therefore, Andersen's red shoes and Dorothy's ruby slippers serve as historic and cultural embodiments of contrasting Negative and Positive attitudes.

The ruby slippers are possibly the most culturally memorable pair of red shoes.<sup>42</sup> When Dorothy's house arrives in the land of Oz, swept from Kansas by the tornado, it lands on the Wicked Witch of the East, killing her instantly and liberating

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<sup>40</sup> V. Steele, 'Femme Fatale: Fashion and Visual Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris', *Fashion Theory*, 8, Issue 3, p. 316.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* is apparently the most watched movie in history, estimated to have been seen 'over a billion times', though the method of quantifying this is unknown. 'Authentic Ruby Slippers', *The Ruby Slipper Fan Club* <<http://users.deltacomm.com/rainbowz/rubyslipperfanclub/authenticslippers.html>> [accessed 5 September 2004], para. 1.



Figure 26



Figure 27

the Munchkins she ruled over.<sup>43</sup> The Good Witch of the North whisks the ruby slippers from the feet of the violently deceased Witch to the girl's, and the shoes accompany Dorothy and her companions as they journey to find the Wizard of Oz. By famously clicking her ruby heels together three times and saying 'there's no place like home', Dorothy uses the slippers' magic to return to Kansas. The movement from a morally negative female, who has received her punishment for wickedness, to a young virgin figure who will use the shoes to eventually achieve her heart's desire of returning home reflects the way contemporary women have embraced the Positive attributes of Red Shoes out of their Negative origins. Rather than dancing off full of bloody feet, the shoes themselves are transformed and redeemed. Dorothy's blue ankle socks (Fig. 27) mitigate the latent sexuality of the ruby slippers to create a poignant image of a girl on the verge of womanhood. Turim calls it 'the magic of the moment of transition, trauma and promise.'<sup>44</sup> The concept of *transition* in the Positive type counters the term *transgression*, implying a similar activity of moving between different conditions, but without the negative, violatory connotations. Rushdie considers that 'the *unsexiness* of [Judy] Garland's playing is what makes the movie work'<sup>45</sup>, correlating a lack of active sexual expression with the removal of Negative associations from a red shoe motif. Another shift in interpretation of the red shoes motif is that the shoes do not dictate Dorothy's actions, though she is reliant on their will as embodied by their magical powers. When these red shoes dance 'away over the fields into the deep forest'<sup>46</sup>, Dorothy is choosing to direct their movements as she follows the yellow brick road, unlike Karen, who could only watch the shoes go and take her mobility with them. Dorothy has independent agency in her red shoes, and uses them while unselfishly helping the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion to achieve their greatest desires.<sup>47</sup>

The shoes in L. Frank Baum's book (1900) were originally silver, and the designers kept this idea until the fourth draft of the script, when the 'immortal jewel-

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<sup>43</sup> Although as Rushdie points out, perhaps the Witch wasn't that wicked if the land she ruled is 'so sweetly sweet' and in good running order. S. Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> Turim, p. 80. She also cites the use of red shoes on the character of Cher in the film *Clueless* (1995) as representing the uncertainty and potential danger of adolescence.

<sup>45</sup> Rushdie, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> H. C. Andersen, 'The Red Shoes' in *Fairy Tales from Hans Andersen*, trans. by L. W. Kingsland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; 1999 edition), p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> She does, albeit accidentally, manage to kill two witches and unmask a fraudulent wizard, displaying a strength of character and connection of the ruby slippers with violence in a way not foregrounded by most commentators.

shoes' were first introduced to exploit the new film medium of Technicolor.<sup>48</sup> After an exotic 'Arabian' test pair, echoing the orientalism of historic Male red slippers, the final shape of court shoe with bow was finalised. This style was fashionable throughout the 1930s, shown in two examples from Northampton in figure 28. The exact number of ruby slippers made is unknowable, between the pairs used for close-ups, stand ins and doubles. Five pairs are known to remain in existence. There are subtle differences between each pair which fans use to identify which pair is used when in the film. Each pair was given a manufacturer's number, enabling existing pairs to be matched up, and to turn speculation on the location of missing pairs into an almost mythic quest. When put up for sale, the prices these original ruby slippers command are astonishing. One pair sold at auction in 1988 to a private collector for US\$165,000.<sup>49</sup> The winning bid from David Elkouby on the same pair during an auction in 2000 was US\$666,000 (£412,000).<sup>50</sup> Lacking the originals, the ruby slippers inspire people to create their own. The most expensive pair were made by jeweller Harry Winston for the fiftieth anniversary of the film in 1989, using actual rubies for a cost of US\$3,000,000.<sup>51</sup> Jack Townsend makes reproductions of the ruby slippers for fans using the original medium of sequins. These prices and replicas demonstrate the depth of feeling the ruby slippers generate in their legion of fans, devoted not just to *The Wizard of Oz*, but specifically to the symbol of the shoes

In October 1999, Christies in New York auctioned off personal property of Marilyn Monroe. Lot 2 was a pair of scarlet satin Ferragamo stilettos, encrusted with scarlet rhinestones and evoking the ruby slippers (Fig. 29). Figure 30 shows Monroe wearing a similar pair of red shoes in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). With a sale estimate of US\$4,000-6000, the stilettos eventually sold for US\$48,300 back to the Ferragamo family.<sup>52</sup> These red shoes became a symbol for arguably one of the most ambiguous women of the twentieth century, iconic as an actively sexual woman. The positive and negative aspects of Monroe's life will never be clear, as she has passed into legend. After seeing these red shoes amid other 'dazzling relics' displayed in the window of the Ferragamo store in New York before the auction, journalist Andrew O'Hagan was

<sup>48</sup> Rushdie, p. 14. and Turim, p. 79.

<sup>49</sup> M. Trasko, *Heavenly Soles* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> P. Martin, 'Shelf Appeal: Shimmering stilettos by Viktor & Rolf', *Show Studio* <<http://www.showstudio.com/shelf/redshoe.html>> [accessed 7 February 2004], para. 1, and T. Templeton, 'The OM Index', *Observer Magazine*, 7 March 2004, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: The making of a movie classic*. MGM. 1989.

<sup>52</sup> *Marilyn Monroe Collection* <<http://www.marilynmonroecollection.com/Flash/Christies.htm>> [accessed 4 May 2004], para. 9.



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30

moved to write an essay comparing the public fervour to own objects owned by Monroe with the respect paid to relics of saints, whether their bones or objects they touched.<sup>53</sup> O'Hagan considers Monroe a 'sacrifice to the potency of her own mythology', and the director of a modern ballet of *The Red Shoes* also calls the theme 'the Marilyn Monroe story'.<sup>54</sup> The red shoes owned by this tragic, desirable woman become mythic symbols of a modern kind of holiness, again connecting red shoes with sacredness.

The ruby slippers/red shoes motif returned to screen in David Lynch's *Wild At Heart* (1990). *The Wizard of Oz* is used as a framework to tell the story of a pair of young lovers, Lula and Sailor, who run away together from their past, his jail sentence and her controlling mother, who functions as the Wicked Witch character. The motif appears in a scene where Lula narrowly avoids being raped. The camera cuts to her feet in red suede court shoes tapping her heels together in an attempt to leave the situation. Despite a range of further trials, true love eventually triumphs. This makes Lula's pair a Positive red shoe motif. She is actively sexual, a runaway girl and disobedient daughter – attributes of Negative use – but stands by her man and is rewarded for fidelity of the heart, like Gerda, rather than receiving Karen's punishments.

In other cultural use, a glitter-covered pair of ruby-slipper-style shoes accentuates the cyber-fairytale image projected by Alison Goldfrapp on the cover of her 2003 album *Black Cherry*, complete with wolf (Fig. 31). The socks accessorising the shoes are the ankle-length of Dorothy's, but striped like the black and white stockings seen on the Wicked Witch of the East (Fig. 32), creating an ambivalent visual association with both women. The overall effect is of a strong woman confident with her sexuality. An earlier incarnation of Goldfrapp's red shoes is an artwork contributed to the *Shoe* National Touring exhibition in 2000. Described as a 'photographic re-staging of murderous narratives', the shiny red heels, used as the catalogue cover image (Fig. 33), are considered 'the focus of dangerous games'.<sup>55</sup> These dual uses of the Positive/Negative aspects of Red Shoes by the one female artist highlight the ambiguity of the motif, and the flexibility with which contemporary women are able to explore this duality of meaning.

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<sup>53</sup> O'Hagan, para. 7.

<sup>54</sup> D. Nahat, quoted in J. Chiapella, 'Red Shoe Diary', *Metro* (San Jose, CA), October 18-24, 2001. <<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/10.18.01/arts-0142.html>> [accessed 4 May 2004].

<sup>55</sup> The City Gallery, *Shoe* (Leicester: The City Gallery, 2000), p. 4.



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

Dutch fashion designers Viktor & Rolf used similar glittery red shoes in their spring/summer 2004 ready-to-wear show that directly reference the ruby slippers. Every model went down the catwalk in red shoes, accompanying neutrally coloured garments. The shoes were variants on a theme of glitter-covered high-heels and details of wrapped leather, with a signature piece that reinterprets the 1940s curves of Dorothy's pair (Figs. 34 and 35). The fashion press focussed on the shoes, and the designers cited the 1948 film *The Red Shoes* as inspiration besides *Wizard*. The signature pair soon appeared as stand-alone pieces in *Vogue* (Fig. 36), illustrating an article on the joys and dangers of wearing high-heeled shoes. The caption reads 'For the sheer fun of it, opt for red with [...] Dorothy-style heels.'<sup>56</sup> An online fashion editorial on these shoes taps in to their symbolic ambiguity: 'At a stretch, red shoes can look cute, but only when every attempt is made by the wearer to work 'against' their sexuality, dressing them down with prissy tweed or workaday denim to clean up their bad reputation.'<sup>57</sup> Martin demonstrates how sexuality is considered an inherent quality of red shoes, and that the Negative associations can be strong enough to affect contemporary Positive use.

The ruby slippers can symbolise a different slant on Positive Feminine red shoes, that of male homosexuality. The slippers came top in a Canadian list of two thousand gay icons of the twentieth century,<sup>58</sup> and were used to advertise a party at Ruby, one of London's leading gay clubs (Fig. 37).<sup>59</sup> The gay community's appreciation for Judy Garland may have a strong influence on the adoption of this symbol. However, a gay man's sexuality focuses on a male object of desire, like a straight woman's sexuality, and homosexual identity and dress can be culturally feminine. For people opposed to it, homosexuality is also sinful, a moral transgression against nature and gender.

## Autonomy

The quality of independence or self-directed agency present in Feminine uses of red shoes is summarised by the word 'sovereignty', a term that also illuminates some of the reasons for the ambiguity towards this type. A fifteenth-century Arthurian legend demonstrates the sense of the word. When the knight Gawain is charged to discover

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<sup>56</sup> D. Hutton, 'Killer Heels', *Vogue*, no. 2, February 2004, pp. 184-189.

<sup>57</sup> Martin, para. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Donna Lypchuck, 'Gay icons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century', *EYE Weekly* 6 June 1999  
<[http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue\\_06.24.99/news/necro.html](http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_06.24.99/news/necro.html)> [accessed 12 February 2004]

<sup>59</sup> *qx International*, no. 490, 30 June 2004.



Figure 34



Figure 35

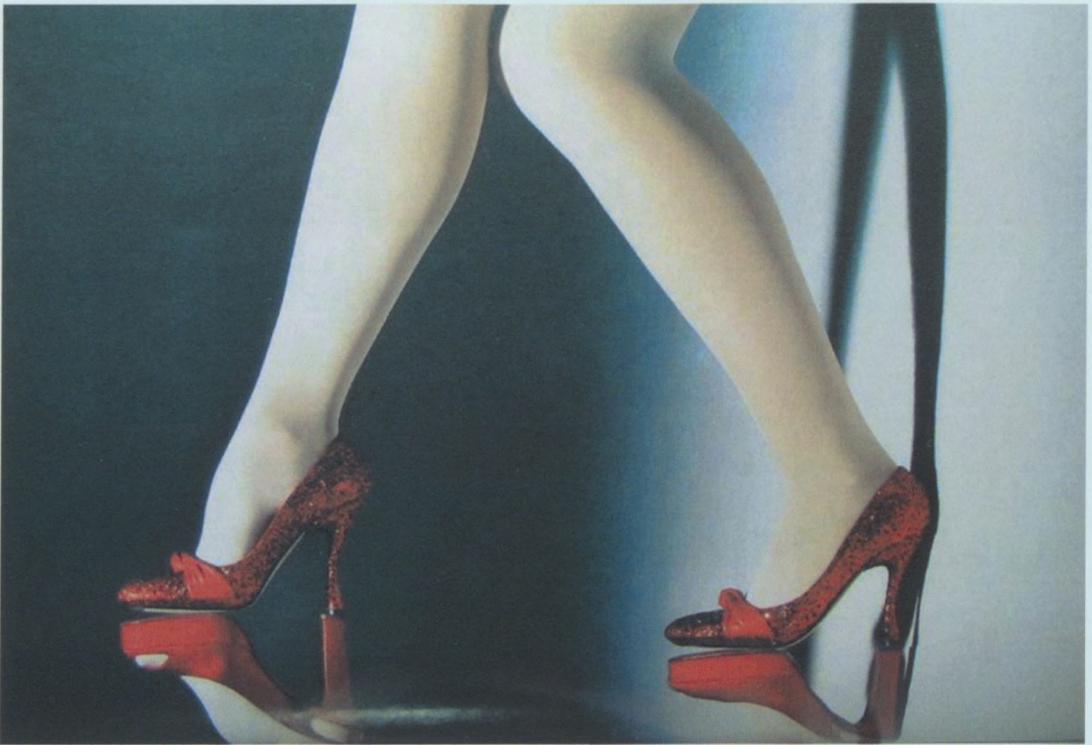


Figure 36

**Bleached\*** the official  
**RUBY**  
 after Party

"Toto  
 I don't think  
 we're in canvas  
 anymore!"

DJs:  
 Fat Tony  
 Mark Westhenry  
 Guy Williams  
 Kinky D  
 Tyrone  
 DJ Philly  
 Per ex  
 DJ Johnny  
 Matt (aka) Ross  
 Percussion by Joy

VIP Passes  
 + wristbands available from  
 the world of fat tony room  
 at Ruby

4<sup>th</sup> July 5am - approx late @ egg 200 York way  
 admission £8 with FIVER £10 without

Bleached every 28 days every night every morning

egg

Figure 37

what it is that every woman desires, he meets an old hag who answers 'sovereignty'. After marrying the hideous, enchanted woman, Gawain allows his bride to decide whether she should be beautiful by day and ugly by night or vice versa. Her exercise of individual choice breaks the spell, and permanently restores her youth and beauty.<sup>60</sup> If sovereignty, at least over self, is what every woman wants, and red shoes represent sovereignty through their historic use by royal and religious figures of authority, then this association naturally makes red shoes potent objects of desire for women. However, the connections of red shoes with sovereignty are Masculine, making them agents of transgression in cultures that segregate gender roles. A woman engaging in self-directed activity while wearing red shoes, in life or fiction, is taking on masculine characteristics. The way this is considered depends on the contexts of time and place. Since sovereignty could be interpreted as domination, and the story of Gawain as 'a cautionary tale about the secret will to power of all women which men must recognise and control',<sup>61</sup> this symbolism of red shoes gives insight into their use as agents for social control of femininity.

The literally sovereign red shoes worn by royal women have escaped the historic censure attached to other Feminine red shoes. Their rank and status makes red shoes appropriate wear, as Andersen's princess demonstrates. Historic objects support the connection, starting with a pair of red velvet mules belonging to Charles II's sister Henrietta Maria and now in the Museum of London collection (Fig. 38). The Museum also holds red shoes belonging to an unspecified royal child (1844), Queen Alexandra (1901-10) and Queen Mary (1910-36). They can all be considered Positive historic red shoes through their royal provenance.

## Contemporary women

Feminine red shoes are frequently used in connection with the relatively neutral activity of 'going out', for a special occasion, a party, or to go dancing. Contemporary songs especially make the connection, such as Waits's 'We're going out tonight/Put on your red shoes' (1978)<sup>62</sup> or Wyclef Jean's 'Maxine, put your red shoes on/We're going to the disco' (2001).<sup>63</sup>

A resoundingly Positive Feminine motif comes from Velva Lee Heraty, founder

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<sup>60</sup> Warner, *Monsters*, p. 17, and Duffy, p.162.

<sup>61</sup> Warner, *Monsters*, p.16.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Waits. Red Shoes By The Drugstore. *Blue Valentine*. 1978. Elektra. CD 7559-60533-2. Lines 43 – 44.

<sup>63</sup> Wyclef Jean. Perfect Gentleman. *The Ecleptic*. 2001. Columbia. CD 4979792. Lines 4-5.



Figure 38

of US fundraising organisation The Red Shoes Club, who states that ‘the very idea of wearing red shoes made [her] want to live again’ after the death of her daughter. Heraty’s description of members summarises the Positive uses and associations of Feminine red shoes:

You love red shoes because you know that before Dorothy and beyond Marilyn red shoes have become both a symbol and a universal icon [...] that echoes magic, adventure, passion, confidence and sass. Here's to all red shoe women everywhere.<sup>64</sup>

The affirmative use of Feminine red shoes by a contemporary woman is an indication of the current state of the symbol’s meaning, after many changes during the preceding two centuries. To gauge the effect of how cultural and historic use has affected current feminine perceptions of red shoes, the survey mentioned in the introduction was conducted from January to August 2004. Thirty-five women responded, ranging in age from nineteen to fifty-six, based mostly in Britain and Australia. The questions were designed to be open-ended, and prompt personal responses rather than set answers. Appendix 2 contains the full list of questions. At least eighty percent of the respondents did not know the survey related to research on red shoes. Topical questions appeared only in the second half of the survey, in an effort to elicit reasonably unbiased or otherwise directed answers. Questions 8, 10 and 11 specifically asked about red shoes, how they feel if they wear them and what associations the phrase brings to mind. The answers can be summarised by number of responses in the following groupings, though there was often more than one answer from the same person.

### **Red shoes in cultural expressions -**

Dorothy/*Wizard of Oz*: 12

*The Red Shoes* film: 8

*The Red Shoes* by Andersen: 4

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<sup>64</sup> V. L. Heraty, ‘The Red Shoes Club’, *Ta Da! International*  
<<http://www.sixdegreesofsuccess.com/redshoes/index.htm>> [accessed 18 August 2004], para. 2.

## **Qualities of red shoes -**

Individuality/confidence /boldness: 19

Sexuality: 13. The phrase most used is 'sexy'.

Passion: 8

Strength: 6

Dance: 5

Other Positive qualities: 18. These references include 'feeling like I have jewels on my feet', 'key moments in my life', 'joy' and a 'movie goddess'. Nine Negative connotations were cited, with 'jealousy', 'bad taste' and 'attention seeking' the only answers deviating from the sexual, dangerous or transgressive meanings outlined above. The survey demonstrates the overwhelmingly Positive way modern women regard red shoes, both to wear and in a symbolic capacity, and how the attributes of their Feminine use remain centred around certain inherent qualities. Contemporary use allows for a degree of synthesis between artificial good/bad woman distinctions.

## **Summary**

Feminine red shoes represent the thing a person most desires: to return home, sexual expression, happiness, sovereignty, power, or the assertion of the individual self. A passionate desire for any of these qualities can instigate transgressive behaviour in order to fulfil the ambition. Expressing an active sexuality or independent, self-directed agency can be seen historically as transgressions in themselves, creating a Negative attitude of sin and temptation towards Red Shoes embodying these characteristics. Achieving a desire can lead to obsession, danger and destruction, but also to joy, maturity and individual agency. When Negative meanings are not present, the movement between social states becomes transition. Feminine red shoes can be either and simultaneously Positive or Negative in historic and especially cultural usage, creating a potent ambiguity of meaning.

#### 4. Dance Red Shoes

Oh she dance like the diva do/I said I'd love to dance like you/She said just take  
off my red shoes/Put them on and your dream will come true<sup>1</sup>

While red shoes have been connected with dance at least since Andersen's tale, the Powell and Pressburger film *The Red Shoes* (Fig. 39), made a hundred years later in 1948, crystallised the re-interpretation of the motif and shifted the cultural emphasis from folklore to dance, while retaining the conflicting attributes already outlined. This chapter considers the film's impact and cultural legacy, and the way Red Shoes symbolise the obsession and sacrifice of dancers' experiences.

The film is inspired by Andersen, made clear from the starting title shot with a book of his tales in the background (Fig. 40), and includes a ballet based directly on the story. Moira Shearer, at the time a principal dancer with Sadlers Wells Ballet, plays Victoria Page (Vicky), a gifted ballerina rising through the ranks of the prestigious Ballet Lermontov. The imperious company director, Lermontov, creates a ballet of *The Red Shoes* especially for Vicky, in which she receives great acclaim and becomes a star. The young composer Julian Craster is also rising in his career as orchestra master for the ballet company, and the two fall in love. Vicky must choose between dance and love, and initially leaves the company to marry her sweetheart. Lermontov lures her back to dance *The Red Shoes* again for a gala performance, and she goes without telling her husband. After a confrontation in her dressing room between husband and director, Vicky, dressed for her role wearing the red satin ballet slippers, runs wildly onto a hotel balcony, torn between her two great loves. The shoes dance her madly over the edge onto the railway below, and she falls to her death under a train.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Red Shoes' ballet occupies a central place in the film. Starting on the stage of the theatre the company is performing in, the action moves away from a real location, utilising the potential of film to become a kind of dream sequence. Karen in Andersen's story is represented by the Girl, danced by Shearer. The old soldier responsible for enchanting her shoes here becomes the demonic Shoemaker, a part created and danced by Leonid Massine, a former associate of

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Bush. The Red Shoes. *The Red Shoes*. 1993. EMI Records. CDEMD1047/8272772, line 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> The denouement echoes the fate of Anna Karenina, another tragic fictional woman passionately torn between two paths of love and the obligations of society.

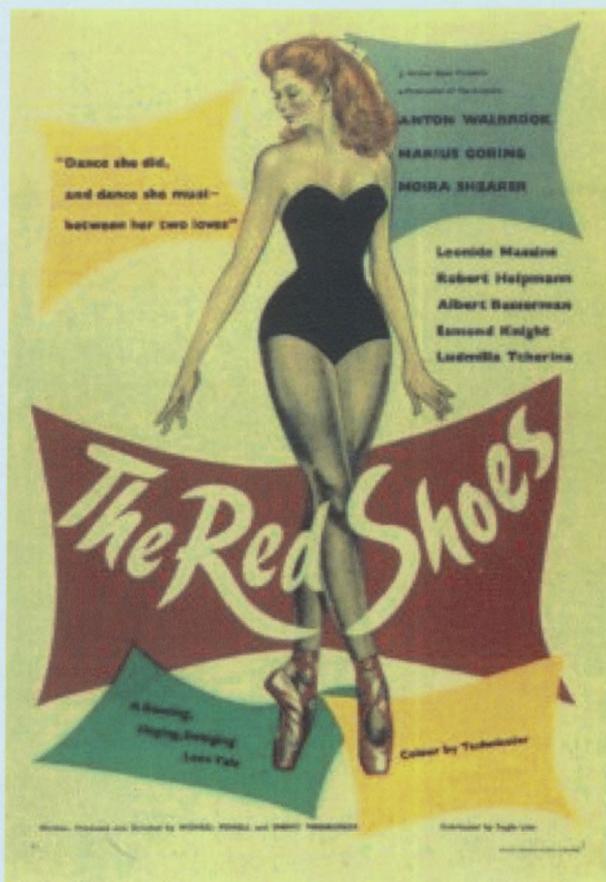


Figure 39



Figure 40

Diaghilev. The ballet starts in his shop, with the Red Shoes placed in the middle of the window. The Girl, accompanied by her sweetheart, sees a vision of herself dancing in them, tempting her to try them on, and the Shoemaker brings them out. Removing the shoes from the contained shop environment marks the departure from reality, as the potential of film is utilised to make the shoes appear to jump onto the Girl's feet and do themselves up.<sup>3</sup> She wears the shoes to a carnival that becomes an increasingly threatening place of madness as the shoes dance her away from the town to a ghost-world of wispy shadows. The action has moved well beyond the area of a stage when the Shoemaker enters as the dream-world turns to thorns, then to a dark street inhabited by prostitutes, with the Girl's dancing becoming increasingly frenetic. After dancing piteously through the town ball, dressed in rags, the Girl asks the priest attending the Old Lady's funeral for mercy. He refuses, but after a hellish dance with the Shoemaker, the priest manages to remove the Girl's red shoes, and she dies in his arms. The shoes return to the Shoemaker, who puts them back in his shop window. Elements already cited as meanings of red shoes pervade this ballet: desire, transgression, religion, magic, obsession and sexuality, tied together by motif of Dance. The Modernist treatment of the stage designs refreshes the fairytale elements into immediately relevant contemporary symbolisms, an accessibility which perhaps contributes to the film's popularity for modern audiences.

Pressburger developed a ballet script based on Andersen in late 1938, just before the release of *The Wizard of Oz*, though it took eight years to realise the film.<sup>4</sup> Despised by its executive producers, the initial release of *The Red Shoes* was unsuccessful. However, after running for two straight years in a small New York cinema, the film developed into a cult classic, promoted by word-of-mouth. The entire production is 'symbolic'<sup>5</sup> in style, with an overt theatricality and heightened sense of fantasy pervading even the off-stage action.

The Shoe Museum in Northampton holds an unworn pair of the red ballet shoes made for the film (Fig. 41). They are small, about a modern UK size 3, and were made by Freed of London, old and respected dancewear manufacturers who

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<sup>3</sup> Pausing the DVD version of the film reveals the ghostly shadow of hands between frames.

<sup>4</sup> I. Christie, *Arrows of Desire. The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (1985) (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1994), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Christie, p. 80.



Figure 41

still supply the Royal Ballet.<sup>6</sup> The curator, Sue Constable, believes the film used around twenty pairs.<sup>7</sup> Freed made shoes for Moira Shearer throughout her career, and since at the time it was a ‘natural continuation of [their] working relationship’ with her, no records remain of the orders made for the film.<sup>8</sup> Shoes were made in whatever colour a particular production required, and these happened to be red. Dancing is notoriously hard on delicate pointe shoes. Principal ballerinas can wear out a pair or more in the course of a full-length ballet.<sup>9</sup> Filmic continuity also demands multiple pairs so the slippers will always look new on camera. This causes a discrepancy between these multiple red shoes as object and symbol. The film gives the impression of the shoes as a single pair, the focus of the ballet, and representative symbol of two irreconcilable passions. The slippers are metaphors for the obsessive, consuming sides of both dance and love. Throughout the film, the phrase ‘red shoes’ is emphasised verbally, or by emphatic music. The opening painted title sequence features a pair of red ballet shoes underneath the text of the credits against a variety of different landscape backgrounds. They are deployed as an iconic visual symbol. As practical objects though, the red ballet shoes are only one of many pairs employed to fulfil this symbolic function. Like the ruby slippers, there is no one pair of ‘the’ *Red Shoes*.

The central proposition of the film, of which Red Shoes become a symbol, is found in the first conversation between Vicky and Lermontov. He asks her ‘Why do you want to dance?’ and she replies ‘Why do you want to live?’. Vicky then cites his answer ‘I don’t know exactly why, but I must’ as her answer too.<sup>10</sup> Dancing, therefore, is the ultimate *raison d’être*; for the dancer, it *is* her life, and if she cannot dance, she dies. Although the Red Shoes dance the heroine to death, it is only once they, and implicitly, the dance, are removed from her feet that she ceases to be.<sup>11</sup> This raises Mackie’s idea of ‘bloody stumps’, presented in

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<sup>6</sup> Freed’s London store had a window display based on red ballet shoes in June 2004 in connection with a production of *Anastasia* at Covent Garden, but unfortunately it was not possible to obtain a photograph.

<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation with Hilary Davidson, 30 June 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Fran. <shop@freed.co.uk>. ‘Re: Archive research query’. Personal e-mail to Hilary Davidson. <hbgd103@soton.ac.uk>. 10 August 2004.

<sup>9</sup> G. Reaves, ‘The Slip in the Ballet Slipper: Illusion and the naked foot’ in S. Benstock and S. Ferriss (eds.), *Footnotes: On Shoes*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> *The Red Shoes*. Dir. Michael Powell. Moira Shearer, Anton Warbrook, Robert Helpmann. J. Arthur Rank. 1948.

<sup>11</sup> It will be interesting to see how Cirrone uses the Dance motif in a forthcoming young adult book whose title, *Dancing in Red Shoes Will Kill You* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), explicitly states the shoes’ connotations. <[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/)

conjunction with her examination of Andersen's story.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Karen who was 'cured' of dancing after the executioner removed her feet, leaving her to walk on stumps, ballet dancers *continue* to dance after the visual amputation formed by the pointe shoe. The suffering of the foot and the illusion of its removal raise the dance technique into a more proficient realm. The highest art of ballet is only reached through the sacrifice and suffering which saved Karen from her impiety. The shoes which raise a ballerina *en pointe* embody her dancing identity, and the creation of literally red, blood-soaked shoes through dance class or performance functions as a sacralising ritual, a sign of the dancer's ability to perform 'magical feats'.<sup>13</sup> Lermontov states that 'Ballet is a religion',<sup>14</sup> and the directors wrote in their 1978 novelisation of the film that 'a sacred flame of passion for their chosen art' burns in dancers' breasts.<sup>15</sup> The links between these passions is of sacrifice leading to exaltation, a theme in both holy and mythological beliefs. Powell's *Red Shoes* uses the symbol to explore the sacrifice of the self to Art, and red shoes as an instrument of the driven control of another's will. Mackie cites examples of the submission of the individual will from the experience of four ballerinas, and considers that Vicky has no available option of 'an independent, self-directed existence'<sup>16</sup> – a curtailment of her feminine sovereignty. In the same book, Reaves (herself a dancer) uses the particular case of Gelsey Kirkland, star of the New York City Ballet, to parallel the Red Shoes experience of destructive seduction, and links the loss of dance to Karen's loss of autonomy. Moira Shearer, however, had a different (albeit non-contemporary) perspective on the film's themes, commenting that 'the whole story of Victoria Page is such nonsense from the point of view of any real person [...] I'm sure no dancer of any generation ever had this supposedly appalling problem [...] between real life and ballet.'<sup>17</sup> Shearer herself married in 1950, and had two children while remaining a professional

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/006055701X/qid=1092661499/sr=1-3/ref=sr\_1\_3/102-6486860-4730520?v=glance&s=books>  
[accessed 15 August 2004]

<sup>12</sup> E. Mackie, 'Red Shoes and Bloody Stumps' in *Footnotes* (see Reaves, above).

<sup>13</sup> Mackie, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup> *The Red Shoes*. Powell.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Christie, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Mackie, p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in D. Lemon and C. Thomas. *A Profile of 'The Red Shoes'*. Carlton Television. 2000.

dancer, so the struggle depicted appears to be symbolic, a mythologised extreme of the situation.<sup>18</sup>

The greater context of dance, suffering, passion and magic in which the film sites these Red Shoes has influenced and reinforced the link between red shoes and dance in a variety of ways. The owner of the domain name [www.redshoes.com](http://www.redshoes.com) is an American dance footwear store. HMS/M *Tiptoe*, a British submarine in service during World War II, was presented with one pair of Shearer's ballet slippers (now in the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport) and adopted them as the craft's emblem (Fig. 42).<sup>19</sup> Shoemaker Manolo Blahnik designed a pair of red satin shoes in 1986 called 'Martha', presumably after twentieth-century dance pioneer Martha Graham. They feature the low pump style and crossed ribbons of ballet slippers (Fig. 43). Red ballet slippers 'remain a favourite' amongst dance aficionados, and pink and red are by far the best sellers of the five colours in which Freed makes miniature ballet slippers.<sup>20</sup> The presence in the Northampton collection of ballet slippers and tango shoes in red silk from the 1880s (Figs. 44 and 45) suggests, however, the colour was popular for dance footwear well before the film.<sup>21</sup> Fig. 46 shows the cover of Julian Barnes' novel *Love, Etc.* (2000), about a love triangle between two men and a woman, which represents the protagonists through shoes. The woman is symbolised by a worn, red tap-dance shoe wedged between the Oxford and two-tone brogues of the men. In literary use, 43% of works using red shoes as a motif focus on their dance aspect, especially for children, and 59% of those were written between 1991 and 2004, showing how the legacy of the cinematic utilisation of the Dance type of Red Shoes remains inspirational in contemporary society. It is unlikely that these figures would be so high based solely on Andersen's connection of red shoes with dancing.

The film, not Andersen's tale, inspired Kate Bush's 1993 album *The Red Shoes*. The red satin ballet slippers *en pointe* used on the album cover (Fig. 47) are a

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<sup>18</sup> One survey was completed by a young ballerina newly graduated from the Royal Ballet School, and her only stated association with red shoes was *The Wizard of Oz*, suggesting again that the symbolic Red Shoes have less resonance in the day-to-day life of a dancer.

<sup>19</sup> Submarine Heritage Centre, Barrow-in-Furness. <<http://www.submarineheritage.com>> [accessed 10 August 2004].

<sup>20</sup> Fran. Personal e-mail.

<sup>21</sup> The collection has surprisingly few examples of the tango shoes worn for *the dansants* during the dance crazes of the 1910s and 20s. Published examples from the Bata Shoe Museum, Toronto, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York show red dance shoes from these years, but it would require more collections research to support any speculations about the popular use of red shoes for dancing in the early twentieth-century.



Figure 42

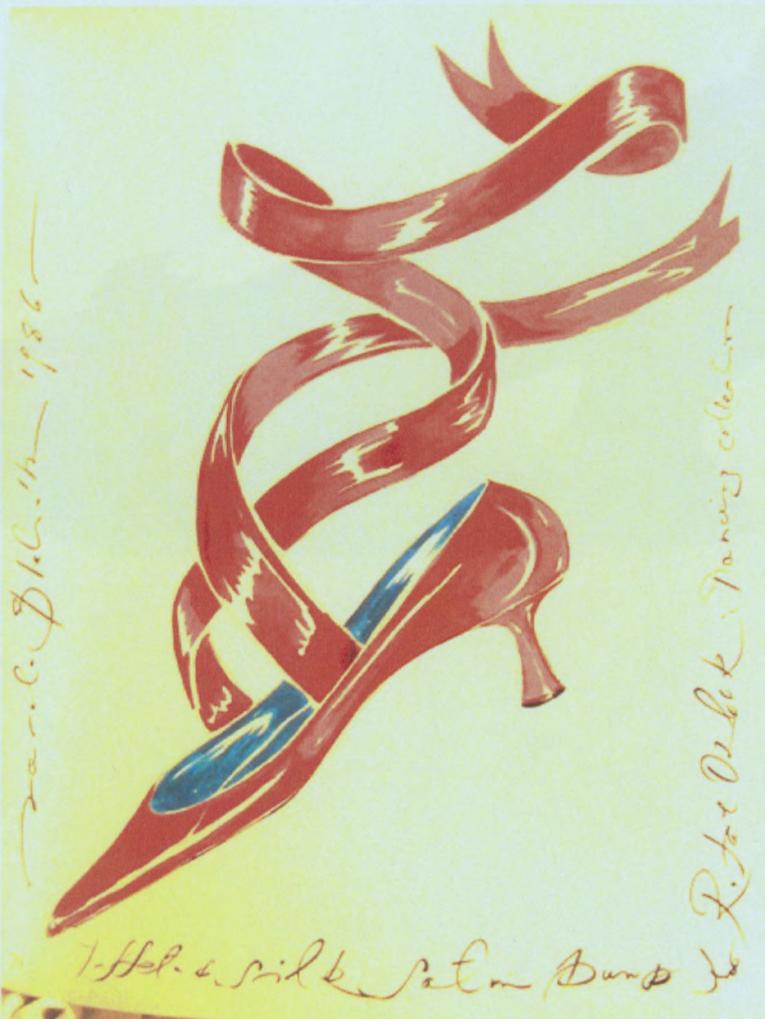


Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45

Julian Barnes

Love, etc

'Barnes on top form'  
*Time Out*



Figure 46



Figure 47

visual representation of Mackie's bloody stumps, with somewhat seedy overtones of use and obsession in the torn and laddered stockings. Bush made her directorial début with an accompanying film called *The Line, The Cross and the Curve*, linking individual video clips together in a different sequence from the album to trace a narrative composed of performance, dialogue and songs. Although she is best known for her singing and song-writing, Bush is a trained dancer, and appears as the central character who dances through the film. It starts in her dance studio during a blackout, when a strange woman (Miranda Richardson) dressed in red and black runs out from the large mirrors. Claiming her hands are burned, she offers Bush her 'pretty red shoes' in return for a line, a cross and a curve drawn on pieces of paper. Once accepted, the shoes magically do themselves up, like Shearer's, and start to dance. The red ballet slippers worn in the film were also made by Freed of London, giving historic as well as thematic connection between the two works.<sup>22</sup> Bush realises she has been tricked, and chases through woman through the mirror into a stylised hell, starting the journey through a fantasy world to 'sing back the symbols' which will free her from the spell of the red shoes. As the title song elucidates 'this line, is [her] path/ this cross, is [her] heart/and this curve, is [her] smile'.<sup>23</sup> Upon achievement of all three, Bush returns to the real world, and the red shoes return to the feet of the other woman. Bush's statement while caught in their spell that 'these shoes are all anger and passion' reflects the strongest meanings of the Dance type. Lindsay Kemp, Bush's early dance teacher and a highly influential performance artist in his own right, plays the equivalent to Massine's Shoemaker. Theatrically demonic, this unspecified character accompanies Bush/the Girl through her journey. An ambiguous figure, he advises and encourages Bush while seeming, like the Shoemaker, to hold the power of the shoes, demonstrated by the final scene where he goes to the shoes kicking from a pile of rubble and says 'Hello...', as if the shoes have returned to their owner. Kemp's own work was 'deeply affected' by *The Red Shoes*,<sup>24</sup> so Bush's album and film can be considered tributes to a Red Shoes source which influenced her entire career. The *Red Shoes* film has influenced other film-makers: Brian de Palma says it made him become a director;<sup>25</sup> Coppola, Scorsese and Spielberg cite the

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<sup>22</sup> Fran. <shop@freed.co.uk>. 'Re: Archive research query - red shoes'. Personal e-mail to Hilary Davidson. <hbgd103@soton.ac.uk>. 12 August 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Bush. *The Red Shoes*.

<sup>24</sup> Derek Jarman, quoted in Christie, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> Christie, p. xvi;

film as a direct inspiration on their work.<sup>26</sup> Even if Red Shoes are not explicit motifs in these directors' works, they exert a hidden cultural influence.

The issue of suffering for Art explored in the *Red Shoes* film seems to be a theme in Hans Christian Andersen's own life. He was the son of a poor cobbler, which could explain what Turim calls the writer's 'obsession with the bloodlines of footwear'.<sup>27</sup> Andersen's ambition was to go on the stage somehow, and though he studied dance at the Royal Theatre's Ballet School in Copenhagen, they dismissed him at seventeen due to his physical unsuitability for ballet.<sup>28</sup> Andersen's early writing patrons, while encouraging him, were also 'determined to crush the boy's pride, conceit, and [...] high ambitions [...] to teach him that his place in the world (due to his origins) must be a humble one'.<sup>29</sup> This reflects the experience of his heroine Karen.<sup>30</sup> Despite his success as a writer, Andersen suffered all his life from low self-worth stemming from his physical limitations, like dancers.

The adoption of the ruby slippers motif by the gay community has greater resonance when Andersen's personal life is considered. Despite outwardly conforming to social convention, privately he became obsessed with men: a close friend, then a young theology student, and in his later years, a handsome young ballet dancer.<sup>31</sup> The author of an Andersen biography believes that 'without the enormous repression of his time, he could have declared himself to be a homosexual'.<sup>32</sup> This combination of the Male and Dance red shoe types occurs in a song by openly gay artist Elton John. 'The Ballad Of The Boy In The Red Shoes' (2001) uses the motif to symbolise the loss of health and activity to AIDS, and a political subtext regarding the lack of political action during the outbreak in the nineteen-eighties.<sup>33</sup> The red shoes represent his past life and what he is losing:

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Lemon and Thomas..

<sup>27</sup> M. Turim, 'High Angles on Shoes: Cinema, Gender and Footwear' in *Footnotes* (see Reaves, above), p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> T. Windling, 'Hans Christian Andersen: Father of the Modern Fairytale', *Journal of Mythic Arts*, Summer 2003 <<http://www.endicott-studio.com/jMA03Summer/hans.html>> [accessed 23 April 2004], paras. 5 & 7.

<sup>29</sup> Windling, para. 9.

<sup>30</sup> The autobiographic element of *The Red Shoes* is mentioned previously. Given Andersen's further negative experiences with the social conventions of his day, class prejudice, and the stifling of his ambition, the repentant moralist ending of the story seems to conflict with the writer's own perspectives. I speculate the possibility therefore of *The Red Shoes* being a bitter satire on Andersen's society. Further research would be required to support this.

<sup>31</sup> Windling, para. 24.

<sup>32</sup> From an interview by Else Cornelius with J. Wullschlager, author of *Hans Christian Andersen: the Life of a Storyteller* (2000), Berlingske Tidende, 2002, quoted in Windling, para 24.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted from a live performance by John. J. Stevenson, 'Elton Thrills Again' October 6 2001, *Toronto Sun* <[http://www.canoe.ca/JamConcertsE2K/john\\_elton\\_100601-sun.html](http://www.canoe.ca/JamConcertsE2K/john_elton_100601-sun.html)> [accessed 23

‘Take my red shoes, I can’t wear them anymore’.<sup>34</sup> During this research, only one connection was found between lesbianism and red shoes, contrasting with the more frequent associations with male homosexuality. It is a truism that the performing arts attract a higher number of gay men than other fields, and that male ballet dancers are effeminate, despite the considerable physical strength dance requires. Fig. 48 is dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, taken from a series of portraits of performers in all disciplines wearing white clothes and red shoes, taken by dance photographer Kenn Duncan. He uses the ‘magical qualities of a pair of red shoes’<sup>35</sup> to symbolise the energy of creative artists – dancers, actors, singers. The contrast of the shoes against the pale background emphasises their iconic potential, and the book’s direction links red shoes not only with dance, but with activity, and the symbolism of a creative individual outlined in the Masculine type. Intermittently bisexual artist David Bowie used the Dance red shoes motif in a popular cultural expression. The line ‘Put on your red shoes and dance the blues’ from his hit ‘Let’s Dance’ (1984) is cited in books on shoe history<sup>36</sup>, and was mentioned by five survey respondents as an association with red shoes. Bowie also studied with Lindsay Kemp, creating another link in the inspiration legacy of *The Red Shoes* film. Fig. 49 shows a card sold by large British stationery chain Paperchase in 2004. Also entitled *Let’s Dance*, the woman in red shoes appears in control of the situation. Her sharp high heels and seamed stockings add sexuality to the image, which in the context can be considered a Positive Feminine manifestation of the red shoes symbol, in a cultural expression with the possibility for a broad audience. The contemporary adoption of a reasonably affirmative attitude towards female dancing marks a contrast with earlier historical use, when ballerinas were prized courtesans, possessed of a ‘spectacular virtuosity competitive with the athleticism of male dancers.’<sup>37</sup> This accords with Negative red shoe symbolism stemming from issues of gender transgression and active sexuality.

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September 2004]. Elton John used a *Wizard of Oz* motif in his earlier ‘Goodbye Yellow Brick Road’ (1973).

<sup>34</sup> Elton John lyrics – Ballad Of The Boy In The Red Shoes lyrics, <<http://www.azlyrics.us/79759>> [accessed 18 March 2004]

<sup>35</sup> K. Duncan, *Red Shoes* (New York: Universe Books, 1984), inside flap. The book features Dorothy’s ruby slippers on the cover.

<sup>36</sup> L. O’Keeffe, *Shoes* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1996), p. 107

<sup>37</sup> Mackie, p. 245.



Figure 48

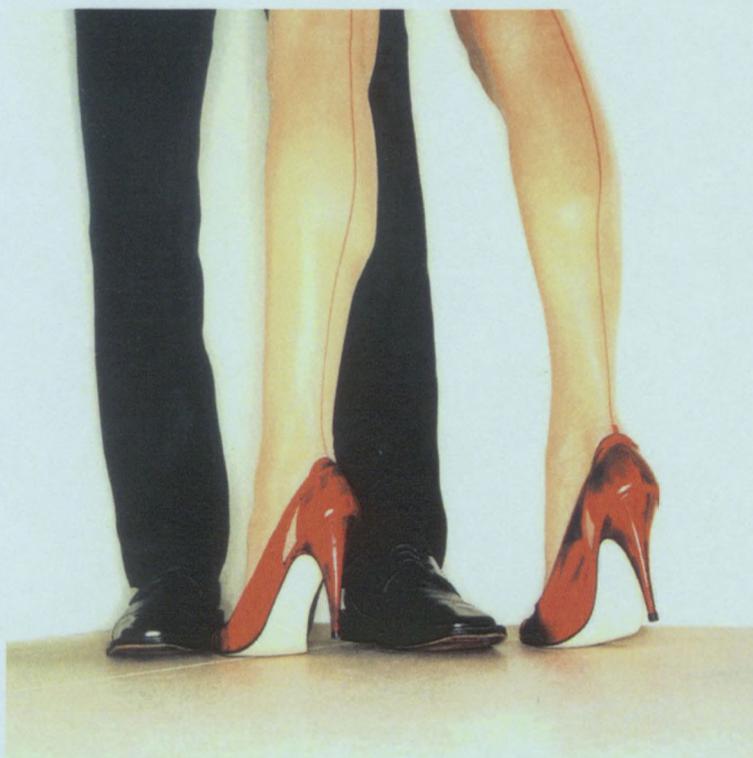


Figure 49

## Summary

Red shoes represent the dancer's ambivalency between overcoming the physical limitations of the body, and being overcome by the harsh disciplines and denials of dance, 'the paradox of ballerina as both worshipped spectacle and defaced object' as Reaves terms it;<sup>38</sup> a performative version of the madonna/whore complexity embodied by other Feminine uses of red shoes. Red Dance shoes also represent the sacrifice of the individual self and will to a greater cause, whether a director, art, or dancing itself. Used to create identity, or to facilitate individual artistic or sexual expression, the removal of a dancer's red shoes, literally or symbolically, destroys their ability to dance. While the appropriation of meaning depends on each dancer's perspectives, the connection of red shoes with dance in Andersen's story, compounded by the *Red Shoes* film, created a symbolism that remain inspiring to contemporary dancers and creators. A pair of red ballet slippers embodies the passion, freedom, obsession, pain and sacrifice of dancing.

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<sup>38</sup> Reaves, p. 262.

## 5. Magic Red Shoes: Fairytales, folklore and myth

Some of the strong connections of Red Shoes with magic are mentioned in the previous types. The references found during this study which are variants of 'red shoes are magic shoes' are numerous, and it may be considered a primary attribute of the symbol. This chapter considers this integral connection between red shoes and Magic in various cultural forms, and has been placed after the discussion of the Feminine and Dance types to pull together concepts underlying the uses of red shoes referred to in those chapters.

### Folk and Fairytales

The use of these cultural expressions in society has moved through oral storytelling, moral instruction (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century), and psychological interpretation (twentieth-century) to an arguably post-modern state of individual appropriation. Joseph and Wilhelm Grimm were seeking the folk voice of the German people in their collection of stories, and published their *Tales* in an attempt to 'document basic truths [...] and preserv[e] their authentic ties to the oral tradition'.<sup>1</sup> Andersen's imaginative literary fairytales form a fantasy contrast to the Grimm brothers' conscientious sourcing. The Danish author 'channelled many of his own frustrated desires into the supernaturally charged folktale' form pioneered by E. T. A. Hoffman (1776-1822) who combined 'speculative psychology with folk motifs'.<sup>2</sup> This ahistoric approach to fairytales helped inspire modern reappraisals of the psychological value of these stories, most notably Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) and the continuing work of Jack Zipes (1979 - present).

Recent female commentators have absorbed the multitude of historical perspectives on fairytales, and Red Shoes in a fairytale context, so it is their work which most informs this study. Sage argues that author and journalist Angela Carter, through her influential deconstructions of familiar traditional stories,

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<sup>1</sup> J. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> I. Christie, *Arrows of Desire. The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (1985) (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1994), p. 64. Powell and Pressburger filmed *The Tales of Hoffman* in 1951, a further exploration of fairytale themes through dance begun with *The Red Shoes*.

demonstrates how magic and myth are of the individual's contrivance.<sup>3</sup> Carter's revisionist fairytales, first presented in *The Bloody Chamber* (1978), initiated a new genre of literary reinterpretation, though her vigour and asperity are rarely equalled.<sup>4</sup> Carter's intelligent, feminist critiques of stock material, arising from her deep interest in the subject,<sup>5</sup> created a legacy which helped a generation of writers to consider folk and fairy tales with intellectual legitimacy. 27% of the red shoe motifs in writing, films and theatre directly concern their Magic aspect, though it is less used in songs.<sup>6</sup> Many exploit the Andersen/Dance model of uncontrollable enchantment, while others draw on larger cultural contexts from fairy and folk tales. Isobelle Carmody gives a subtle and disturbing rendition in her novella for young adults. Her version of *The Red Shoes* (1996) concerns the eight-year-old Amerie, whose dancer mother has left to escape her husband's restrictions on her 'flying' dancing. Amerie's mother tells her that 'You will long for the red shoes as I did, and no price will be too high. You will fly because my blood runs through your heart.'<sup>7</sup> Her father, who explicitly fulfils the fairytale Woodcutter archetype, tells her 'wanting is the same as greediness, and only bad comes of it',<sup>8</sup> drawing out the desire theme present in Red Shoes. The book ends in a suitably ambiguous way, with the girl 'flying' (Dancing? Falling?) through the window into the moonlit night, because she 'must', wearing her mother's red ballet slippers. Carmody ably blends Magic and Dance elements of red shoes to give another perspective on an 'absent mother' red shoe motif. Authors Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling<sup>9</sup> edited a recent series of anthologies that collect re-interpreted fairytales. One volume

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<sup>3</sup> L. Sage (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Flesh and the mirror: essays on the art of Angela Carter* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Carter wrote the screenplay for *The Company of Wolves* (1984), a dark and controversial fairytale film based on the three final stories in *The Bloody Chamber*. It was directed by Neil Jordan, who found inspiration in the 'stylistic incongruity and non-naturalism' of the works of Powell and Pressburger, including *The Red Shoes*. Christie, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Carter also edited both volumes of the *Virago Book of Fairytales* (London: Virago, 1991 & 1992), and *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women* (London: Virago, 1986), an anthology of contemporary folk and fairytale based stories. The cover of the 1997 edition is red, and includes six red shoes in its photo-collage illustration.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is 'Witchcraft' by Wonderwall, involving an old 'shimmering and glimmering' witch wearing 'those striking red shoes'. Wonderwall, 'Witchcraft', All the Lyrics.com <<http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/wonderwall/witchcraft/witchcraft/>> [accessed 18 March 2004], line 21.

<sup>7</sup> I. Carmody, *The Red Shoes* (Port Melbourne: Thomas C. Lothian Pty Ltd, 1996), p. 14. The image of birds runs through the story as a metaphor for the liberation of dance, and of personal freedom.

<sup>8</sup> Carmody, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Windling also edits the on-line *Journal of Mythic Arts*, concerned with contemporary myth and fairytale studies. Both women's own fiction explores fairytale themes.

includes the story 'The Red Boots' (2000), based on Andersen's *Red Shoes*.<sup>10</sup> The structure reflects Andersen with a feminist slant, in which a modern American Karen is forced to keep travelling by a curse placed on the red cowboy boots she won from her female lover in a deadly dance competition. She cannot stop until she lets someone else win, and competes wherever she finds herself. Although the objects are boots, their symbolism makes them Red Shoes. The revision of the tale reinforces the original aspects of dancing, pride, femininity, and transgression in a modern fairytale.

Though the best-known fairytale shoe theme - the Cinderella tale and its many variations - concern a glass, fur or golden slipper, it is not without a red shoe incident. In the Grimm original, the two stepsisters cut off a heel and a toe respectively in order to make their feet fit the tiny shoe. The blood flowing from this most literal red shoe alerts the prince that he has been deceived. Carter calls this shoe a slick, warm 'open wound', realising grimly that 'nothing in the many texts of this tale suggests the prince washed the shoe out between the fittings'.<sup>11</sup>

A production of *The Red Shoes* by Kneehigh Theatre (London, 2002), though based on Andersen, falls into a folkloric interpretation of the Red Shoes motif (Fig. 50). Taking their cue from the more gruesome of Grimm's *Tales*, the play was a visceral, raw experience. Simple in design, props and actors were used in archetypal rather than individual ways. Characters simply called the Girl, the Soldier, the Butcher (like the cinematic 'Red Shoes' ballet), the six performers being dressed alike except for basic accessories to denote their role, and a deconstructed set all contributed to emphasis the modular, symbolic potential of folk tale elements (Fig. 51). The red shoes themselves were red clogs. Coloured clogs are still worn by Morris-dancers, corresponding the shoes with a living English folk practice. These choices served to move the production away from a fairytale context and highlight the folkloric aspects. The ability of red shoes to form both a folk and a fairytale symbol gives their meaning another ambivalency by tapping into 'the tensions between the oral folk tale and the literary fairy tale'.<sup>12</sup> Karen Elizabeth Gordon exploits the modular potential of folk tale motifs, identified by Vladimir Propp, in *The Red Shoes and Other Tattered Tales*, a story

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<sup>10</sup> L. Cutter, 'The Red Boots' in E. Datlow and T. Windling (eds.), *Black Heart, Ivory Bones* (New York: Avon Books, 2000), pp. 182-197.

<sup>11</sup> A. Carter, 'Ashputtle or the Mother's Ghost' in *Burning Your Boats* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 394.

<sup>12</sup> Zipes, p. 135.

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Figure 50

**Name: Mike Shepherd**  
Age: 48  
Enduring Folk Tale Memory: The huntsman bringing back the heart of a deer in place of Snow White's.  
For Kneehigh: Most shows since the beginning...recently *The Riot*, *The Itch*, *Strange Cargo* and *Tregeagle*.  
Other Work: Bristol Old Vic, Royal National Theatre and BBC Radio.

**Name: Bec Applebee**  
Age: 35  
Enduring Folk Tale Memory: "OH! What big teeth you have..." "All the better to eat you with..." from *Red Riding Hood*.  
For Kneehigh: *The Riot*, *Ghost Nets 1&2*, *Strange Cargo*, *King of Prussia*, *Telling Tales*, *Windfall*, *Ravenheart* and many more.  
Other Work: *Desperate Men*, *Galovan*, BBC, Radio 4.

**Name: Giles King**  
Age: 35  
Enduring Folk Tale Memory: ...the spinning wheel pricking Sleeping Beauty's finger.  
For Kneehigh: *Douderful Island*, *Strange Cargo*, *King of Prussia*, *Telling Tales*, *Ashmad* and many more.  
Other Work: European Theatre Ship, *Walk the Plank*, *Bogartock*.

**Name: Luis Santiago**  
Age: 38  
Enduring Folk Tale Memory: Hensel and Gretel find the house of sweets.  
For Kneehigh: *The Itch*  
Other Work: (in Portugal) *Teatro Do Naroste*, *Teatro Ao Largo*, *Teatro Do Mar*, *GICC Teatro Dos Beiros*.

**Name: John Surman**  
Age: 56  
Enduring Folk Tale Memory: The Beast becoming the Prince in *Beauty and the Beast*.  
For Kneehigh: *The Itch*, *The Riot*.  
Other Work: Orchard Theatre Company, Manchester Library Theatre, Theatre Clywd, Octagon Theatre, Bolton, Leeds Playhouse, Television, Film and Radio.

Figure 51

designed to be read non-sequentially so the reader can trace meaning through their personally-determined relationship between an assemblage of narrative elements.

## Magic Objects

Other Magic elements are present in Andersen's *Red Shoes*. The triplicate 'ritual repetition'<sup>13</sup> of the old soldier's charm-phrase 'What pretty dancing shoes!' which causes the enchantment of Karen's red shoes is a standard module of Magic practices, seen also in Dorothy's tapping her heels together three times to return home. The soldier's red beard marks him as a fairy/devil character, through the associations with red mentioned in chapter 2.1. Duffy expands this to highlight how the presence in a tale of a red cap, animal's ear, toadstool, or garment like Little Red Riding-Hood's denotes both a magic and a sexual symbol.<sup>14</sup> Powell and Pressburger's emphasis on the Magic type in *The Red Shoes* is deliberate, with Powell considering that after Vicky enters Lermontov's 'charmed circle', the texture of the film is 'wholly magical'.<sup>15</sup> A survey respondent also associates red shoes with 'Dancing shoes from magic stories'.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, since fairies 'are always tireless dancers' whose ring dances 'mesmerize the people caught in them',<sup>17</sup> the entire Dance red shoes type has connections with the fairy aspect of Magic. Nine survey respondents associated red shoes with magic or fairytales in addition to the predominance of ruby slipper associations. One woman called them 'talismans', and felt 'protected, invincible' when she wore her pairs.<sup>18</sup> 29% of non-musical cultural expressions also directly consider the Magic type of red shoes outside the Andersen/Oz/Powell parameters.

The Magic type is difficult to find in red shoes as objects, since the attribute stems mostly from the context of their use. An exception to this is a pair of red shoes seen in a Venetian shoemakers (Fig. 52). They were made for the Carnivale, the city's annual celebration of fantasy and theatrical liberation revived from medieval practices, which in the words of one participant is 'like the fairy's

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<sup>13</sup> M. Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1989), p. 295.

<sup>14</sup> Duffy, p. 287. The author considers Little Red Riding Hood concerned, like Andersen's *Red Shoes*, with female castration.

<sup>15</sup> Christie, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> Response 9

<sup>17</sup> Duffy, p. 297.

<sup>18</sup> Response 32.



Figure 52

wand: all of a sudden impossible things become real.<sup>19</sup> The most identifiable material Magic red shoes, however, are Dorothy's ruby slippers, in addition to their Positive Feminine symbolism, although their exact nature of their magic functions remain curiously undefined. All the characters are sure the shoes are magic, but no-one quite says what that magic entails. Glinda the Good Witch declares 'they must be very powerful, or she [the Wicked Witch of the West] wouldn't want them so badly', but also instructs Dorothy, once wearing the shoes, to 'never let those ruby slippers off your feet, or you will be at the mercy of the Wicked Witch of the West.'<sup>20</sup> These contrasting statements may have been a result of the 'dissension-riddled scripting process'<sup>21</sup>, but also suggest Glinda is not fully cognisant of their functions. The Wicked Witch, however, refers more often to the shoes' potential throughout the course of the film, stating variously that 'I'm the only who know how to use them'; 'when I gain those ruby slippers, my power will be the greatest in Oz'; and 'take special care of those ruby slippers. I want those most of all.' These comments suggest that the power of the shoes is dependent on the will of the wearer. As Dorothy is well-intentioned, the slippers are used in 'good' helpful ways, where the Witch would use them to reinforce her Wickedness like her Eastern sister. Another manifestation of their ambiguous moral function is that the ruby slippers simultaneously place Dorothy in, and protect her from, danger. Rushdie repeatedly calls the ruby slippers 'magic shoes' in his short story 'At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers' (1991), where the frenzied, fantastical bidding is an attempt to fulfil a plethora of individually-determined 'heart's desires'.<sup>22</sup>

## Myth and psychology

The broadly mythic applications of red shoes through the Magic type can be more specifically unpacked. Dr. Michael Delahoyd includes *The Line, The Cross and the Curve* (see chapter 4) in the undergraduate Humanities syllabus at Washington State University. It is the only film to be specifically mentioned in the subsection

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<sup>19</sup>N. Salvalaggio, 'Nostalgia of Lost Carnivals' in A. Savella, *The Carnival of Venice*, trans. by H. R. MacLean (Milan: Amilcare Pizzi Editore, 1984), p. 48. Red shoes are also part of the attire of Mattaccino, the Buffoon, in the tradition of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte.

<sup>20</sup> *The Wizard of Oz*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer. 1939.

<sup>21</sup> S. Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> S. Rushdie, 'At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers' in *The Wizard of Oz*, p. 64.

'Mythology in Film', beside genres like 'Westerns' and 'Monster Films'. Delahoyd highlights it as 'a rare instance of mythology for women: female identity is at issue, and it doesn't hinge on finding a man.'<sup>23</sup> This reinforces the idea of women wearing red shoes for themselves, rather than to attract or please a masculine viewer, and the quest for self-expression found in the Feminine and Dance types. Delahoyd also writes that 'red shoes function as a folklore motif rather than as a full-fledged "myth." But their manifestation in the [...] film signals a need to read the entire film itself archetypally, or mythologically.'<sup>24</sup> The quest for the three symbols of the title reinforce this reading, and are another form of triplicate Magic.

In a move from Freudian to Jungian analysis, psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estes considers red shoes from an archetypal viewpoint in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1993).<sup>25</sup> She uses myth, folk and fairytales from various cultures to guide the process of reclaiming what she terms the inner 'Wild Woman', or the principle of feminine wildness. One of the longest chapters is concerned with The Red Shoes, entitled 'Self-preservation: Identifying Leg Traps, Cages and Poisoned Bait',<sup>26</sup> using the motif to represent the effect of the psychologically devalued life on creating addictions. The story she bases this interpretation on is 'an old women's teaching tale [...] variously known by the names "The Devil's Dancing Shoes", "The Red-Hot Shoes of the Devil", and "The Red Shoes". [...] Andersen wrote a story based on this old tale.'<sup>27</sup> The version included in the book is, Estes claims vaguely, a 'Magyar-Germanic version' told by her aunt. The fourteen other stories the book includes are also versions told by female relatives, which, while complementing the work's theme, also allows Estes to negotiate both copyright laws and the component modules of the story to suit her argument. Interested in other versions of The Red Shoes tale, which includes autobiographical elements from Andersen's life, I have found no reference to any story so directly similar during this research though it is a possibility as Andersen learnt Danish folk tales

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<sup>23</sup> M. Delahoyd, Mythology in Film <<http://www.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/kate.bush.html>> [accessed 11 June 2004], para. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman* (London: Rider, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Estes also produced a self-help cassette drawn from this chapter entitled *The Red Shoes: On Torment and the Recovery of the Soul Life*. The tape was only released in North America, and it has not been possible to obtain a copy.

<sup>27</sup> Estes, p. 215.

in his youth from old women working with his grandmother.<sup>28</sup> The unexpurgated Grimms' *Snow White* and other early versions includes the stepmother being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes as a punishment, but the incident is minor. Discussion among a folk and fairytale research forum produced no results either.<sup>29</sup> What Estes appears to do, then, is individually appropriate the Red Shoe story, altering details in what is a probable Andersen original to create a version supporting her interpretation of the story's theme. There is no Dame Shoemaker, the unnamed girl does not see the princess, nor is she finally taken into heaven. Each of these elements is important for developing the story's transgressive themes. Textual addenda – the shoes 'made by [the girl's] own hand had given her the greatest happiness'<sup>30</sup> – serve to communicate Estes' perspective rather than analysing the perspectives created by the tale. Since Estes is presenting the mythic aspects of Red Shoes, drawing on the 'psychology of archetypes and the unconscious',<sup>31</sup> this adulterated treatment limits the possibility of a valuable, informed study of mythic red shoes, especially in a book with great scope for cultural impact through its sales of over two million copies.<sup>32</sup> When red shoes are used archetypally in other self-help books, the authors foreground the dichotomy between Red Shoes and ruby slippers. Kavalier-Adler calls a certain mental state 'Red Shoes Frenzy',<sup>33</sup> implying a negative psychological aspect, while books on 'Wearing' or 'Finding Your' ruby slippers use the motif as a symbol of happiness, fulfilling dreams, and an ability to deal with life positively.<sup>34</sup>

However, the work of sociologist Roland Barthes provides the most useful concepts for considering the greater mythic qualities of red shoes. In answer to his own question 'What is a myth, today?', Barthes proposed that myth is a type of

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<sup>28</sup> T. Windling, 'Hans Christian Andersen: Father of the Modern Fairytale', *Journal of Mythic Arts*, Summer 2003 <<http://www.endicott-studio.com/jMA03Summer/hans.html>> [accessed 23 April 2004], para. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Posted 17 May 2004. 'Red shoes other than Andersen', Sur la Lune fairytale pages <<http://p084.ezboard.com/fsurlalunefairytalesfrm1.showMessage?topicID=1879.topic>> [accessed 31 May 2004]

<sup>30</sup> Estes, p. 216.

<sup>31</sup> Estes, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Red Shoes: On Torment and the Recovery of the Soul Life', About The Author, Amazon.com <<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/156455211X/002-4507825-1785652?v=glance>> [accessed 29 December 2003], para. 7.

<sup>33</sup> S. Kavalier-Adler, *The Creative Mystique: From Red Shoes Frenzy to Love and Creativity* (:, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> J. Zimmerman Rutledge, *Finding Your Ruby Slippers: Dealing With the Real Stuff That Makes Life Rough* (London: McGraw Hill, 2003); K. Downing-Orr, *Wearing the Ruby Slippers: 9 Steps to Happiness* (London: Arrow, 2000).

speech 'chosen by history: it cannot [...] evolve from the 'nature' of things'.<sup>35</sup> Myth is a message formed by the 'type of social usage which is added to pure matter'.<sup>36</sup> The phrase 'red shoes' applied to material objects covers an infinite stylistic variety of footwear coloured red. Some of these shoes, in history and as motif in cultural expression, have been 'arbitrarily be endowed with meaning'<sup>37</sup> through their social uses, attributing to them Barthes's concept of *speech* as 'any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual', including meaningful objects.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, any pair of red shoes can become mythic in semiological terms through the nature of their use. Since this study is concerned with the meanings cultural and historic usage attaches to red shoes, every example given here can be considered to have a mythic function.

## Summary

Through their colour and their transformative properties, red shoes are connected with magical powers, beneficial or destructive depending on the wearer or the instigator of the magic. The Magical uses of red shoes continue their Feminine associations, as the symbol is predominantly used in ways affecting women's lives. The folk and fairytale use of the symbol remains inspiring to contemporary producers of cultural expressions. Magic and mythic functioning pervades the spectrum of red shoe use, psychologically, archetypally and as an essential attribute of any red shoes used in a meaningful way.

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<sup>35</sup> R. Barthes, 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies* (1957) (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Barthes, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

## 6. Children's Red Shoes

This chapter considers the strong but quite different impact on society represented by Children's red shoes. In their cultural and historic uses, they present an anomaly of symbolism, set apart from the conflicts of desire, religion and sin raging around the other types.

The most prevalent style, both in actual red shoes and in ideal use, is the court shoe with a strap either around the ankle or over the instep. This style is known in the twentieth-century as a Mary-Jane, after the sister of the eponymous comic strip character Buster Brown, created in 1902 (Fig. 53).<sup>1</sup> The name 'Buster Brown' was adopted by the Brown's shoe company in 1904, and became a synonym for children's shoes in America as Clark's did in Britain. While both Buster and Mary-Jane wore this style of shoe, it is her name which stuck. Sources refer to Mary-Janes, especially in black or red patent leather, as the 'quintessential' or 'classic' little girl's shoe.<sup>2</sup>

An initial survey of the children's shoe collection in Northampton reveals a higher proportion of red shoes than the adult collection. While approximately 1 – 5% of both women's and men's shoes are red or red-heeled, this figure rises to 10 – 15% of children's shoes. While the absence of women's red shoes in the first half of the nineteenth century is discussed in chapter 3.1, by contrast, the number of children's red shoes rises in the same period, to about 20% of the collection representing 1800 – 1860. They are the most prevalent colour in the collection after black. This may be another reason for their unpopularity amongst women, if red shoes were considered childish or immature at this time. Another speculative reason for this disparity could be that adult shoes, especially the delicate fashionable slippers, wore through quickly in the thin soles. This leaves the upper leather in a better condition, and if the adult shoe was unable to be mended, the upper may have been cut down into children's shoes. There is little information

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Life and Times of Buster Brown', *Brown Shoe*

<[http://www.brownschoe.com/busterbrown/busbrwn\\_history.asp](http://www.brownschoe.com/busterbrown/busbrwn_history.asp)> [accessed 17 August 2004];

<sup>2</sup> G. Perry. <[grayson\\_perry@hotmail.com](mailto:grayson_perry@hotmail.com)>. 'Re: Red shoes'. Personal email to Hilary Davidson. <[hbgd103@soton.ac.uk](mailto:hbgd103@soton.ac.uk)>. 8 August 2004; 'Mary-Janes'

<[http://www.lilesnet.com/50/mary\\_janes.htm](http://www.lilesnet.com/50/mary_janes.htm)> [accessed 16 August 2004], para. 2; L. O'Keefe, *Shoes* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1996), p. 234; A. Pattison and N. Cawthorne, *A Century of Shoes: Icons of Styles in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1997), p. 14.

# BYSTER BROWN



MAGAZINE.

Figure 53

on the possibility of this practice, and more research needs to be undertaken to support the speculation.

Textual evidence supports the common historic use of Children's red shoes. One Elizabeth Burrell, age thirteen in 1709, had '2 pair of Turkey leather shoes, one yellow, one red, laid with silver'.<sup>3</sup> A German visitor to London in 1786 wrote of the girls of a school in Queen's Square:

I especially noted [...] their shoes and found that they fitted to the foot's natural form... made like the Turkish slippers men are in the habit of wearing of green, red or yellow morocco leather.<sup>4</sup>

Susan Sibbald, writing many years later, recalled her niece, age five in 1806: 'I think I can see her now in a white muslin frock and red morocco shoes which children then wore.' Buck and Cunnington go on to say that this description 'serves well for a picture of almost any small girl of that time, in a white muslin dress, with coloured shoes and sash.'<sup>5</sup> A portrait of c. 1770 in Fig. 54 shows the ensemble. The tie style of shoe (Fig. 55) was worn by children up to the age of four until the 1840s, when shoes with an ankle strap (Fig. 56) became the general fashion and remained the usual style for children aged about two to four until the end of the century.<sup>6</sup> A working girl in the 1860s wore 'thick, nailed boots, both summer and winter'<sup>7</sup>, contrasting greatly with the fine materials used in all the pre-twentieth century children's red shoes in Northampton, and suggesting a class-based usage similar to adult red shoes. The sixteen red strapped children's shoes in Northampton dating from the twentieth-century, compared with twelve from 1780 to 1899, show the use of Children's red shoes throughout more recent years. Fig. 57, of a girl at the water in a pair of red Mary-Janes and Fig. 58 of a baby boy in Winchester, both taken in 2004, demonstrate the continuing and culturally unisex nature of red shoes for small children. This versatility may be echo the practice of breeching, which lasted until the late nineteenth-century. Before the age of about three or four, children of both sexes were dressed alike in long

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<sup>3</sup> A. Buck and P. Cunnington, *Children's Costume in England From the Fourteenth to the end of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Buck & Cunnington, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 168-69

<sup>7</sup> A. Buck, *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children's Dress in England 1500 - 1900* (Bedford: Ruth Bean, 1996), p. 239.



Figure 54



Figure 55



Figure 56

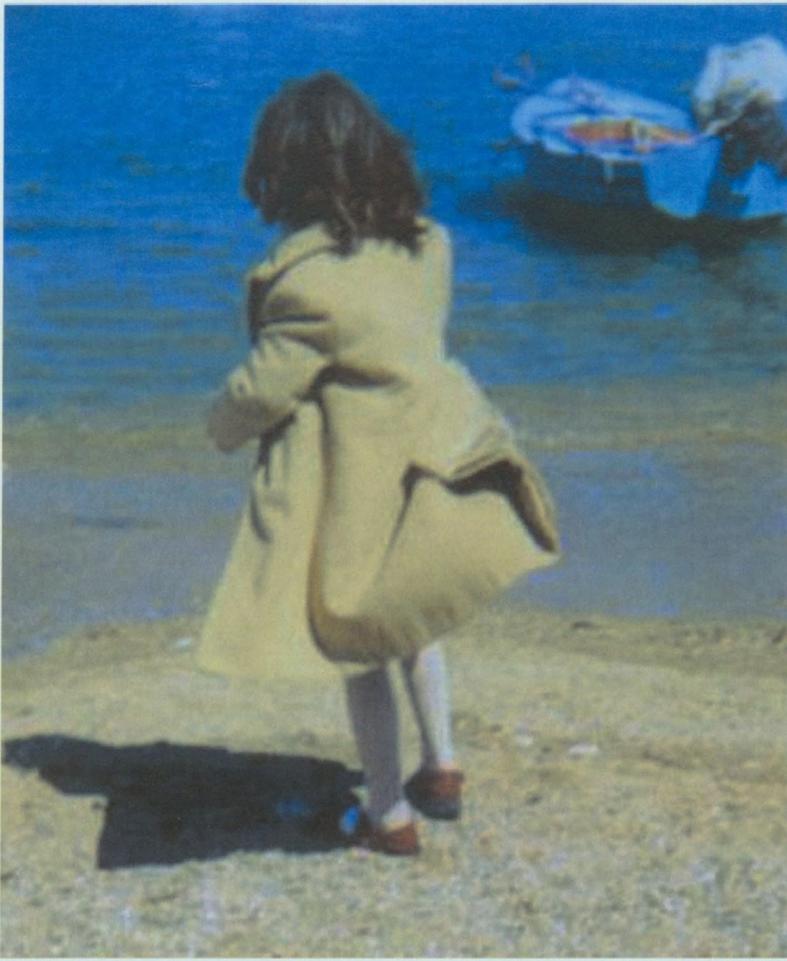


Figure 57



Figure 58

## Rouge comme... Red like...



Figure 59

petticoats. During the breeching ceremony a boy was given his first trousers and had his long hair cut, and thereafter he was culturally differentiated, passing from the care of women to his future as a man.<sup>8</sup> If for boys 'black shoes took the place of coloured ones as they grew away from infancy'<sup>9</sup>, then red shoes become an equivalent symbol of a pre-gendered stage of childhood.

An instep or ankle strap on children's shoe is a practical consideration. The feature keeps the shoe on an active child's foot, while being easy to undo when needed. Red is a bold, primary colour, attractive to children. Both may be reasons which contribute to the enduring popularity of children's red Mary-Janes. Another possible reason for the cultural attachment to red children's shoes is the belief in the protective or prophylactic powers of red. Sixteenth and seventeenth century portraits of children often depict them holding a stick of coral, which Buck and Cunnington attributes as a good luck symbol,<sup>10</sup> and Newell as guarding against the evil eye.<sup>11</sup> In a medical inspector's report of the early twentieth-century, one-third of children at a Wimbledon school are recorded as wearing necklaces of 'cheap coral' against the common cold.<sup>12</sup> Wearing red flannel petticoats or tying a strip of the fabric around the neck to ward off colds are old folk remedies, cited even to the present day.<sup>13</sup> So Children's red shoes may be an example of historic fetish objects with magic powers of protection. The perceived innocent purity of childhood may itself be part of the magic, like Dorothy's protective ruby slippers. If the adult meanings of red shoes as symbols include sexuality, transgression, gender and power, then children's lack of knowledge of these qualities saves their red shoes from taking on this symbolism.

### Cultural uses

Children's red shoes are used to represent image of childhood, the projection of an idealised state: 'They [orphaned Russian twin sisters] looked like they just stepped off a Walt Disney set, wearing little red dresses and red patent-leather

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<sup>8</sup> Buck, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Buck, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Buck & Cunnington, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> V. Newell, *An Egg At Easter: A Folklore Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> M. Tatem, 'Purple – A Tale of Blue Blood and Scarlet Raiment' in John Hutchings and Juliet Wood (eds.), *Colour and Appearance in Folklore* (London: The Folklore Society, 1991), p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> My mother still occasionally used the latter remedy, though its efficacy remains dubious.

shoes.<sup>14</sup> The memory of red shoes as a child can form a nostalgia which can be relived by putting one's own children into red shoes. Other parents give their children red shoes to fulfil their own childhood desire for red shoes they never received (a form of Freudian transferral). The literary novel *Red Shoes* (1998) tells of a woman, Petra, who forms a repressive cult around monstrous particularities. One rule is that all the members must wear red shoes, and especially the 'thirteen little girls with long golden hair, black dresses, black stockings and red shoes' Petra is raising as her daughters.<sup>15</sup> She deliberately fetishises these children's red shoes to represent their purity and potential as her successors.<sup>16</sup>

The connection between red and shoes remains culturally reinforced for children. The song 'Mary's Shoes' starts 'Mary wears her red, red, shoes/on her...head!<sup>17</sup>', and continues on with other colour/garment combinations in the wrong place, as the singer chooses. No matter what comes later, this set part before the improvisation gives the message that red is a colour for shoes. A French postcard for children shows a number of red objects, under the title *Rouge comme... Red like...* These include cherries, tin ladybirds, and 'des chassures vernis', patent leather Mary-Janes (Fig. 59), again reinforcing an integral connection between red and shoes. The short song about children 'Little People', by the White Stripes, contains the lyric 'There's a little girl with the red shoes on' as part of a list of typical children's activities<sup>18</sup>. Country singer Loretta Lynn's 2004 'comeback' album *Van Lear Rose* includes an intriguing piece of spoken anecdote with a musical accompaniment, about a pair of 'little red shoes' that her mother stole from the shoe shop for her when the singer was deathly ill as a small child.<sup>19</sup> The shoes become associated simultaneously with maternal love, transgression, and prophylactic protection against illness. Van Morrison's 'Astral Weeks', from the album of the same name, has a mother 'Takin' good care of your boy/Seein'

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<sup>14</sup> T. Strasser, 'Adopted Russian sisters leave their red shoes behind', *The Jewish News Weekly of Northern California*, 3 November 1995 <[http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story\\_id/2319/edition\\_id/38/format/html/displaystory.html](http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/2319/edition_id/38/format/html/displaystory.html)> [accessed 21 April 2004], para. 3.

<sup>15</sup> C. Bird, *Red Shoes* (Sydney: Random House, 1998), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> The adult cult members wear their red shoes in imitation of Petra's own self-declared divinity, emphasising the religious and sovereign aspects in a different context of maturity.

<sup>17</sup> Anon., 'Mary's Shoes', <<http://www.childrenonlyesl-cfl.com/mainpages/tourcategories/tourcategorypages/songstourpgs/bodysongs.asp>> [accessed 18 March 2004], para. 5.

<sup>18</sup> The White Stripes. Little People. *The White Stripes*. 2001. XL Recordings Ltd. XLCD149. Line 9.

<sup>19</sup> L. Lynn. Little Red Shoes. *Van Lear Rose*. 2004. Polydor. CD9818955. Coincidentally, this album was produced by Jack White, half of The White Stripes, above.

that he's got clean clothes/Puttin' on his little red shoes'. This last links red shoes with a positive, protective femininity, while also highlighting the issue of gender in Children's red shoes.

Besides the unisex wearing of red shoes, this type contains gender negotiations in the form of the acceptable line between sexless childhood and physically mature adulthood. The use of the same shoes by Buster Brown and Mary-Jane is an example of the pre-pubescent desexualised gendering. When this line is crossed, red shoes can symbolise the nature of the transgression. The Negative Feminine red shoe associations become emphasised when they are worn in an inappropriate children's context, as an extract from a pre-school mother's online diary shows: 'The unfortunate daughter of 'Nasty Family' was wearing a pair of bright red 'Nasty Whore Shoes' today. High heels. Charming on a 5 year old.'<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Children's red shoes are seen as inappropriate wear for adults. Evdokimova considers that red shoes worn in Chekov's story *The Duel* convey the childishness or infantilism of the wearer. The character Nadezhda wears a cheap thin dress with 'little red shoes', and her 'juvenile dresses and irresponsible actions lead her almost to irreparable ruin'.<sup>21</sup> Here, the child type of red shoes is strong enough to symbolise character traits, and subvert the adult appearance of the wearer.

This is also the case with the red shoes worn by transvestite artist Grayson Perry, winner of the Turner Prize in 2003. When dressed as his little girl alter ego Claire, to accept the prize, he accompanied his short frilled dress with patent-leather red Mary-Janes (Fig. 60). Of five pairs of 'classic little girl shoes' made for him, he chose the red ones that evening mainly because they matched his dress, although he associates them with Dorothy's ruby slippers.<sup>22</sup> A recent fashion subculture plays with the subversive effects of combining adult and children's elements in dress. The style is called 'kinderwhore', 'kindergoth' or 'Lolita', and devotees wear childish or school-girl style dress with 'the specific intent to be sexy

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<sup>20</sup> Melissa, *Suburban Bliss: Better Living Through Sarcasm*

<[http://suburbanbliss.blogspot.com/2003\\_08\\_01\\_suburbanbliss\\_archive.html](http://suburbanbliss.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_suburbanbliss_archive.html)> [accessed 29 December 2003], para. 25.

<sup>21</sup> S. Evdokimova, 'What's so Funny about Losing One's Estate, or Infantilism in "The Cherry Orchard"', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 4. (Winter, 2000), pp. 623-648, <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0037-6752%28200024%291%3A44%3A4%3C623%3AWSFALO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Q>> [accessed 4 January 2004], p. 647.

<sup>22</sup> Perry, personal email, 8 August 2004.

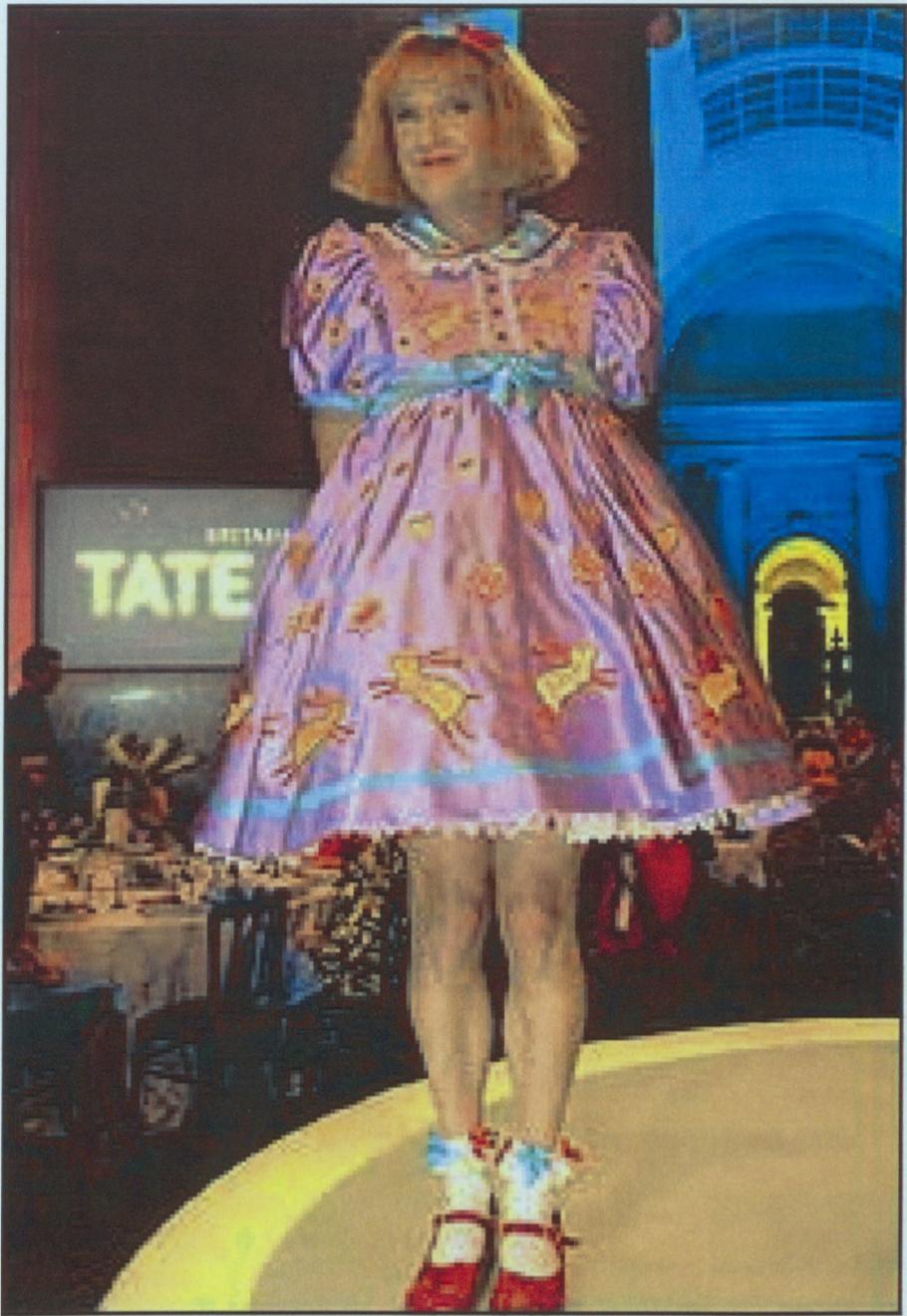


Figure 60

or provocative.<sup>23</sup> It is this provocation which distinguishes the look from the cute appearance cultivated particularly by Japanese women.<sup>24</sup> To quote a website advocating the look: ‘The style of Lolita [...] takes [...] elements of Victorian style and presents them in a cute demeanor [*sic*], as if to be transported back then to be a little Victorian girl. Puffy skirts, ribbons, meters of lace, warm colours, and cute Mary Janes dictate this part of Gothic and Lolita.’<sup>25</sup> While also utilising the sexual potential of a fetish object, red Mary-Janes are here inherently connected with children’s footwear, and are used to display a cultural association with childhood. In a connection with the Positive Feminine type, O’Keeffe feels that grown women appropriating these ‘little-girl’ shoes turns them into ‘an ironic symbol of post-feminist empowerment.’<sup>26</sup>

These examples show that red shoes can make an adult feel childish. Responses from the survey of contemporary women highlight how the opposite can also be true: red shoes can make children feel adult. Answers to question 1.1.5, ‘How did you feel when you wore the shoes?’ include ‘pretty darn good. I felt grown-up’, ‘like a grown up princess’, ‘pretty cool’ and ‘very special’, from women who remember having red shoes in childhood. The mature feeling can take the form of a new awareness of the body: ‘My calves in the mirror looked perfect, I was never aware of how I or parts of my body might be seen before.’ This contrasts with the idea of red shoes being connected with childhood’s *lack* of physical knowledge. Another woman remembers ‘walking around staring at my feet for about two days’ while wearing her ‘cherry red patent leather baby doll style shoes’. One answer – feeling ‘like the Queen of Sheba’ – displays that this woman’s response to red shoes has instinctive connotations of royal femininity. These memories, associations and emotions connected with Children’s red shoes are all very positive. With such a good grounding, how does this affect contemporary women’s adult use of red shoes as represented by the survey sample? Answers to the two subsequent survey questions give an indication. Question 1.1.6, ‘Did those shoes affect shoe choices you made in the future?’ elicited responses like ‘I have never worn anything quite like those red shoes’, ‘I

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<sup>23</sup> S. Carroll-Clark and R. Netherton <robin@shell.nightowl.net> ‘Re: [h-cost] What means the word lolita??’. On-line posting, 28 July 2004. Historical Costume <h-costume@indra.com>.

<sup>24</sup> See S. Aoki, *Fruits* (London: Phaidon, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> *Crosses and Petticoats* <<http://www.magnet-holic.net/crosses/alice.html>> [accessed 2 August 2004].

<sup>26</sup> O’Keeffe, p. 237.

still love red shoes', and an unequivocal 'Yes, absolutely'. The same respondent who became aware of her calves feels that it is perhaps because

I didn't take [the red shoes] home. I took home the same pair in black, and while in the store they seemed the same and I was talked into *BEING SENSIBLE!* They never came near in matching the feeling of the red shoes.<sup>27</sup>

The last sentence parallels Andersen's 'Nothing in the world can compare with red shoes!'.<sup>28</sup> Question 1.1.7, 'Have you looked for similar pairs of shoes as an adult?' found that one woman had recently bought a red pair of shoes similar to her childhood ones. Even more specifically, another owned two pairs of black, and one pair of red Mary-Janes, the style of her childhood shoes. The connection was something she had not previously considered and found 'very weird'.

The answers drew out another aspect of Children's red shoes, a connection with activity in the form of 'going out' mentioned in the Feminine chapters. Summed up by one respondent's phrase 'red shoes were party shoes', patent-leather Mary-Janes were often reserved for best, party or Sunday wear. A Buster Brown advertisement of 1947 (Fig. 61) shows children's feet 'going to grandma's', with the girl wearing this type of shoe.

The first part of the survey asked the respondents about their memories of childhood shoes (see Appendix 2). As these are the initial questions, and most recipients were unaware of the specific subject (red shoes) being researched, these memories are relatively unbiased, and represent the strongest, most immediate childhood shoe associations. In total, of 35 respondents, 12 remembered red shoes from their childhood. Of those, 7 felt that these shoes influenced their shoe choices as an adult. A further 13 respondents were influenced by non-red shoes. This gives a total of 58% of women whose strongly remembered childhood shoes influenced their adult choice. The ages that red shoes made an impact are cited as from '2ish' to about seven - early in development and corresponding with the ages at which historic shoes were worn. If childhood shoes make a lasting impact, and red shoes are historically popular children's wear, then their cultural potency can also begin early. The style which was mentioned

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<sup>27</sup> Survey response 9.

<sup>28</sup> H. C. Andersen, 'The Red Shoes' (1845) *Project Gilead* <[http://hca.gilead.org.il/red\\_shoe.html](http://hca.gilead.org.il/red_shoe.html)> [accessed 23 April 2004], para. 6.

*LOOK AT YOUR FEET*

*LOOK AT YOUR FEET*

**More kids will go to grandma's in  
Buster Brown Shoes than any other brand.**

It's not just the fact of the matter that they love to wear them, but the fact that they love to wear them. Buster Brown shoes are made with soft, comfortable leather and they're made by the famous, famous, famous Buster Brown shoe company. They're the shoes that every kid wants to wear. They're the shoes that every kid wants to wear. They're the shoes that every kid wants to wear. They're the shoes that every kid wants to wear.

**BUSTER BROWN**  
The shoes for the kid who goes to grandma's in his dreams.

© 1974 B. B. Co.  
Buster Brown Shoes, Inc.

Figure 61

more than any other is black patent leather Mary-Janes, belonging either to the respondent, or to a member of their family. Therefore, even if the colour is not red, the style is still a strong cultural influence.

## **Summary**

Red shoes, especially in the Mary-Jane style, have been popular children's footwear since at least the eighteenth-century. They can signify protection against harm, but also represent the protective power of pre-pubescent innocence. As a motif, these red shoes denote the memory and ideal of childhood, and can influence attitudes to red shoes later in life. In another ambiguity, red shoes give children an identification with 'grown-ups', while simultaneously indicating childhood or immaturity when worn by adults in the form of Mary-Janes.

## 7. Conclusion

This study can only begin to trace the myriad interconnecting historic and cultural uses of red shoes and consider how they relate to the formation of the symbol's continuing potency. Each type covered has huge potential for further exploration, and the breadth of sources consulted within this narrow scope has possibly been detrimental to the research focus. I argue, however, that the research *value* lies in the study's broad interdisciplinary approach, as this methodology, in Breward's phrase, 'enables us to understand cultural phenomena and social relationships [...] not accessible through other disciplines'.<sup>1</sup> To only concentrate on Children's red shoes, for example, or the Negative sexual associations of the Feminine red shoes type, in an attempt to deconstruct the elements of meaning in the Red Shoes symbol, would be to neglect the significant influences of the other types and create an unrepresentative view of the whole. It is difficult to unpack a phrase such as 'only prostitutes wear red shoes'<sup>2</sup> without exploring how this linguistic association is created through the impact of cultural, symbolic uses of a dress object upon the historic, material uses. Texts used as significant objects in the study require different methods of analysis than material object based methodologies proposed by Prown or Elliot.<sup>3</sup> A cultural studies approach facilitates the informative, valuable role textual objects can play in the study of dress history.

The socio-cultural uses of red shoes have changed through history. The first paradigm is the Masculine meanings of status, power and authority, dominating early Western culture. While royal Feminine red shoes co-existed with this symbolism, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the use of red shoes by women of lower classes, either in life or fictionally, could be the basis for a censorious Negative attitude. The symbol of Red Shoes represented rebellious transgressions against prevailing social behaviours in the areas of gender roles, sexual morality, class distinctions, spiritual beliefs and self-expression. Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Red Shoes* summarises these transgressions.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Breward, 'Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress', *Fashion Theory*, Volume 2, Issue 4 (1998), p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by a twenty-nine-year old mother as part of her childhood memories of red shoes. Response 10.

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Prown, 'Mind in matter: an introduction to material culture theory and method' in S. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 133-138, and R. Elliot et al, 'Towards a Material History Methodology' in *Interpreting Objects*, ed. S. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 71-86.

Incremental developments at the end of the nineteenth-century resulted in beneficial changes to the legal and cultural expectations of women, and the meanings attached to Feminine red shoes also gained Positive aspects of autonomy and self-identity. The ruby slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* embody this Positive view. Both aspects of Feminine red shoe use co-exist in contemporary society, and modern women determine on an individual basis how to utilise the symbol. Masculine red shoes have changed to also denote creative individuality. The twentieth century saw a greater cultural attachment of Dance symbolism to red shoes, begun by Andersen's story, but strengthened by the 1948 ballet film. This type is associated with the passion, obsession and sacrifice of a dancer's life. Underlying these types is the continual use of red shoes in a context of sacred power, through religion, or Magic in myth, folk and fairytales. Children have also worn red shoes through the period of investigation, and this use developed meanings of protection and pre-gendered innocence. Red shoes can form a strong childhood memory, and become a nostalgic symbol for an idealised state.

Red shoes take the wearer out of the ordinary, by distinguishing and individualising them in some way contrasting with their usual socio-historic and/or gender context. These contexts also determine whether this isolating action is considered positive or negative. The tensions and dichotomies resulting from the changing historic and cultural uses of red shoes have formed a potent source of inspiration for producers of cultural expressions. The ambiguous visual, textual and material potential of the symbol allows for flexible interpretations, and the Red Shoes motif appears in a variety of expressive forms. Creators continually reinterpret the interrelationships between different types, and each new use adds to the layers of symbolic meaning. Red shoes remain inspirational up to the present time (2004), used in at least eleven new popular cultural expressions in the last two years alone.

For every association with red shoes, there is an opposite and equal meaning. Which view predominates depends on historical, cultural and individual opinions. The symbolic oppositions can be traced through Eastop's Structuralist approach,<sup>4</sup> mapping the multiple and contrasting uses of red shoes:

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<sup>4</sup> D. Eastop, 'Textile as Multiple and Competing Histories' in *Textiles Revealed. Object Lessons in Historic Textile and Costume Research*, ed. M. M. Brooks (London: Archetype Publications, 2000), p. 19.

Holy	:	Evil
Sacred	:	Profane
Creativity	:	Destruction
Inspiration	:	Obsession
Independence	:	Pride
Control	:	Chaos
Protection	:	Danger
Appropriateness	:	Transgression
Gendered	:	Neutral
Maturity	:	Immaturity
Individual	:	Society

Red shoes symbolise the position of the colons, negotiating between contrasting elements and drawing power from each. What these oppositions leave, however, are qualities of red shoes without opposites -magic, energetic activity, transgression, and sexuality. Each of these qualities can contain the oppositions listed above, and therefore may be considered fundamental attributes of red shoes in their historic, cultural and symbolic use, summarised as follows.

### **Sexuality**

Red shoes mean sexuality and desire, including the gendered double standards of red shoes, clerical asexuality, and pre-gendered childhood uses. Red shoes are markers of an active sexuality and physical awareness. Removal of red shoes can be a form of castration, and has significant negative associations through implications of immoral feminine sexuality.

### **The Active Principle**

The facilitation of mobility is inherent in shoes, however, energetic activity particularly relates to many uses of red shoes, most directly that of dancing. Dance uses the extreme possibilities of the foot's movement, and dancers devote themselves to it with emotional passion. Other forms of the Active Principle of red shoes are:

- Transition, the movement between differing states
- Physical or spiritual journeys
- Going out, to a party or dancing
- The assertion of independence or sovereignty
- Active leadership: governance by royal or religious authorities
- Creative action: fertility, material artistic expressions
- The act of leaving: absent mothers, runaway girls

### **Magical-Religious**

Magic red shoes take their wearers on a journey. Dorothy wears them down the yellow brick road before the ruby slippers return her home. Karen progresses three ways; through a series of red shoes, a hellish unstoppable journey, and from transgression to redemption. They initiate Gerda's adventurous journey and Bush's reclamation of self-identity. In semiological terms, every pair of red shoes with meaning can function as a myth, apart from any explicit archetypal applications.

Further Magical-Religious red shoe uses include:

- Folk and fairytales; superstitious shoe beliefs.
- Charms: apotropaic or prophylactic powers, protection from danger
- Magic beings: fairies; devils
- Papal and clerical footwear, the Passion of Christ
- Sacred passion: dancers' suffering for art

### **Transgression**

Red shoes embody intense desires or emotions that can cause transgressive behaviour sometimes termed sin or wickedness. Areas of transgression include:

- Gender: roles; homosexuality; sexualised use of Children's shoes
- Class: royalty; nobility; respectable middle classes
- Active sexual expression

- Religion
- Socio-cultural conventions: appropriate behaviour; expectations
- Instinct of self-preservation

These four qualities are described by the different concepts of *passion* – sexual love or desire; strong and lasting enthusiasm; passion as suffering, religious, spiritual or physical; and passion as intense emotion.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, red shoes represent passionate feet through their multiple uses as historic objects and cultural symbols, which have created layers of potent meaning.

It is difficult to maintain objectivity when researching a subject as evocative as red shoes. Their tantalising effect is something felt in the gut, an emotional experience bypassing many rational thoughts. Red shoes are objects of lust and desire; a warning against obsession; seductively sinful; liberating and independent; sweetly childish; darkly sexual; wilful and wanton. Tracing a history from the feet of emperors and kings to very modern women, red shoes are tied to multiple elements of culture which appear to have a lasting effect on the human psyche, and refuse to be tied down to one cultural appropriation. Active, dangerous, regal, magic, sacred and sexual - red shoes, whether objects or symbols, seem destined to keep dancing a path of passionate feet through human cultural history, exciting and inspiring with their potency.

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<sup>5</sup> All definitions are from *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, ed. by R. E. Allen, 7<sup>th</sup> edition (1984) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 537.

## 8.1 Appendix 1 – Tables of Cultural Red Shoe Use

Table 1: Cultural Expressions Using Red Shoes (non-musical)

Type of Expression	Totals	Red Shoes in the title	Other Title	Producer Gender		Themes					Year Produced			
				Male	Female	Dance	Magic	Children	Sex	Negative	Positive	1800 - 1950	1951 - 1990	1991 - 2004
Written	Stories	7	2	4	5	3	3	2	1	7	2	2	3	4
	Novels	24	4	7	17	10	6	5	6	9	14	2	8	14
	Poetry	4	1	4	0	1	0	0	2	3	1	1	2	1
	Self-Help	4	1	0	4	0	3	0	0	2	2	0	0	4
	Children's Books	15	3	5	10	10	3	13	0	0	12	0	5	10
<b>SUBTOTALS</b>	56	45	11	20	36	24	15	20		21	31	5	18	33
<b>%age of sub-totals</b>	-	80%	20%	36%	64%	43%	27%	36%	0%	38%	55%	9%	32%	59%
Fashion	3	0	3	3	0	1	1	0	2	0	3	0	0	3
Film	8	3	5	5	2	2	4	1	4	4	4	2	3	3
Theatre	5	5	0	2	2	3	2	1	2	4	1	1	0	5
Other	10	6	4	4	3	1	2	2	2	4	6	0	3	7
<b>TOTALS</b>	82	59	23	34	43	31	24	24	10	33	45	8	24	51
<b>Percentage of totals</b>	-	72%	28%	41%	52%	38%	29%	29%	12%	40%	55%	10%	29%	62%

**Table 2: Musical Expressions Using Red Shoes**

	Totals	Red Shoes in the title	Other Title	Producer Gender		Themes						Year Produced		
				Male	Female	Dance	Magic	Children	Sex	Negative	Positive	1800-1950	1951-1990	1991-2004
<b>Songs</b>	37	18	19	21	16	7	3	10	11	15	10	2	19	16
<b>Albums</b>	3	3	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
<b>Band</b>	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	41	22	19	24	17	8	4	10	12	15	12	2	19	20
<b>Percentage of totals</b>	-	54%	46%	59%	41%	20%	10%	24%	29%	37%	29%	5%	46%	49%

These tables of cultural expressions excludes theatrical productions which are an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen, and books which are reprints of the story. It also excludes red shoes as a logo and paintings, as the range of visual works using red shoes as a significant element would require a greater research scope than has been possible to provide an equivalent to the more textual sources. The tables represent an initial survey, and are by no means exhaustive.

## 8.2 *Appendix 2 – Shoe survey questions.*

Date:

Age:

Place of residence:

Occupation:

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1. Do you remember a particular pair/s of shoes from childhood?
  - 1.1.1. Why do you remember them?
  - 1.1.2. Describe them:
  - 1.1.3. What colour were they?
  - 1.1.4. How old were you?
  - 1.1.5. How did you feel when you wore the shoes?
  - 1.1.6. Did those shoes affect shoe choices you made in the future?
  - 1.1.7. Have you looked for similar pairs of shoes as an adult?
2. Do you have any other cultural (literature, media, social, family etc.) shoe memories from childhood?
3. Generally, what kinds of shoes do you like now?
4. How many pairs of shoes do you own?
5. What details and styles in shoes are you attracted to?
6. Describe your current favourite pair:
7. What colour are the majority of your shoes?
8. Do you own any red pairs of shoes?
  - 8.1.1. How many?
  - 8.1.2. Why did you choose them?
  - 8.1.3. How do you feel when you wear them?
  - 8.1.4. Do you consider them special in any way?
9. Would you describe yourself as an 'Imelda', or do you know anyone who does?
10. What associations does the colour red have for you?
11. What connotations/feelings/images/reactions does the phrase 'red shoes' create for you?

The following published works were included in the bound thesis. These have not been digitised due to copyright restrictions, but the links / references are provided:

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